

Obama implores world leaders to ‘step up now’ to avert climate disaster

- **Ex-president criticizes China and Russia for emissions failures**
- **‘Images of dystopia start creeping into my dreams,’ Cop26 hears**



Cop26: Obama warns of 'dangerous lack of urgency' in climate talks – video

Oliver Milman in Glasgow

[@olliemilman](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 16.46 GMT

Barack Obama has called on world leaders to “step up and step up now” to avert climate breakdown, singling out China and Russia for being foremost among countries that are failing to cut planet-heating emissions quickly enough.

Obama said that while progress has been made at the Glasgow climate talks, including significant pledges made by countries to reduce methane emissions and to end deforestation, “we are nowhere near where we need to be at” in cutting emissions and that “most nations have failed to be as ambitious as they need to be”.

“It was particularly discouraging to see the leaders of two of the world’s largest emitters, China and Russia, decline to even attend the proceedings,” the former US president said in a speech to delegates at Cop26, **echoing** the criticism leveled at Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin by Joe Biden at the summit last week.

Obama added: “Their national plans seem to reflect a dangerous lack of urgency and willingness to maintain the status quo, and that’s a shame.”

In some of his most personal comments on the climate crisis, Obama said that “there are times where I feel discouraged, there are times where the future seems somewhat bleak,” adding that “images of dystopia start creeping into my dreams”.

The Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of nationalism in countries such as the US and misinformation spread on social media had frayed the global effort to confront climate change, he said. But Obama added that “cynicism is the recourse for cowards and we can’t afford hopelessness” – before urging young climate activists to keep pushing politicians to do more.

“If those older folks won’t listen, they need to get out of the way,” he said. “Vote like your life depends upon it, because it does.”

Obama’s speech comes in the second week of a disjointed UN climate conference, where world leaders have used doom-laden **rhetoric** while pledging to do more, with new emissions reduction pledges pushing down expected global heating, **albeit still at dangerously high levels**.

This has contrasted with the stance of environmental groups, indigenous leaders and young activists who have complained that Cop26 has been a disappointing parade of greenwashing and broken promises. “You can shove your climate crisis up your arse,” as Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish activist, **put it**.

Obama sought to address this disparity, saying that “imperfect compromises” will be required to address the climate emergency.

“Gird yourself for a marathon, not a sprint,” he said. “If we are going to be honest with ourselves then, yes, it’s going to be really hard. The good thing is humanity has done hard things before and I believe we will do hard things again.”