

**Presentation by Martin Lees**  
**at**  
**The Rio + 20 Global Town Hall**  
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**The 2030 Challenge**

**Slide 1.**

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to make this presentation before such a distinguished and expert audience at the Rio + 20 Global Town Hall.

Cities are on the front lines of the issues threatening the future of humanity: they will prove to be a key to the future. Consequently, your efforts to create the productive, sustainable and resilient cities of the future are vital if we are to manage the accelerating environmental, economic and social challenges which threaten the lives and hopes of millions of people today and the prospects of future generations.

We are heading into a perfect storm of connected environmental, economic and social challenges as the scale of human impacts on the natural world.

I have been asked to present an overview of the most critical global issues which will define the world of 2030. The outcome in 2030 is by no means pre-ordained but will be determined by our choices and actions. The existential challenge we face is to meet the needs and aspirations of a growing world population while remaining within the capacities and boundaries of our fragile planet.

How will the historians of the future judge us in this regard?

- **Slide 2.** We are living beyond our means and overusing the resources of the planet to gratify our desires at the cost of nature. As a result, the prospects for young people and for future generations are increasingly compromised.
- **Slide 3.** We are polluting and destroying the natural capital and the terrestrial and ocean ecosystems on which we absolutely depend. **Slide 4.**
- **Slide 5.** We are destabilizing the uniquely favorable climatic conditions of the Holocene period which have allowed the development of our civilization.
- We accept the coexistence of massive, concentrated wealth with widespread poverty and exclusion.
- And, we are wasting huge amounts of physical and human resources and of human creativity through endemic unemployment in an economic system designed for a different era.

Perhaps the greatest criticism will be that we were warned over decades that our consumption-driven, resource-intensive model of exponential growth was unsustainable on a finite planet but that we failed to act. On the most critical issues the science is clear, we know what we should do and we have enormous skills and resources available. But, in common with previous civilizations which have failed, we seem incapable of facing the reality of emerging threats and acting to avert them. We suffer from a deficit of vision and leadership. Our epitaph may well be: “too little, too late.”

On a more positive note, if we should be able to shift the trajectory of human progress onto a sustainable and equitable path, this would bring enormous opportunities and benefits. This is not simply a pious hope but is becoming a reality for example: the European Union is committed to a transition towards a low-carbon, green economy as a means of generating employment and growth. China is engaged in the re-orientation of its economy onto a more equitable and sustainable path and Korea is deploying green technology and ICT to build a highly competitive modern economy. It is wrong to consider that the move towards sustainability will simply imply added costs to the economy and a loss of competitiveness. It has been shown by many examples that it represents investment in the foundations of the new economies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **An Overview of the Critical Issues which will determine the State of the World in 2030**

**Slide 6.** Rather than again outlining a catalogue of problems, let me present the challenges ahead in a framework of five lines of action to salvage the future.

### **1. We must defend and restore terrestrial and ocean ecosystems.**

**Slide 7.** Humanity is overusing the regenerative capacities of the planet by some 50% each year: we are using up our biological capital, not only our revenue, at the cost of future generations and this is unsustainable. In the absence of strong action, this overuse will increase as population rises from 7 to 9 billion and the consumption of a rising world middle class escalates.

**Slide 8.** The fresh water, vital to human life and to the ecosystems on which humanity depends is under increasing stress across the world, through overuse, contamination, climate change and mismanagement. Water use is doubling about every twenty years.

The state of the oceans, which support 95% of life on this planet, is also desperate. Human impacts have changed the oceans more in the last thirty years than in previous human history. Mean ocean acidity has increased by 30% in the last 200 years. This has severe consequences for both marine life and the global climate.

### **2. We must take strong and urgent action to avert the consequences and risks of climate change.**

The issue of climate change is crucial. For, if we are to achieve sustainable world development, it is essential to preserve a stable climate.

