



Stanley Johnson addresses climate activists from Extinction Rebellion in London  
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“I would like to see bankers and financiers rise to the challenge”

## The road to Glasgow

Tim Saunders speaks to conservationist and former politician Stanley Johnson ahead of COP26 in Glasgow

**W**e must do something about global warming urgently, demands lifelong conservationist 80-year-old Stanley Johnson. “We are certainly not on the right track now.” Johnson knows what he is talking about. The former Conservative politician is international ambassador for the Conservative

Environment Network, a group of 100 MPs and peers, and is also the father of British prime minister Boris Johnson.

Current emissions are taking us over 3°C, rather than keeping us below 1.5°C – the ‘safe’ limit of climate change and the goal countries agreed upon during the 21st Conference of the Parties in Paris in

emitters – continues on its present path. And it is just as important for COP26 to agree 2030 or 2035 goals and the programmes to achieve them.”

Financing the transition is key. Paris 2015 agreed that developing countries needed and should receive at least US\$100 billion a year to deal with climate change. “That is a bargain, given the existential nature of the threat we face,” says Johnson. “Governments do not need to put up all the money. I would like to see bankers and financiers rise to the challenge. And if they do not, maybe they can be prodded.”

Another crucial international conference, according to Johnson, is the 15th meeting of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), due to be held in Kunming, China, at a date still to be confirmed. “Given the crucial role Nature-based solutions will play in tackling climate change, it is perfectly obvious that avoiding deforestation, protecting mangroves, rewilding and re-wooding of large areas, and blue carbon initiatives of various kinds will be vital,” Johnson says.

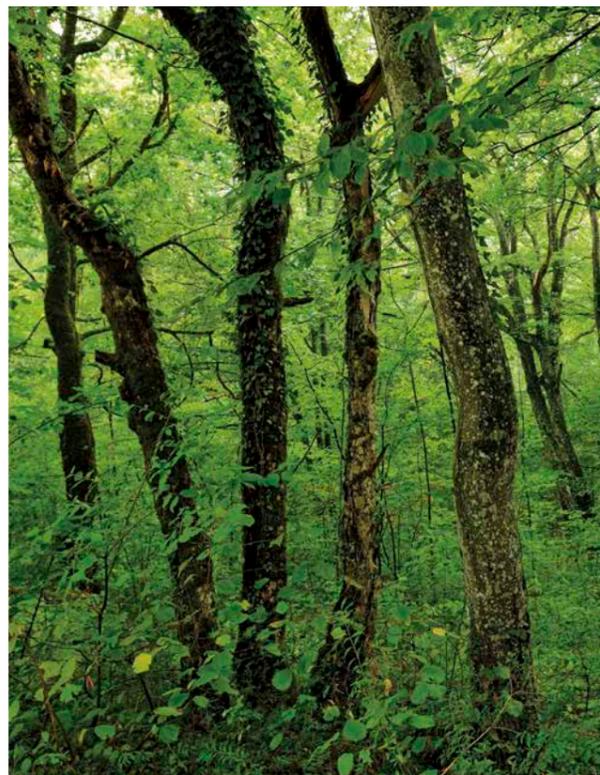
The CBD already requires national programmes of biological conservation to be prepared and put into effect by parties to the convention. But the overarching goals still need to be agreed. The previous set of goals, known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, expired at the end of 2020. “One crucial goal would be a clear commitment by the international community to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity at the latest by 2030,” Johnson tells me. “I very much hope that the 197 countries who are members of the CBD will support such an initiative.”

Johnson says he would like to see the UK taking the lead in the pre-Kunming negotiations. “As far as climate change is concerned, the UK’s negotiating stance has been greatly helped by the 2008 Climate Change Act, giving provision for the establishment of legally binding targets such as the 2050 carbon net zero target, together with intermediate targets determined by the Climate Change Committee in accordance with a carbon budget.”

The first step, as he sees it, is to get a legally binding target to stop and reverse the decline of Nature

2015. “The challenge now, of course, more than five years after the Paris Agreement, is to make sure the world is on track,” Johnson says.

To keep global warming below the 1.5°C level, reaching global net zero carbon emissions on or before 2050 is crucial, Johnson says. This is why COP26 in Glasgow is a “tremendous task”, he explains. “It must seek global agreement or consensus on the 2050 goal of global carbon net zero, which will be difficult or impossible to do if China – which, alongside the US, is one of the main carbon



Photographs by Bernard Van Elegem

in England by 2030 and he wants his son, the prime minister, to insert a clause in the Environment Bill to this effect.

