

Transcript

The view from Glasgow, Scotland

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: [MAORI]. Hello, everyone.

MIA MOTTLEY: Your Royal Highness, Excellencies.

SALEEMUL HUQ: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

JOE BIDEN: We meet with the eyes of history upon us.

ELIZABETH WATHUTI: My name is Elizabeth Wathuti. I am a youth climate activist from Kenya.

TXAI SURUI: My name is Txai Suruí. My people have been living in the Amazon Forest at least 6,000 years.

BRIANNA FRUEAN: When I was a little girl, I was taught the importance and impact of words.

ELIZABETH WATHUTI: I have asked myself over and over what words might move you. And then I realised that my truth will only land if you have the grace to fully listen, if you can open up your heart.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: I would want people to continue to interrogate the words of what I'd said.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SPEAKING MAORI]

My name is India, and I come from Kahungunu Rongomaiwahine, Rangitane on the East Coast of Aotearoa, colonially known as New Zealand. And I am a climate change campaigner and activist. And I've been involved in the UN negotiations for many years now right up until COP26 in Glasgow, where I gave a now well-known speech.

ALOK SHARMA: Now upon my special invitation, it is my pleasure to invite India Logan-Riley, a representative of the Indigenous peoples to address the plenary. India, you have the floor.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: [SPEAKING MAORI]

In our communities, we always introduce ourselves in our language, where we're from, who we are descended from, the rivers and the mountains and the oceans that make up our DNA.

[SPEAKING MAORI]

And so, for me, it was really important to speak our language, te reo Māori, in the colonial motherland of Britain because it was the British government that has tried to erase our language and our customs.

252 years ago, invading forces sent by the ancestors of this presidency arrived in my ancestors' territories, heralding an age of violence and murder and destruction enabled by documents like the Doctrine of Discovery that were formulated in Europe.

It was an interesting journey to ending up on the stage and at the opening of COP26. I was very nervous, knowing that not many people would get this kind of opportunity. But the most important thing for me was that my words were kind of worthy of that five minutes that we'd been given, really bringing in other people's stories and experiences and speaking truth to power.

Land in my region was stolen by the British crown in order to extract oil and suck the land of all its nutrients while seeking to displace my people and end our practices. So, I knew that what I had to do is just not shy away from naming the roots of the climate crisis that we're in today, naming colonization.

I was very nervous that they would cut the mic because they've done that before to Indigenous peoples. If you speak too long or if you get too challenging, they'll take the microphone off you, and you'll be herded into the security office. If you're seen to be protesting too much, you can be banned from the venue for up to five years and so can your organization. So, it's a really tense situation to end up in.

Six years ago, I first spoke these stories into this space. I've been applauded and awarded for conjuring emotive imagery of rising sea levels and yearly wildfires that my community continues to endure. I have repeated the same words-- wildfires, sea level rise, wildfires, suffering, sea level rise, biodiversity loss, sea level rise. Emissions continue to rise.

It's portrayed as if you're talking to global representatives like Biden and other presidents and stuff like that. They're not in the room. They don't actually care enough to show up. I'm the same age as these negotiations. I have grown up, graduated, fallen in love, fallen out of love, stopped and changed a couple of careers along the way, all while the Global North, colonial governments and corporations fudge with the future.

STEVEN RATUVA: So, in many ways, the countries of the Global North refer to the former colonial powers, which have, if you like, western orientation. And then you have the Global South, which are the former colonised territories. My name is Steven Ratuva. I'm a distinguished professor here at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, and I'm originally from Fiji.

So, in terms of socioeconomic division, there's a lot of nuanced and complex realities on the ground. Within the Global South itself, you have very rich people who are probably richer than most people in the Global North. You have people in the Global North who are very poor, probably poorer than a lot of people in the Global South. But still, by and large, the Global North countries still hold a lot of economic and political power and that's part of the issue now in the world.

SALEEMUL HUQ: It's a pleasure to join you today on behalf of the Race to Resilience campaign and communities around the world, including my own in Bangladesh, who are already living with the impacts of climate change. I am Saleemul Huq. I'm director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

Well, it so happens that I'm one of the few people that has been to every single COP. But I should hasten to add that I don't go as a negotiator. I don't represent a particular country. But I do have a role as an advisor to the group of least developed countries, which are 47 of the poorest, most vulnerable countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Asia, including my country, Bangladesh.

We know the scale of the challenge we are facing. It doesn't matter where you live or where you govern. Floods are devastating in Germany and Bangladesh and indeed in Scotland in the last few days. Extreme heat is already a reality for most people and is proliferating. That is my first message. The COPs are extremely important, particularly for the most vulnerable developing countries because they are the only place where they have a seat at the table. Other fora like the G20 or the G7 exclude them. But at the COP, they're all there. They're able to put their voices forward. And I advise them on issues related to adaptation and loss and damage.

Adapting to climate change and building resilience is a call for everyone, all countries, rich and poor. In COP26, at the very beginning, we had a leaders' segment where heads of governments from all over the world flew in. I'd say the most interesting statement was from Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados, which is a very vulnerable island country in the Caribbean.

MIA MOTTLEY: We come to Glasgow with global ambition, to save our people and to save our planet. We need the correct mix of voices, ambition, and action. Do some leaders in this world believe that they can survive and thrive on their own? Can there be peace and prosperity if one third of the world literally prospers and the other 2/3 of the world live under siege and face calamitous threats to our well-being?

