



European Commission - Speech
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Speech by President von der Leyen at the One Planet Summit

Brussels, 11 January 2021

Merci Monsieur le Président.

Cher Emmanuel,

I am delighted to be with you.

It is fitting that we start this new year with a One Planet Summit in Paris talking about biodiversity. Because I believe 2021 will be the year when the world turns over a new leaf for our planet.

In a few months, the world will come together in Kunming: This COP15 for nature must be like the COP21 was for climate. And we need a Paris-style agreement to go with it. Ambitious, global and game changing. The stakes could not be higher and the imperative act could not be more compelling.

This is about sustainable development. Because thriving biodiversity can ensure access to food, water and energy for billions of people.

This is about equality. Because we know that the effects of nature loss disproportionately affect poorer and indigenous communities.

This is about our security. Because conflicts explode when more people grapple for less natural resources; and this is about our quality of life. Because we need nature in our lives for our physical and mental health.

We all know the scale and the urgency of the task ahead of us this year.

And we see the changes in our everyday lives: From more concrete blocks to less wilderness and wildlife to increasing temperatures and extreme weather.

These worrying changes are different sides of the same coin. In fact, they mutually reinforce each other.

When we lose forests, we don't 'just' lose green space or natural habitat. We lose a key ally in our fight against climate change. When temperatures rise and nature disappears, we suffer more natural disasters and zoonotic diseases.

We have spoken a lot about the links between biodiversity loss and COVID. But this is not the first, last or even most telling example. Think of how one of the deadliest outbreaks of Ebola is thought to have started: with a young boy playing next to a tree in a remote village in Guinea. A tree that had been infested by bats who had been pushed towards the village because 80% of forests in the region had been destroyed. We know the tragic repercussions this had.

And if we don't urgently act to protect our nature, we may already be at the beginning of an era of pandemics. But we can do something about it. It needs concerted global action and local sustainable development.

And just as we cooperate for our 'One Planet' we need to work together for our 'One Health'. This is why we will prioritise research on 'One Health' across Horizon Europe.

And let me be clear: we will invest several hundred million euros over the next four years for research: on biodiversity, animal health, emerging diseases and much more.

It is why we will work closely with our international partners on research - in the spirit of the PREZODE initiative launched by France and Member States, which the European Commission welcomes.

And it is also why we will bolster and sponsor initiatives like the Africa-led Great Green Wall. I would like to congratulate the African Union - and all of the partners involved for bringing a decades-old dream to life. We have already seen the difference it can make, stretching from Senegal in the West to Djibouti in the East. It has helped restore 15 million hectares of degraded land in Ethiopia and

supported farmers in Niger to produce enough grain to feed an extra 2.5 million people a year.

This is why I say today: We will mobilise even more than the €700 million per year already raised for the Great Green Wall project.

The more partners and the more Member States join and invest: the more we can do. This is the spirit of Team Europe and I am determined that we can do so much more working with our African partners.

This shows that turning over a new leaf for nature all comes down to local action and global ambition. This is why, with the European Green Deal, we are stepping up our own action and ambition - both locally and globally.

Our new Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies will lead the way. They set out the EU's ambitions to protect 30% of land and sea areas - in Europe and around the world. They will help us restore damaged rivers and plant 3 billion trees by 2030. They will help bring back pollinators to agricultural lands and reduce the use and risk of harmful pesticides.

And the new, greener Common Agricultural Policy will help us protect livelihoods and food security - while we protect our nature and our climate.

But we know we need to do more. Being a major economy and trading superpower comes with responsibilities.

And it is our duty to ensure that our Single Market does not drive deforestation in local communities in other parts of the world. This is why, later this year, we will propose new legislation to minimise the risk of products linked to global deforestation being placed on the EU market.

Europe is ready to lead the way and I hope others will join us in that effort!

Dear friends,

this sums up the EU's approach in this historic year for nature. We will lead by action and ambition at home. And we will do everything we can to bring as many partners on board with us.

This is why we will work to broker an ambitious agreement in Kunming and it is why we will support initiatives like the Great Green Wall. Let's make sure that we turn over this new leaf together.

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