

QUESTION 3

Ali Aslan, International TV Presenter and Journalist

Mr. President, you have been the President of COP21, we have a head of a delegation of an upcoming COP – so, a lot of expertise here amassed on this stage. Clearly, COP serves a very important function but there are a lot of people who also say, ‘Look, these are important gatherings but, at the end of the day, a lot of pledges are being made, pledges for actions. Then people leave and there is no accountability and there is no transparency afterwards’.

How can we track the steps and developments better in the aftermath of what is undoubtedly an important event, but where is the longevity here?

Laurent Fabius, President of the French Constitutional Council, President of the COP 21, former Prime Minister of France

Well, it is a good question. There are critics about COPs and we can share these critics, because they are heavy and so on. However, what else? Do you know today of another opportunity to get together all the governments, the companies, the NGOs, and to compel the different states to make commitments and to check if the commitments are fulfilled or not?

Right now, we do not have a better system. Therefore, the question is still there – how to be sure that the commitments will be fulfilled? It is a more general question. It does not apply only to climate.

Today – it is a rather philosophical observation – the main problems of humanity are international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational. We do not have a worldwide system of government which is able to tackle these new elements.

I think that what is necessary, first, during the COP, is the ability of the Presidency to gain the trust of the 200 states present. There is always a sort of fear by the different member states, saying, ‘Well, probably the President of the COP has the solution in their pocket’. No. You have to build trust and, if you build trust, it can lead to important results.

I remember, for instance, that at the beginning of the Paris conference, nearly all the powerful States were against the famous figure of 1.5 degrees. The science was in favor, but they were against because obviously it was a problem for them.

However, through the dynamics of the conference, through some particular speeches, through the discussions, and, at the end, through the arbitration of the Presidency, i.e., myself, it was decided – and, today, we know that it is the objective.

There is another point, which is the continuity of COPs. From this viewpoint, I am concerned by the fact that COP29 remains unclear. It is a strange thing – the President of the COP gains that title during the second week of the COP. In fact, he has been President of the COP for a year.

From the legal point of view, he will be President of the COP during the COP itself – but what comes next, if we do not have a solid COP29? Today, we do not know who will be the host country and if the Presidency will be convincing enough.

We know that COP30 will be Brazil and, for many reasons, I think that Brazil will be very active. It will be 'Paris + 10'. However, if we have an excellent COP in Emirates, but a sort of gap in the following year, we shall, I would say, lose or waste one year.

Therefore, the continuity – the fact that we must always be ahead, move forward, but ensure continuity, – is absolutely necessary.

One other point – let us be careful about the long-term. It is surprising to say that. I remember a chat with Michael Bloomberg when he said to me two things – and I think he was right and I very often think about that.

He said, 'Mr. Fabius, there are two mistakes that you must avoid – a) to be too long-term because, in the long run, we are all dead'. If you say to people, 'Okay, that is the aim in 2060', in reality, the question of climate becomes a race against time. We have to act urgently. It is necessary to have a long-term view, but not too long-term.

The second one is, 'Let us be careful about over-pessimism. We have enough pessimism right now'. If you say to people, 'Today, it is difficult. Tomorrow, it will be more difficult', they will do nothing. Therefore, to keep a feeling of hope, while being honest and acting urgently, is absolutely necessary.

Ali Aslan

Yes, the race against time, I think...

Mariam Al Mheiri, Minister of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates

Yes, I would just add something to what Laurent said. Partnerships are so important here. For those of you who do not know, the COPs have, of course, a huge negotiations team behind it and they are sitting for hours, until past midnight, talking and talking and talking and looking at one...

Laurent Fabius

You have to get people tired. If they are tired, it is okay.

Mariam Al Mheiri

You see? You need to get people tired, until they give in.

Ali Aslan

It is the same system at the World Policy Conference, by the way, but...

Mariam Al Mheiri

Yes.

Laurent Fabius

And good food, very good.

Mariam Al Mheiri

Yes, I wanted to come to that. What we have found that has been really good is to find something that partners are excited about and work together with the partners to make platforms. AIM for Climate, for example, the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, that we are spearheading with the US, for example – it has been up and running for two years. We have over 500 partners, USD 13 billion of committed investments, and they are all about looking at innovations in smart climate-resilient agriculture.

This has become a platform made for partners, by partners, and they choose their innovation sprints – they are calling it innovation sprints – the areas they want to work together in. They get money from outside and they are sprinting innovations. This, I find, has been a powerful tool of how to accelerate things; and then, of course, hopefully, even after the COP, it just keeps moving.

Another thing was the Mangrove Alliance for Climate – this is a platform for getting countries who understand the power of mangroves and restoring mangrove forest. By the way, we do not have any forests in the UAE, but we do have mangrove forests. These are basically our trees and they are amazing swamps or sinks for carbon.

Seeing the power of that, plus the power of biodiversity and they are beautiful to look at as well, we have managed to create MAC. We have got 20 countries on board now – the latest newcomer was Germany – and this is about bringing countries together that want to champion certain things to accelerate quickly, because that is what we need right now.