I am happy to inform you that on 17<sup>th</sup> June in Belo Horizonte within the framework of the ICLEI World Congress 2012, I presented the Statement of the high-level Task Force on Climate Change convened by President Mikhail Gorbachev on “The Need for Action on the Urgent Realities of Climate Change” to the General Assembly of the World Mayors Council on Climate Change. The Council not only agreed to endorse the Statement but also decided to use it as a framework for action through the new GreenClimateCities program.

**Slide 9.** The globe is warming. The evidence of climate change is clear across the world. It is not a problem for the future: it is now degrading the fragile ecosystems of the planet, devastating the lives of millions of people today and undermining the prospects for progress and peace. **Slide 10.** And the major impacts we see today are the result of the temperature rise of only 0.8°C so far, since the start of the industrial revolution in 1750.

The world community has been struggling for more than twenty years to reach agreement on action to reduce the threats of climate change by taking measures to limit the rise in global average temperature to 2°C. But even a rise of 2°C would have massive impacts, particularly on the poor. **Slide 11.** And it would have devastating consequences for the survival of the ecosystems on which we absolutely depend.

**Slide 12.** If we fail to act and continue on the present path, global average temperature could rise by over 6°C by 2100, above the worst-case scenario of IPCC. Such a rise would provoke intolerable conditions for humanity and all other living species. And this estimate is a global average figure. It would imply a temperature rise of double this amount in some regions of the world, such as the Greenland and West-Antarctic ice sheets. This would provoke a sea-level rise which would endanger millions of people in coastal cities.

These then are the realities we face but international negotiations are failing to agree on strong and timely climate action. Carbon emissions, far from declining, have cumulatively risen by 49% since 1990, reaching a record high in 2011. **Slide 13.** And a recent independent study shows that even if, optimistically, all the reduction targets and pledges which have been made were implemented, we would still be on a path to an average temperature rise of 3.5-4.5°C, with intolerable consequences.

This is bad enough. But we must also understand that we do not simply face a gradual process of global warming as is commonly assumed. **Slide 14.** We also face the grave risk that the complex, interacting systems which drive the climate are non-linear and that we may be exposed to abrupt, unpredictable and irreversible impacts.

It is therefore of overriding importance that we do not push the climate beyond the tipping points which can trigger a number of “positive feedback” processes which can generate “runaway” climate change, beyond human influence.

**Slide 15.** As the planet warms, these processes are already now beginning to operate. This is a grave threat to the future of us all. We must therefore take rapid and decisive precautionary action to manage these risks by cutting emissions into the atmosphere so as to avoid incalculable costs to present and future generations. **Slide 16.** And we have very little time to act.

The multilateral negotiations do not reflect the urgency, scale and intensity of the climate risks ahead as perceived by science. Strong climate action must be taken within the next crucial decade. But the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action envisages a new international agreement to be established only in 2015 with a commitment to binding emission cuts from 2020. This is too little, too late.

### **3. We must encourage the empowerment of women to slow demographic growth.**

**Slide 17.** We must face the fact that, within 40 years, global population will rise from the present 7 billion to over 9 billion: how will our fragile planet, already under intense stress, respond? In the absence of effective action, this will aggravate poverty, reduce political stability and accelerate environmental degradation.

**Slide 18.** Nearly all this demographic increase will occur in developing countries and it will be spread unevenly across the globe, concentrated in the poorest countries and communities and increasingly in urban areas.

We know that the alleviation of poverty, a focus on reproductive rights, improved health and the education and empowerment of girls and women can improve lives and lead to a reduction in fertility. The scale of population increase is therefore open to some influence and should become a key focus of policy.

### **4. We must alleviate poverty and deprivation**

According to the World Bank, some 1.3 billion people are trapped in absolute poverty while around 2 Billion people today are living on less than \$2 per day, with their basic needs for security, employment, health, food and nutrition unmet.

Escalating demand of a growing population and increased prices for food and energy have already provoked a food crisis across the world. And food production is already being affected by the impacts of climate change.

