

Toespraak minister Schultz van Haegen bij Adaptation Futures

Toespraak | 10-05-2016

‘Of course we must respond to Climate Change. But it’s even more important that we stay one step ahead of the future. Our challenge is to prevent disasters. Our goal is to make people, and their societies and economies, resilient. You can do something every day to make the world a better, more pleasant place. I’m keen to do the same. Today and tomorrow, here in Rotterdam, I will be speaking to experts and fellow ministers about preventing water disasters and making vulnerable areas more resilient. Many of those areas are in low-lying urban river deltas. The Netherlands is a good example. And that is exactly why we have launched an international Delta Coalition. A coalition of countries that face the same issues and so are well suited to helping each other. The Delta Coalition will meet for the first time here, at Adaptation Futures.’

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Netherlands, welcome to Rotterdam.
And above all: welcome to Adaptation Futures. With 1,700 participants from 95 countries, this is the biggest climate adaptation conference ever held.

The presence of so many here says a lot about the urgency of climate adaptation. We need to adapt to a changing world, even if we succeed in reducing CO₂ emissions to a minimum.

But what will we be adapting to?
What’s the new normal?
Which future issues will we face?
There are still many questions crying out for answers.

The tremendous turnout today also shows that this issue affects us all. Whether it’s through water or food, energy or biodiversity – climate change is going to impact our economic development and our quality of life as a whole.

Those effects will trickle through every society and every economy. From the rice farmer in Bangladesh, who sees the water in the enormous delta rising ever higher –to the young mother in São Paulo, where drought means that less and less water is available for more than 20 million people.

But responding to big changes is not the greatest challenge we face. Of course we must respond. But it’s even more important that we stay one step ahead of the future. Our challenge is to prevent disasters. Our goal is to make people, and their societies and economies, resilient. That will save people’s lives and it will be a sound economic investment. Because for every dollar we spend on prevention, we save seven dollars of disaster relief.

Building global resilience is certainly a major task.
And we must do so with climate change all the while making its mark.
But fortunately adaptation is now higher on the global agenda than ever, thanks to the Paris climate agreement.
Now we need to turn that urgency into results. It's time for action.
That means we need to achieve visible results at this conference, with new knowledge and new ideas.
This will only work if experts can meet and share what they know.

But that's just one side of the coin.
We will make even more progress if we bring together thinkers and doers.
If we give trailblazers the space they need to set to work using all the knowledge available.

Ideas and innovations don't come from nowhere. Governments can't buy them with subsidies.
And markets can't just pull them out of thin air either.
We need to do careful research – even if that sometimes takes years.
At the same time, thinkers and doers need to be working out the next steps.
We can foster this process by creating Living Labs: projects where research centres and companies team up to look for practical solutions – and above all to make mistakes.

To some that might sound like a paradox.
But it's exactly what history's biggest thinkers and doers did.
And it's how progress is still made every day.

I'd like to give you two very different examples.
The first is a floating wooden school in Lagos, Nigeria.
It drifts around in the middle of Makoko, a slum village built entirely on stilts in the middle of a lagoon.
Makoko is a place without infrastructure, without roads and without even land. Yet almost 100,000 people live there.

Three years ago, this school was the first, cautious answer to the question:
how will this vulnerable place survive an uncertain future?

It was an experiment, but it has proved a great success.
The floating structure adapts to the tidal changes and varying water levels of the lagoon,
making it invulnerable to flooding and storm surges.

The new school provides an education for more than a hundred children.
But it is more than that.
It is a place where people from all over Makoko meet.
And it is an inspiration, because the school's design can be copied to build new and stronger houses in the vulnerable lagoon.

Makoko's floating school is an excellent example of a simple and cheap solution that has had a great positive impact on the local community.
It is climate resilience in practice – on a small scale, but with a big impact.

My second example is the man you may know as the inventor of the Segway.
His name is Dean Kamen

– and all his life he’s been fascinated by great scientists like Archimedes and Einstein.

And by the question: What problem can I help to solve today?

At a young age he invented a portable dialysis machine for home use:

a great advance in medical technology.

By inventing the Segway he found a way of making urban traffic quieter and cleaner.

Recently, Kamen and his team have been working on the SlingShot, a water purification device the size of a small refrigerator.

The aim of the SlingShot is to make clean water available and affordable to everyone on earth. That would be an enormous achievement, especially in times of climate change.

Whether he succeeds or not, Kamen is a textbook example of someone who takes a practical approach to complex issues.

Someone who combines a great love of science with the restlessness of an entrepreneur.

He sinks his teeth into a problem and doesn’t let go until he has made the world a little better.

I’m sure many of you have come to Rotterdam with the same attitude.

Just like the residents of Makoko and people like Dean Kamen, you can do something every day to make the world a better, more pleasant place.

I’m keen to do the same.

Today and tomorrow, here in Rotterdam, I will be speaking to experts and fellow ministers about preventing water disasters and making vulnerable areas more resilient.

Many of those areas are in low-lying urban river deltas.

The Netherlands is a good example.

And that is exactly why we have launched an international Delta Coalition.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased that the Netherlands – and Rotterdam in particular – can make a small contribution to solving these global issues.

Not only as host of this conference, but also because we in the Netherlands urgently need your knowledge and solutions.

The lowest point in the Netherlands is only 12 kilometres away, and it lies almost seven metres below sea level.

With 17 million inhabitants and a world-class economy to protect, the Netherlands has first-hand experience of the effects of rising sea levels and erratic weather patterns.

Our future can benefit from your solutions.

So I hope that during this conference you will learn something about our country and our

challenges – but also about the way we've learned to live and work with them.
Because I also want my country – with all its experience – to help other countries in turn.
Noblesse oblige.

I hope that seeing our country and meeting so many other stakeholders will mean you return home with new insights and new answers.

And that we are all inspired to stay one step ahead of the future.

We must not settle for anything less.

Thank you.