



## **Christiana Figueres: Corporate Leadership On Climate Change Approaching Critical Mass**

Figueres, the prime driver of the December 2015 global warming summit in Paris, now says that global corporations are buying into climate change rhetoric. This is partly the fruit of Figueres' Mission 2020 campaign (see video below). □ TN Editor

Figueres, a highly influential figure in structuring the [historic climate deal](#) agreed in Paris in December 2015, spoke exclusively with edie after addressing a London audience about the immediate effects of climate change on Sunday (1 October).

She noted that, until recently, strong corporate leadership had been the preserve of a small section of the business community, particularly those that played a prominent role in encouraging countries to adopt an ambitious agreement in the lead up to Paris.

But this once exclusive club of corporate leaders has grown considerably in size in recent times, illustrated by last month's news that membership of the Science Based Targets programme had [reached the 300 mark](#).

Figueres claims that it is the so-called “middle chunk” of businesses now entering the low-carbon fray that will enable the world to “move the needle” in reducing emissions to keep global warming well below 2C.

“This has been going on for quite a few years,” she explained. “Leadership in corporations, like anywhere else, follows a bell curve of distribution. Before Paris we had about 10-15% of CEOs showing support.

“But what is new is that it no longer a few leading companies and CEOs – we’re starting to get beyond the 10-15%, and now we’re getting through to the middle chunk of around 70% of corporations that are beginning to come forward.

“It’s the middle chunk that actually makes up the critical mass. What we had before was very powerful and eloquent leadership, but it didn’t move the needle with respect to the emissions themselves. Whereas now we’re starting to get more numbers of corporations coming forward and I think we will be seeing critical mass pretty soon.”

## **‘Story to tell’**

There was a welcome sign last week that corporates are helping to make some progress in the battle against global warming, as figures showed that global emissions of climate-warming [carbon dioxide remained static in 2016](#) for the third consecutive year.

All of the world’s biggest emitting nations, except India, saw falling or static carbon emissions due to [less coal burning](#) and increasing [renewable energy](#). The world’s largest emitter, China, has seen [huge coal burning peak](#) following a dramatic decline in new coal-fired units.

Figueres, who recently launched the [Mission 2020 campaign](#) with an aim to “bend the curve” on global emissions in three years, declared her optimism at the fact that emissions have remained flat in a time when the global economy is growing.

“If we had levelled out but rubbed up the global economy, it wouldn’t be a story to tell,” she said. “But it is a story to tell because the greenhouse gas emissions have levelled out and global GDP has been growing by 3% a year. It begins to be a signal that in fact it is possible to delink GHG from GDP.”

## **‘Not fast enough’**

But the world cannot afford to ease off now, warned Figueres. Indeed, levelling-out global emissions means that huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> are still being added to the atmosphere every year - more than 35 billion tonnes in 2016 - driving up global temperatures and increasing the risk of damaging, extreme weather. Meanwhile, a number of mainly developing nations, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, still have rising rates of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Figueres is keen not to point the finger at any individual nation, stressing that urgent action is required from both industrialised and developing nations. Ensuring that the business case for emissions reductions is fully understood by global leaders will prove decisive in driving the low-carbon agenda forward, she said.

“Industrialised countries have levelled out, but they need to do much more,” Figueres said. “They need to go to net-zero. An additional an urgent effort is needed there.

“Developing countries are also making an effort due to many different reasons, not because they want to save the planet but because it is good for the economy. Nobody is going to do anything just out of charity or out of an interest in saving the planet. They need to find where the financial incentive and the economic strength of this is. Of course, none of this progress is fast enough, but everybody is making an effort.”

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