SALEEMUL HUQ: Scientists around the world have made it very clear that they now have unequivocal evidence of impacts of climate change happening, which is causing global temperature to rise. It's gone up above 1 degree centigrade already, and it's headed to 2 degrees and above. So, there are three ways in which we deal with it. The first way is to reduce the emissions of the greenhouse gases that caused the problem. In the climate change jargon, we call that mitigation.

MIA MOTTLEY: On mitigation, without more, we will leave the world on a pathway to 2.7 degrees. And with more, we are still likely to get to 2 degrees.

SALEEMUL HUQ: The second issue then becomes tackling or preparing for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. And we call that adaptation to climate change, which is preparing for temperature rises and impacts that will happen.

MIA MOTTLEY: On adaptation, adaptation finance remains only at 25%, not the 50/50 split that was promised nor needed given the warming that is already taking place on this Earth.

SALEEMUL HUQ: And then the third problem is the issue of loss and damage from climate change. We have failed to either mitigate enough or adapt enough, all of which are now causing losses of human lives, biodiversity, damage to infrastructure, homes, agriculture.

MIA MOTTLEY: Failure to provide the critical finance and that of loss and damage is measured, my friends, in lives and livelihoods in our communities. This is immoral and it is unjust. Code red, code red to the G7 countries. Code red, code red.

Our world, my friends, stands at a fork in the road, one no less significant than when the United Nations was formed in 1945. But then, the majority of our countries here did not exist. We exist now. The difference is we want to exist 100 years from now. And if our existence is to mean anything, then we must act in the interests of all of our people who are dependent on us.

When will we as world leaders across the world address the pressing issues that are truly causing our people angst and worry? Simply put, when will leaders lead? The world, the planet needs our actions now, not next year, not in the next decade. Thank you.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: The Global North runs the narrative around climate change in lots of different ways. But, for me, a very clear example is what happens at the climate change negotiations.

SALEEMUL HUQ: Inside the negotiations, it's quite complicated, and sometimes the issues can be highly politically sensitive. They go on all night arguing about a comma or a full stop. Literally, they do that.

BRIANNA FRUEAN: In Samoa, there is a proverb that goes, [NON-ENGLISH]. It means that even stones decay, but words remain. A lesson in knowing how words can be wielded, how texts can change everything, how switching one word or number could reframe worlds, how two degrees could mean the end and 1.5 could mean a fighting chance.

STEVEN RATUVA: Pacific Islands states have to work very hard to be visible. In the COP, they are supposed to talk about climate as being an equalizing factor, where everybody sits around the table as equals, but it doesn't work out that way.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: Basically, there are pieces of the agreement that are negotiated concurrently within the conference. And so, it will be split into different articles or sections. And so, you're going to have 10, 20 negotiations happening at the same time. If your country can only afford to send three negotiators, you have to pick which eggs you're going to put in which basket to try and save your people.

SALEEMUL HUQ: It's a very unequal playing field where the rich and powerful, particularly the Global North, have a much higher ability to influence decisions than the Global South.

STEVEN RATUVA: Even if you say, we're all the same, around the table and the US president walks in with an entourage of Secret Service in black glasses and the Air Force One parked outside, what do you do? It's a symbol of power, of dominance. You have no choice but to bow down. So that's the politics of symbolism.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: And then you'll have these richer countries like the US who will actively bring fossil fuel executives on their negotiating teams. And they can afford to shift their plane date or extend their accommodation when the conference goes over time, because the UN negotiations have never actually finished on time on the Friday. They always go over.

And some countries can't afford to change their flights. So, they have to walk out of the negotiations that are going to directly affect the well-being of their people because they can't afford to stay longer. And that is messed up.

This is all to say that climate change is the final outcome of the colonial project. And in our response, we must be decolonial, rooted in justice and care for communities like mine who have borne the burden of the Global North greed for far too long.

SALEEMUL HUQ: We now have a growing movement on what we call climate justice or what I call climate injustice, which is rich people causing a problem, poor people suffering because of it. And that's not right.

BRIANNA FRUEAN: This is my message from Earth to COP.

TXAI SURUI: The Earth is speaking. She tells us that we have no more time. It's not 2030 or 2050. It's now.

BRIANNA FRUEAN: If you're looking for inspiration on this, look no further than the climate leadership of young pacific people.

ELIZABETH WATHUTI: We are the adults on this Earth right now, and it is our responsibility to ensure that the children have food and water.

BRIANNA FRUEAN: We are not just victims to this crisis. We have been resilient beacons of hope. Pacific youth have rallied behind the cry. We are not drowning. We are fighting.

INDIA LOGAN-RILEY: And last but not least, land back, oceans back. This is all part of following Indigenous leadership. I had no idea my speech would do what it did or create the kind of media wave that I did. This is what keeping warming below 1.5 degrees looks like.

People resonated with it and that was really reassuring. Glad that it's being used as an education tool and that kind of thing. But I wouldn't want people to stop at that. I would want people to continue to interrogate the words of what I'd said and act in alignment with justice. This is an invitation to you. This COP, learn our histories, listen to our stories, honour our knowledge, and get in line or get out of the way. [MAORI]. Thank you.