



Jeffrey Sachs - UN SDSN

Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs

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Good morning everybody. It is remarkable that we are together and that we are with remarkable people. Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo is one of the most remarkable people that you will ever have the blessing to know. We are very, very lucky to be in his guidance and in his home. Betsee Parker is a remarkably special person as well and let us thank her again for bringing us together. We are in a unique place, obviously. You will never forget being here and, certainly, we will never forget the picture we will take this afternoon together. This will be a life moment for all of us.

How special is this room? Look up here if you can, just turn around to what is said there. It talks about the *Lyncaeorum Academiā* established in MDCIII (1603). We are in one of the most important forums in the world, in history, the Academy of Sciences, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. While you may not be aware, the Lynx Forum had as one of its founders Galileo, one of the founders of all scientific thought. Although the story is told of the Church and Galileo's confrontation, the deeper story here is the alliance of science and faith, of the Church. That is a fundamental story for the world because it is the combination of faith and hope, together with knowledge, that can allow us to make a better world and that is what we are here for. It is also interesting. I could reflect that last week my wife Sonia and I were in Leuven, in Belgium, just outside of Brussels. We were celebrating the 500th anniversary of a very good book by Thomas Moore, *Utopia*, which was published 500 years ago this year. *Utopia* is a remarkable vision of the world that can be, as an inspiration. It draws, fundamentally, on the same sources of classical wisdom and the sense of the ability to shape society for human wellbeing. So, we are in a great tradition, when we meet together, we are in THE great Western tradition. While people are coming from all over the world and different traditions, this Western tradition, for all of the world dating back 2500 years to the wisdom of Aristotle and the Greek philosophers, to the Church and to the 400 years of this Academy and the marriage of faith and science is really a home for our very wonderful deliberations today. I want to take my text from this year's Nobel laureate who has made great contributions to the world and his text goes like this.

*"Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'*

We could have you sing it instead, but Bob Dylan go a lot right so we are happy he won the Nobel Prize this year for literature. I will continue because it gives us some guidance:

*"Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'
For the loser now will be later to win (That is Matthew 20:16 by the way)
For the times they are a-changin'*

*Come senators, congressmen
 Please heed the call
 Don't stand in the doorway
 Don't block up the hall
 For he that gets hurt
 Will be he who has stalled
 There's a battle outside and it is ragin'
 It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls (as the Pope has asked us)
 For the times they are a-changin'*

*Come mothers and fathers
 Throughout the land
 And don't criticize
 What you can't understand
 Your sons and your daughters
 Are beyond your command
 Your old road is rapidly agin'
 Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
 For the times they are a-changin'*

*The line it is drawn
 The curse it is cast
 The slow one now
 Will later be fast
 As the present now
 Will later be past
 The order is rapidly fadin'
 And the first one now will later be last
 For the times they are a-changin'”*

That is your world! That song I listened to about 10,000 times, roughly fifty years ago, and it still rattles my walls. But this is your world too, it is rapidly changing. We need new ways and you have new opportunities and new tools, but there is never certainty in how this change will go and the fundamental point of us being here today is that you are participants and protagonists in change, you are not observers and spectators. If we do not actively chose the good path there is no telling what will happen. For me, right around the time of this song, another very wise man, President John F. Kennedy, also made a very remarkable statement that defined modernity and its paradox. He said that: “For man holds in his mortal hands the ability to end all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life”.

That is the paradox of modernity; that we have become technologically so powerful that what seems impossible, to end poverty, is really within reach. And we have become so technologically powerful that what seems unthinkable, destruction on a mass scale, is also possible and that is really what we confront right now. When President Kennedy spoke about this he was speaking mostly about nuclear weapons and it behoves us to note that just two days ago Russian and US jets nearly collided over the skies of Syria, because those who control the military do not have responsibility, unfortunately, and we all too easily play games that can end up in disaster.

At the same time we have this remarkable opportunity, very realistic, to end poverty, which is unbelievable. Can you think how cool that would be that you guys do that? You know, for millennia people have dreamt of that, people have been told it is a Utopia, people have been told it is impossible, and you can actually do it. That is pretty cool. So the legacy you have is not all bad, it is really the paradox of modern times and fundamentally it is a call for responsibility and, fundamentally, a call for action.

I think that you and I and all of us are quite lucky that we have a kind of marriage between Pope Francis' vision and a global call to action, simultaneously. It was literally simultaneous last September 25, 2015 at the United

Nations (UN) – just about the coolest day of my life – when Pope Francis spoke to world leaders at the UN and then as soon as he ended with, of course, a world thanks to him, the 193 countries of the UN unanimously adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). What else could they do, you know? “Ok, ok, ok!” So it was really an incredibly remarkable moment and our purpose is to actually make them real. That is why we are here and that is hard work by the way. I’m not meaning to put a whole world on your shoulders, but I’m meaning to say that this is what all of us together are here for.

