

## ‘Panic like the house is on fire’

### Greta Thunberg speech to the Members of the European Parliament

My name is Greta Thunberg. I am 16 years old. I come from Sweden and I want you to panic.  
I want you to act as if your house was on fire.  
I have said those words before  
And a lot of people has explained why that is a bad idea.  
A great number of politicians have told me that panic never leads to anything good.  
And I agree.  
To panic unless you have to is a terrible idea.  
But when your house is on fire and you want to keep your house from burning to the ground, then that does require some level of panic.

Our civilization is so fragile. It is almost like a castle built in the sand.  
The facade is so beautiful. But the foundations are far from solid.  
We have been cutting so many corners.  
Yesterday the world watched with despair and enormous sorrow how the Notre Dame burnt in Paris.  
Some buildings are much more than just buildings.  
But the Notre Dame will be rebuilt.  
I hope that its foundations are strong.

I hope that our foundations are even stronger.  
But I fear that they are not.

Around the year 2030. Ten years 259 days and ten hours way from now. We will be in a position where we set off an irreversible chain reaction that will most likely lead to the end of our civilization as we know it.  
That is unless in that time, permanent and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society have taken place. Including a reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least 50%.  
And please note that these calculations are depending on inventions that have not yet been invented at scale, inventions that are supposed to clear our atmosphere of astronomical amounts of carbon dioxide.

Furthermore do these calculations not include unforeseen tipping points and feedback loops like the extremely powerful methane gas escaping from rapidly thawing arctic permafrost.

Nor do they include already locked in warming hidden by air pollution. Nor the aspect of equity — or climate justice — clearly stated throughout the Paris Agreement, which is absolutely necessary to make it work on a global scale.

We must also bear in mind that these are just calculations. Estimations. That means that these “points of no return” may occur a bit sooner or later than that. No one can know for sure.

We can however be certain that they will occur approximately in these time frames. Because these calculations are not opinions or wild guesses.

These projections are backed up by scientific facts, concluded by all nations through the IPCC. Nearly every major national scientific body around the world unreservedly supports the work and findings of the IPCC.

We are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction and the extinction rate is up to ten thousand times faster than what is considered normal, with up to 200 species becoming extinct every single day.

Erosion of fertile topsoil, deforestation of our great forests, toxic air pollution, loss of insects and wildlife, the acidification of our oceans — these are all disastrous trends being accelerated by a way of life that we, here in our financially-fortunate part of the world, see as our right to simply carry on.

But hardly anyone knows about these catastrophes — or understand how they are just the

first few symptoms of climate — and ecological breakdown.

Because how could they? They have not been told. Or more importantly: they have not been told by the right people, and in the right way.

Our house is falling apart.

And our leaders need to start acting accordingly.

Because at the moment they are not.

If our house was falling apart our leaders wouldn't go on like you do today.

You would change almost every part of your behavior. As you do in an emergency.

If our house was falling apart you wouldn't fly around the world in business class chatting about how the market will solve everything with clever small solutions to specific isolated problems.

You wouldn't talk about buying and building your way out of a crisis that has been created by buying and building things.

If our house was falling apart you wouldn't hold 3 emergency Brexit summits and no emergency summit regarding the breakdown of the climate and environment.

You wouldn't be arguing about phasing out coal in 15 or 11 years.

If our house was falling apart you wouldn't be celebrating that one single nation like Ireland may soon divest from fossil fuels.

You wouldn't celebrate that Norway has decided to stop drilling for oil outside the scenic resort of Lofoten Island, but will continue to drill everywhere else for decades.

It's 30 years too late for that kind of celebration.

If our house was falling apart, the media wouldn't be writing about anything else. The ongoing climate and ecological crises would make up all the headlines.

If our house was falling apart you wouldn't say that you have the situation under control and place the future living conditions for all living species in the hands of inventions that are yet to be invented.

And you would not spend all your time as politicians arguing about taxes or Brexit.

If the walls of our house truly came tumbling down, surely you would set your differences aside and start cooperating.

Well, our house is falling apart.

And we are rapidly running out of time.

And, yet basically nothing is happening.

Everyone and everything needs to change so why waste precious time arguing about what and who needs to change first?

Everyone and everything has to change. But the bigger your platform the bigger your responsibility.

The bigger your carbon footprint the bigger your moral duty.

When I tell politicians to act now the most common answer is that they can't do anything drastic, because that would be too unpopular among the voters.

And they are right of course. Since most people are not even aware of why those changes are required. That is why I keep telling you to unite behind the science. Make the best available science the heart of politics and democracy.

The EU elections are coming up soon. And many of us who will be affected the most by this crisis, people like me, are not allowed to vote. Nor are we in a position to shape the decisions of business, politics, engineering, media, education or science. Because the time it takes for us to educate ourselves to do that simply no longer exists.

And that is why millions of children are taking it to the streets, school striking for the climate to create attention for the climate crisis.

You need to listen to us, we who cannot vote. You need to vote for us, for your children and grandchildren.

What we are doing now can soon no longer be undone.  
In this election you vote for the future living conditions of humankind.  
And though the politics needed do not exist today, some alternatives are certainly less worse than others. And I have read that some parties do not even want me standing here today because they so desperately do not want to talk about climate breakdown.

Our house is falling apart.  
The future — as well as all that we have achieved in the past — is literally in your hands now.  
But it's still not too late to act.  
It will take a far-reaching vision. It will take courage. It will take a fierce determination to act now to lay the foundations where we may not know all of the details about how to shape the ceiling. In other words, it will take 'cathedral thinking'.

I ask you to please wake up and make the changes required possible.  
To do your best is no longer good enough. We must all do the seemingly impossible.

And it's okay if you refuse to listen to me. I am after all just a 16 year-old schoolgirl from Sweden.

But you can not ignore the scientists, or the science. Or the millions of schoolchildren striking school for the right to a future.

I beg you please do not fail, on this.

Thank you.

16/4/2019

*Speaking notes for a speech held in the European Parliament in Strasbourg at an extraordinary meeting of the Environment Committee, open to all members.*