Coming to food – again, food – at the COPs that I have been to, the last two, the food was not too good. When you are doing meeting after meeting; and the negotiators are negotiating, and they do not have good food and they do not have good coffee, the result is not good.

What I have done is I said, ‘This COP, I want to make it a little bit different when it comes to food’. What I did – Laurent does not know this – I invited all the suppliers, the restaurant kitchen staff, and we did a workshop called ‘The Climate Conscious Catering Workshop for COPs’. We started this, there were more than 200 chefs, restaurant owners, and we said, ‘We want you to make sure that, at COP28, we are serving 1.5 degree aligned food.

With that, the experts taught them how to make a burger – the burger still can taste good, but now you are taking it with a climate-conscious mind. You are looking more at where you can source locally; what kind of flavors you can bring into it – and, believe me, the chefs had fun doing this.

Then, of course, taking into account, ‘How can we reduce the waste, make it a no-waste COP?’. All this, we started, in a way, a legacy, hopefully, that will continue to all COPs, starting from COP28.

We may not have it perfect, but I tell you, I hope you can all look forward to the food because it will be very much low-carbon food, low-carbon snacks, and 1.5 degree aligned menus as well.

Ali Aslan

One thing is for certain – throughout these long and contentious discussions, no-one will go hungry.

Mariam Al Mheiri



No.

Ali Aslan

That is for certain. The lack of food will not be one of the reasons why things might fall apart there, rest assured.

Now, being mindful of the time, of course, the session is coming to an end, and we talked about credibility; we talked about hope – something that is extremely important, of course; the aspirations and expectations of COP28 that lie ahead of us.

Now, interestingly, it already is garnering momentum as we speak. There is real impetus at a pre-COP28 meeting, where countries have come together to agree on a fund to help deal with efforts of climate change. Already some positive steps leading up to this big event.

Same question to both of you – what, in your opinion, would you consider to be a successful outcome of COP28?

Mr. President, we will start with you.

Laurent Fabius

Yes. Very practical things – a) operationalize Loss and Damage Fund; b) to really achieve the USD 100 billion a year; c) a commitment to invest in renewables; d) a commitment to phase out fossil fuels.

I would add a final comment. Let us not forget, from my own experience, that a climate problem is always a social problem. We know what the answers are but, when we offer answers to people, we are not in a situation to make them efficient. It does not make sense.

If you say, 'Okay, I raise taxes because I want less traditional vehicles' and so on, okay. However, if people need them and if you do not have the money to solve the problem, forget it.

Therefore, it is always a social problem, which means it is always a financial problem. None of what we have talked about, which was very interesting, makes sense without financial reform.

Ali Aslan

Those are clear words. Now, the Paris Climate Agreement 2015 has raised the bar. Of course, it would be wonderful if, post-COP28, we talk about Emirati Climate Agreement that people start referring to. In all seriousness, I know the ambitions are high. What are you aiming to get out of this? What is the goal? What would be success, in your opinion?

Mariam Al Mheiri

On top of everything that Laurent said – because those are extremely important – I will look a little bit more from the human side of things.

First of all, to bring trust and hope back into the process. We, for the first time, have brought in a youth climate champion into the process and we hope this will continue onwards and you will see a huge number of young people, not only just being part of a delegation, but these young people will be in the negotiations room because it is about their lives.

I hope to get commitments from more than 100 countries on the Emirates Declaration on Food Systems.



I also hope this will be a great platform to show the world who we are, as Emiratis; what our values are, what our journey has been; and how committed we are to this cause, and that we are a credible partner in this.

Of course, hopefully people will leave COP28 with a smile, feeling that they have had a great experience, that they have come out with an outcome to say, 'You know what? I am proud to go home to my kids and tell them I have done something for your future'.

However, I think we all need to step up because we do not have time to discuss and discuss and discuss. I think everyone needs to know that everyone has to give a little bit, so that we can get to where we need to be. We all know what we want, at the end of the day.

Therefore, we need to provide the best ecosystem for everyone to come and be able to convene and discuss, but we also hope that, with all the list of things that Laurent just mentioned, those are the main outcomes. For me, it is about hope and positivity. Let us course-correct where we are. We owe it to our kids.

Ali Aslan

Hope and positivity, walk the talk, raise the ambition, and step up the efforts. Ladies and gentlemen, I think to say that there is a global anticipation for this upcoming event is certainly no overstatement. We are very much looking forward to COP28 and hopefully the results that it will produce.

Climate change, ladies and gentlemen, is there still a collective will? I guess we will find out soon enough here in this very country, not too far from here in Dubai.

I think I speak for all when I say this has been an extremely insightful discussion and is whetting the appetite, if you will, for things to come.

The UAE Minister for Climate Change and Environment, Mariam Al Mheiri; and, of course, the President of the French Constitutional Council, Laurent Fabius – thank you so much. This is your applause. Much appreciated.