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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here with you this evening. I would have liked to pronounce words of boundless optimism; as our topic pertains to the environment, however, my comments will necessarily be toned down. As our Chairman just told you, a few years ago, the then President of the French Republic asked me to prepare the COP 21 and what was to become the Paris Agreement. I will confess: at that point, I was by no means an expert in environmental matters. I was interested in environmental issues, but knew little about them. Yet there I was, in 2013, with the President of the French Republic telling me, “Mr. Minister of Foreign Affairs, you are going to submit our bid to host a conference that will be taking place in 2015, two years from now – in Paris, and I ask you to prepare for the negotiation process, bring it to fruition, and chair the Conference”. And off I went, obedient minister that I was, to Poland at that time, and France was chosen to host the upcoming Paris Conference. I should say that the choice was made easier by the fact that we were the only candidate. I kept in the fore of my mind the two words I was told by all the conference participants when France was elected by acclamation: “*Mr. Fabius, good luck*”, and I saw in their eyes a certain doubt. Then we set about our work, and ultimately succeeded in reaching this first global climate agreement. Once you become involved in this area, as some of you have, it is difficult to turn away: the matter is of such importance. I would like to tell you about it tonight.

Let us start with the existing material, or at least with what is contained in a number of reports that are undisputed and have just been published. I will deliberately take this year’s reports. You have one report published in the United States which identifies the ten main risks to the world, in the ten upcoming years. And out of the first five risks, four have to do with environmental issues. The fifth pertains to the development of nuclear weapons.

You have another report that was also published this year in the United States, and which deals with biodiversity. And that report tells us, with evidence to back it up – undisputed scientific findings – that, already, millions and millions of species have gone extinct. The figure 66 million appears in the document. There is practically no precedent for this, except a very long time ago, when dinosaurs died out. There is a third report to come, from that very important institution known as the International Energy Agency, which shows that, whereas in 2015 and 2016, the carbon gas emissions responsible for the deterioration of climate had stabilised, in 2017 and again in 2018, the same emissions were on the rise again. And lastly, you have a final report which some of you may have read in its summarised form, which was published in early October, by an institution called the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) which, because we asked them to do so at the Paris Conference, looked into the conditions for keeping the temperature increase down to 1.5°C. The report was drawn up by scientists who had reviewed the findings of 6,000 studies, and tells of facts that are now once again undisputed. First of all, 1.5°C. We have already achieved 1°C, and thus have 0.5°C to go. Many people thought that we would be able to reach 1.5°C by the end of the century, but according to the report, this is more likely to happen around 2030. Then, the report explains that even at 1.5°C, which is not at all the current curve, the situation would be extraordinarily difficult in many sectors. The report also says that there is a sizeable difference between 1.5°C and 2°C, which is the main objective set out by the Paris Conference. It uses an example that will immediately drive this home. It says that, between 1.5°C and 2°C, the sea level will not be the same, because if it’s 2°C and not 1.5°C, the sea levels will increase by another 10 centimetres. You see what that means for a city like Venice in Italy! The report goes into a whole series of very negative forecasts and, at the same time, says that we are not doomed to face that, and that is the positive side: if we make strong decisions, we can bring that development to a standstill. And it says, in no uncertain terms, “*Unprecedented risks lead to unprecedented steps*”. What kinds of measures can this imply? Bearing in mind that, the more we work on environmental issues, the more we see that everything is interconnected.

There are three major issues: the climate issue, the biodiversity issue and the pollution issue. However, as soon as we stop and think about it, we see that all of this is dialectical and that, for instance, a temperature increase has a dramatic effect on biodiversity and that, in turn, biodiversity, if it declines, has a dramatic effect on the temperature increase. In short, we need to take what the specialists call a holistic view of these issues. The IPCC’s report tells us



that, just as the risks are global and extremely high, if we want to fight them, we need all players to be staunch believers and to take action. What does “all players” mean? I will not list them all, one by one, but the first players are the citizens who, in their everyday lives, need to be informed of what they can do to try to protect the environment, and in particular, fight the rise in temperatures. There are a number of responses that may appear modest, in the way you equip your apartment, the transport you take, etc. But those all have a significant impact. Then, citizens, and this is the case in many countries, have the right to vote freely, which they can and should use in a certain direction.

If you take just one thing away from this, remember that the threat faced by the environment and climate is not of the same magnitude as the others. The decisions or conferences held on this topic are thus not of the same magnitude either. In other areas, if you are striving to reach a certain goal and fail to do so, you can try again two years later, three years later, five years later. Whereas, in particular when it comes to climate, if decisions are not made with extreme speed, carbon gas will continue to go out into the atmosphere, and after a while, its effects will be irreversible, because it is something that does not disappear – it stays around for years, even centuries. It is thus a race against the clock, between the action we can take and the aims we need to pursue. The citizens are the first players to address, and they need explanations as to what they can do. This is no easy task. And each responsible person needs, in my view, to ask: “What can I do to move this situation in the right direction?”