The number of people suffering from hunger and deprivation has now risen again to over one billion as a consequence of the financial crisis and around 5,000 children die each day from hunger and disease. These levels of misery are occurring in a global economy which has an annual output of around \$66 trillion.

Since the year 2000, the world community has made substantial progress towards many of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations but this progress has been made on unsafe and unsustainable economic and environmental foundations and could even be reversed.

### **5. We must explicitly focus policy on the generation of productive employment.**

Hundreds of millions of people in both developing and developed countries cannot find productive employment. This has devastating consequences for their lives, their human dignity and self respect and for the prospects and hopes for themselves and their families.

The generation of employment must become an explicit priority of policy, no longer the residual of an economic strategy dominated by financial considerations and aimed at growth as measured by GDP. Besides generating wealth by avoiding the unproductive waste of human talents, policies explicitly focused on employment have been shown to reduce poverty and hunger, to strengthen social cohesion and political stability. This is particularly important to provide opportunities to young people to develop their talents and build happy and productive lives.

Now let me turn briefly to the challenges in the world economy and the world financial system.

We are living at a time of crisis in world economic and financial affairs with growing imbalances, instability and vulnerabilities. **Slide 19.** The processes of globalisation have been widening the gaps between rich and poor: 2% of the richest people own around 50% of the world's wealth while the poorer 50% own only 4%.

What then is our strategy to deal with all the crucial challenges which I have outlined? **Slide 20.** It is to return as soon as possible to the established path of economic growth as measured by GDP to achieve a doubling of the world economy by 2030 through the stimulation of demand for further consumption. This would imply that around an additional billion people would attain the living standards of the middle class, with the corresponding patterns of consumption and waste. **Slide 21.**

However, past experience shows that this strategy, dominated by narrowly defined economic calculus has failed. It would imply for example that, according to IPCC, passenger vehicles would increase across the world from 600 million today to 1.7 billion in 2050, heavily concentrated in congested cities. **Slide 22.** It is further presumed that the global economy could double again by 2050: the addition of three new world economies in 40 years.

While this established strategy may appear logical to policy makers pre-occupied with acute economic and financial issues, it is clearly inadequate and unsustainable when we consider the realities of climate, environment, energy and resources, inequality and development.

The dominance of economic and financial considerations and interests in policy implies that nature and social justice become second-order facets of policy: the environment can be cleaned up later when we are rich and social justice and employment will improve by "trickle down" as we pursue a strategy for growth as a first priority.

Sustained global economic growth has undoubtedly produced enormous benefits for hundreds of millions of people in both developed and developing countries. But the issues we face today are more intense and threatening than those we have faced in the past. **Slide 23.**

The established models and strategies for economic growth, development and globalization, driven by strong Western influence and, over the past thirty years, by the ideology of market fundamentalism, are failing on many counts. They are no longer environmentally, economically, socially or politically sustainable. They are not adapted to meet the new systemic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We must find new models and strategies which can integrate the economic, social and environmental facets of policy into one coherent strategy for sustainable development. We must restructure our economies and energy systems to break our addiction to fossil fuels. **Slide 24.** This will enable us to achieve long term sustainability, to benefit from the enormous opportunities of a green transition to spur growth and employment and to build an equitable, safe and inclusive world in 2030.

The five lines of action I have proposed – to defend and restore ecosystems, to avert the threats of climate change, to empower women and alleviate poverty and to focus on the creation of employment – if implemented together within a coherent strategy would go far to modernize our economies and to put the world economy on to a sustainable path.

Fortunately, we see here at Rio + 20, that an impatient world movement for sustainable development is gaining strength and momentum: Those who can and will understand the realities and challenges of the modern age are acting: those who cannot or will not are being left behind. We have seen what human creativity, energy and persistence can achieve: we can therefore be hopeful for the future. **Slide 25.** We can hope that countries and cities across the world will mobilize their great potentials to seize the opportunities of sustainable development.