He believes that the current government “is doing a lot” in terms of helping the environment. “They’re doing well – a 78% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.” But, he says, there is so much more to do. “The UK set a world-leading example on carbon emissions reduction with the Climate Change Act. Now we must do the same for biodiversity. Setting a target in law to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030 would do that and could come at the perfect moment ahead of global climate and Nature talks.”

For Britain to go to Kunming with a biodiversity commitment already with its own legislation, alongside the legal climate target, “would be something of a diplomatic coup”, he adds.

Johnson spent 12 years in Brussels as a senior civil servant and five years in the European parliament as an MEP and vice chair of the parliament’s environment committee. “This was the solid rock on which my subsequent career as an environmentalist has been based.” He wrote with Guy Corcelle, detailing the vast raft of legislation – air, waste, water, noise, chemicals, Nature protection, and more – that the EU has adopted.

He anticipates that we will be forced to change how food is produced if we are going to future-proof the planet. “Seventy years ago lambing was in the field;

now it is in lambing sheds. Feed comes from Brazil, where forests have been destroyed. There needs to be a transformation of livestock and farming processes. Our diets need to change. Lambs gambolling in the Exmoor landscape are destined for the table 17 weeks later. The explosion of intensive farming is the reason why the Amazon rainforests have been decimated. If I was to start life again I would look at the vegetarian option. In my day it just wasn’t available. I now ask my wife, ‘Can we have chickpea soup for supper?’ If you’re a purist you have to make sure there’s no palm oil. I’ve travelled to Indonesia and Borneo and seen the spread of palm oil production and the subsequent destruction of the orang-utans. Consumer labelling must improve. Far too much meat is labelled as halal when it is destined for general consumption.”

Closer to home, Stanley and his wife are patrons of Somerset Wildlife Trust. He is also endeavouring to rewild some moorland near his Exmoor farm. “It tragically got ploughed and fenced in the 1980s. I tried to stop this 40 years ago but failed. I am trying again now. That’s the name of the game. Never give up. It is never too late. Until it is.” R

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## Leading by example

Governments should be judged on collaboration, not competitiveness, argues **Simon Anholt**



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**F**or the last twenty years, working as an independent policy adviser to the presidents and prime ministers of nearly sixty countries, I’ve often challenged them with the same questions: what is your country *for*? What is its gift to the world? How should a country make itself useful in the 21st century, and so earn its place in the world?

And just as often, I’ve asked myself a different question: *why won’t the world work?* How is it that despite all the power, technology, money and knowledge that humanity has accumulated, we still seem unable to defeat the most dangerous threats, from climate breakdown and pandemics to poverty and inequality? We certainly know the solutions to these threats, but no country has the power to implement those solutions alone, and instead of working alongside each other, countries focus on working against each other, even in the face of global emergencies like the climate crisis or Covid-19.

We need a worldwide change in the culture of governance, from fundamentally competitive to fundamentally collaborative. This is why in 2014 I launched The Good Country Index, the first ranking that, instead of measuring how well countries perform domestically, measures their external impact on the rest of humanity and the rest of the planet.

The Good Country Index correlates to an exceptionally high degree – more than 80% – with the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, an international opinion poll tracking public perceptions of countries, which I’ve published annually since 2005. Perceptions matter, because countries with powerful and positive images trade at a premium, whilst countries with weak or negative images trade at a discount: a positive

national image is associated with high levels of tourism, foreign investment, talent attraction and trade.

The correlation is good news, as it presents governments with a simple incentive to work harder on climate change and other transnational challenges: if they do, it should improve the image of their respective countries, and with an improved image comes growth and prosperity.

I’m certainly not recommending national self-sacrifice. The kind of behaviour that produces a better national image is enlightened self-interest, and in my work I’ve found that the policies, projects and behaviours that gradually earn countries and cities a better image don’t need to be expensive or politically risky. Working more internationally and more collaboratively, if it’s done well, isn’t about compromises: it actually results in better domestic policy as well as higher revenues, and not in some distant future, but in real time.

So it turns out that if a country wants to do well, it must do good. This simple formula is the central argument of my new book, *The Good Country Equation*, and if it sounds familiar, it’s because corporations reached the same conclusion decades ago. This is corporate social responsibility all over again, but this time at the level of the nation, the city and the region.

Governmental social responsibility is a necessary revolution that’s twenty years overdue. Let’s see if we can hurry it along. R

Simon Anholt is a policy adviser and is founder of The Good Country Index. His latest book, *The Good Country Equation: How We Can Repair the World in One Generation*, is published by Berrett-Koehler. [www.goodcountry.org](http://www.goodcountry.org)