I personally think the idea that the world has agreed on these goals is of signal importance. You know, the world does not agree on very much, the world’s attention span is pretty short, pretty diverse, pretty distracted. So when all 193 countries of the UN agree on something, and it is good, my word we are lucky, because that doesn’t come along but once in a generation and that is what happened on September 25, 2015 and the spirit of that continued for the next weeks, to December 12, 2015, when the same 193 countries, plus 3 other signatories: Cook Islands, Niue and the European Union as a group, so making 196 signatories, signed the Paris Climate Agreement.

Thus, within a few weeks we had unanimity in the world around some important global objectives and Pope Francis had asked the world, in *Laudato si’*, for a common plan for our common home. Here the world rallied, at least to set the ideas of what these goals can be. So this is really fortunate for us, but my, it is hard work and that is what we really face right now, is the tremendous challenge of taking what is, after all, just a set of words and making it real.

When you think about the challenge, I really like the wisdom of one of my scientific gurus and human gurus, I would say, and that is professor Edward O. Wilson, the great biologist at Harvard University who is just a magnificent person and, I think, the leading Evolutionary Biologist of modern times. When you visit him in his lab and he picks up an ant (he is the world’s leading ant expert) you know that they are talking to each other, they understand each other perfectly. I have watched it, it is amazing!

Professor Wilson says that we have stumbled in to the 21st century with our “Stonehenge emotions, our medieval institutions and our near godlike technologies”. He talks about the disconnects of our basic human nature and all its complexity of institutions like my government in the United States, founded in a quite a remarkable document, but a document of 1789 and obviously not doing very well in its governance right now, unable to take effective actions for human wellbeing even of Americans, much less the world, and these remarkable technologies that we have as our instruments to solve problems, but also as the potential of mass destruction, whether it is through weaponry or through climate change induced by the burning of massive amounts of fossil fuel.

So we are here to understand how to put into action these Global Goals, how to find the spirit to do it and how to find the direction to do it. If you reflect on the goals you know that, fundamentally, they are guided by the idea of Sustainable Development and the concept meaning, in this case, that we should combine economic advancement with inclusion for everyone in society, a fair, just, inclusive and peaceful society, and that we need to reorient our production to be compatible with sustainability of the ten million other species on the planet, millions of which are at peril at human hands and compatible with the fundamental earth systems of climate and the water cycle and purification of the air and water that enable us to survive, because, as Pope Francis advises in *Laudato si’*, we are part of that nature, we are not separate from nature. We cannot destroy nature and think that humanity somehow survives as well.

So the SDGs call on us to address economic, social and environmental objectives simultaneously. That is a pretty tough assignment. It is like having to pass three exams for one course, which does not seem fair. But it is even worse than that, there are 17 exams in this, and this is a big, complicated agenda and while nobody can master all of it, it is part of our responsibility to understand its interconnectedness. So, I am very much looking forward to our discussions today. Let me just conclude with a few guidances for you.

You are starting out as leaders, you are at the beginning of a lifetime of leadership and I have been at this for 40 years. Sonia and I had our 40th college reunion last week. Oh, wow, that was fast! So I have been thinking about this issue for a while and, in practical terms, it has been for me 31 years on the front lines, in the trenches, so I think I have learnt a thing or two about how change happens and how we can help make it happen. So that is what I wanted to share with you, just a few pointers.

First, especially at your stage of leadership, learn, learn, learn, learn! We live in a complicated world and, crucially, to solve problems you need to understand them. So study and don’t presume you know the answers till you have looked at the problem from as many directions as you can, till you have listened to experts, till you have gotten on YouTube and listened to courses and to speakers and to TED Talks, until you have read books. That process takes at least 40 years and after 40 years, by the way, you feel a kind of desperation that not only are you forgetting constantly, but the universe of what you realise you need to know, and “why

didn't somebody tell me I needed to know that", 40 years later, keeps growing. But it is fun by the way, we should all be endless students, no matter what we are doing in life. We should all be endless students, it is so interesting, these issues also. But to be effective, you need to understand the problems and to understand the problems you need to understand them from multiple perspectives. You need to always understand them from the perspectives of all the participants in a problem also. You cannot just see something your way; you have to see it from all of the different perspectives. A lot of what we are trying to do is to create a consensus, a shared view, a way forward, and so that really requires a 360° vision of these problems.

So learning is first. Thinking, that is part of learning but it is a little bit different also, it means reflection. Thinking, talking, comparing, taking notes, talking to each other, exchanging ideas, learning and listening. There are so many good ideas in the world you do not have to invent them all, you just have to listen very carefully for good ones and say, "that makes sense".