The IPCC’s report tells us, and this too is an idea I would like you to keep in mind, that much more needs to be done in technological research and development which are indisputably an innovative way of trying to achieve targets that are otherwise unattainable. I referred earlier to the 1.5°C or 2°C increase. Today, however, if we stay on the same path, we are more likely to see 3°C, possibly even 4°C. And 3°C or 4°C does not mean that a cold city will turn into the French Riviera. It means rising sea levels, it means drought everywhere, increasingly extreme weather phenomena, typhoons.... It means migratory movements that make today’s movements look like a joke. In the end, it will mean conflict and the difference between peace and war. That is what we have to address today.

I would also bring law into the picture, because it is concurrently the reflection of a certain situation, and a means of helping that situation. That is why, working in conjunction with other legal specialists, I took an initiative now followed up at the United Nations level, which have held an initial vote on this point, to propose a *Global Pact for the Environment* which consists in a single treaty governed by international law that is both ambitious and realistic (otherwise it would serve no purpose) addressing all the rights and responsibilities when it comes to the environment, whether for individuals, companies or States. This work is currently under review at the UN. A first vote has been held, very favourable I might add, by 143 votes to 5 (United States, Russia, Syria, Turkey and Philippines). You can imagine who the other 143 are. Now, we will enter the negotiation process to try to build a text that, of course, will need to be realistic, but also provide a solid legal buttressing needed when it comes to environmental sectors because they tend to be governed by agreements that are non-binding and solely sector-specific, so they leave gaping holes uncovered. Citizens, business communities, cities, governments, law, research and development – you have a whole series of players who will need to move forward all at once, if we are to halt this situation, and avoid ramming into a wall.

I am often asked whether I am optimistic or pessimistic. What I respond is that I am both worried and very determined. We are, to use an expression often heard before, the first generation to be aware of this reality and the last to be able to take action. Afterwards, it will be too late. We have three or four major dates ahead of us, in the two or three years to come. If we manage to bring together the necessary energies, we can use these occasions to make the right decisions – decisions that will obviously be of very high impact. First of all, in a few weeks, a COP – a Conference of the Parties – will be taking place in Poland. It is aimed at setting out what is referred to in the field as a “rulebook”, in other words, an instrument that translates what we did in Paris into concrete actions. Paris resulted in 29 articles and 140 numbered paragraphs; however, there is a whole series of practical, technical measures that need to be enacted and, theoretically, that is the task set out for this COP 24 which will take place in early December. We will see whether it creates the new desired impetus or not.

After that, next year, we will have, in a very timely initiative, a summit of the United Nations Secretary-General in September in New York. There, all countries will be asked to make new contributions, i.e., commitments as to what they will do in the future, seeing as, first of all, the current commitments are not respected, and secondly, they do not



take us any closer to the 1.5°C or 2°C objective. The UN Secretary-General has therefore taken the initiative, and rightly so, to ask all countries to reformulate their proposals next year. We will see how they respond before this unilateral body.

Lastly, there will be two other initiatives, also in the 2019-2020 timeframe. One is a very important conference that will be taking place in Beijing, China, on biodiversity. I told you that everything is interconnected: consequently, we are working to ensure that this, too, is a success. Then, possibly, the international conference which might see the Global Pact for the Environment officially adopted, thus creating a legal foundation for all of these efforts. Many other initiatives are being taken in all countries and show some excellent thinking, but those four are particularly critical and could enable us to move forward.

So there you have some of the facts I wanted to put before you. Don't assume that, because I am speaking in a somewhat laid-back manner, I am less passionate than others are on these topics. I don't think that a person needs to be a majestic orator in the pulpit to believe through and through in the absolute need for action. I have looked into these issues very closely, as I stated earlier. I had no pre-conceived ideas at the outset. I read, I talked with a lot of people, I met with all the decision-makers across the world who are familiar with these issues, and I came to an opinion which is as objective as possible. I feel that environmental matters, and especially climate-related matters, rank amongst the top two or three major issues in the world. There is a shift in philosophy behind all of this, and France has some responsibility to bear. Let me explain. For hundreds of years, in the West (and our Chairman often refers to the "Western view"), it was deemed, to use the words of philosopher Descartes, that mankind was the "master and possessor of Nature". And economic development was carried out on that foundation. Incidentally, the very word, "environment" reflects this conception, placing Man at the centre, with the environment around him, somewhat marginal, or possibly lateral, which was not the case in other civilisations. And today, we see that while, of course, Man remains quite a privileged, sophisticated component in all of this, he is one component out of many others in nature, and that not only do Man's rights on nature need to be defined, but his responsibilities as well. When we look at court rulings over the years, there is a clear change, such as international rulings now granting legal personality to rivers, forests, etc. So it's a philosophical shift.

Without going so far, I think we need to understand that we have, in that respect, entered a new era. In a magnificent book called "*Tristes Tropiques*", the great French sociologist Lévi-Strauss said at one point: "*The world began without man, and it will complete itself without him*". I acknowledge that this is not a very optimistic outlook, but I will pit Hölderlin against Lévi-Strauss, and close with this. The great poet says: "*But where danger is, grows the saving power also*". It is all up to us. Thank you very much.