That is really true if you are an economist, because then you do not really know much of anything and so you really have to listen to the malariologist, the epidemiologist, the energy engineers and the people who know all of these different things because if you do not listen you really know nothing and so it is very important to think and to exchange ideas. But then yes, you too will invent. That is really important because every solution has its local context, has its new needs, has its new opportunities, has its new apps that you will be writing or you will be deploying, creating and conceiving. One of the things that is so incredibly exciting about the time we live in right now is the number of new things that can be put into motion and, as Pope Francis said, and as Bishop Sánchez Sorondo just said, "Something new can always emerge as part of developing our potentialities". So invention is really important, but not invention first and learning second, that can be pretty dangerous. We do not want you to blow up the laboratory, we want you to learn, to study, to have a concept and then to invent. Next on my list is trying things, because actually deploying, trying concepts, putting them into practice, seeing how they work, learning that no matter how great your ideas or your inventions are there is a lot of work to do to make them really work for wellbeing. We are not here for theory, we are not here for "that was a nice idea, I do not know why no one is interested", we are here actually to do, we are here to put into practice, but to put into practice with all of that scientific and moral authority that comes from the preparatory steps that make it possible for you to act.

Next on my list is mobilize, that means to help bring the resources that are needed, whether that is people to partner with you, power to enable you, finances to help pay for the inputs that you need. You are all entrepreneurs of sustainable development. What is an entrepreneur? An entrepreneur is somebody who brings together various parts of a new complexity, who says "I really need some help on this" and "I really need some funding on this" and "I really need the Mayor to help me on this" and "I really need my professor to help on this" and "I really need some guidance on this" and "I really need the telecoms company to give me some airtime" and "I am going to mobilize this by helping everybody to have a common shared vision".

So an entrepreneur is the conductor who helps bring together the strings, the wind section, the percussion, so that you can create this beautiful symphony together. Then, inspire. We are 100 or so around the room and the world is 7.4 billion and we are privileged to be in this most remarkable place and our responsibility is to use that empowerment to inspire others to do the same and to share this idea and to say, "look what I've done, maybe you can do it better" or "look what our city is doing" or "look what our school is doing" or "look what our class is doing" or "look at this application, why don't you take this and improve it?" And inspiring is a huge part, of course, of what you will be doing. Partner! Part of the idea is to find who can bring a great percussion section to your orchestra, who is doing what you need to do in a certain area. Find ways to partner! Do not invent everything from the beginning; do not presume everything, but find ways to enlarge what we are doing together through partnership.

Teach! My wife, Sonia, is a medical doctor. They have a great and frightening expression in medical school, "See one, do one, teach one". You watch the operation first, then someone puts the instruments in your hand and then the next thing you know you are teaching the next one. And teaching is a very, very important part of life. Somehow every generation has to embody all of the knowledge and wisdom and add to it and impart it to others. How much work and effort this is to fight disorganisation, ignorance, darkness and forgetting. And, so, teaching is absolutely fundamental to the task of accomplishment.

Next is network, so we are the Sustainable Development Solutions Network! We are not the Sustainable Development Solutions "Institute", we are not the Sustainable Development "Solutions". We are a network for Sustainable Development. The whole purpose of the network is to help light up the whole world, like a network can, by making the interconnections, by making sure that when you have a great idea, it is heard half way around the world and, in fact, the whole world is represented here. So your network alone, now, can bridge the entire world and this is remarkable. This is an opportunity that, also, because of the capacity to connect with each other is so powerful now that we have to move fast. Remember, that is a part of the challenge but it is

also the opportunity that we have. And I should just mention again, the problems that we are facing right now are time-bound. That is really unusual. One could say, "Well, we have had poverty forever, we have had this forever, we have had that forever". We have never been in a situation like are in the world now, where we are right up against the edge of many calamities and at the same moment right up to the possibility of momentous positive occurrence. This is a unique condition for our time and these goals are not just nice aspirations, these are time-bound objectives. That is the hardest homework assignment you have ever had. End poverty by the year 2030. Stop human induced climate change before global warming goes beyond 2°C. Remember the Paris Climate Agreement says we should be aiming for 1.5°C and to stay well below 2°C. That is time bound. This year was 1.22°C warmer than the pre-industrial level. Partly because of the El Niño, the underlying trend is about 1.08°C, in other words, we are well over half way to the upper limit and things are going fast right now. And so this is time-bound and that is why this networking is so essential that we spread the news.

Well the last point on my list is to celebrate and that is to celebrate that we are together, celebrate that we are blessed to be in the company of Bishop Sánchez Sorondo, that we are blessed to be with Betsee Parker and with many other friends and remarkable people here.

Celebrate that we will be together, at noon, with the world's greatest moral leader of our time and we will take inspiration from him. We are blessed to be with each other, and I cannot tell you how thrilled I am about your commitment and dedication to this cause. Please know that we are here, us old fogies who have been doing this for a while, we are here to help you learn, we are here to help empower you, but we are counting on you. Thank you very much.