OUR CHILDRENS FUTURE - THE WORLD THEY INHERIT

Climate Change and the Future of Childhood

Keynote by Svein Tveitdal | Sulaymaniyah | 5 November 2026

Your Excellency, Dr. Abdul Latif Rashid, distinguished guests, and especially the young people joining us today.

It is an honour to share this session with His Excellency. My sincere thanks to the University of Sulaimani and Kurdistan Save the Children for bringing us together.

Our theme is “The World They Inherit.” What world will our children inherit? I have worked on climate and the environment for decades, including with the United Nations. Today I also speak as a grandfather, and I deeply worry about the world my grandchildren will inherit.

A world approaching three degrees

In Paris in 2015 governments agreed to listen to scientists, cut emissions and limit global warming to 1,5 degrees. Further to send emission goals to the UN. But even if they keep their latest promises, the world is heading for more than 2.5 degrees of warming this century. And many countries are falling behind their pledges. So, three degrees or more, by the end of this century, is a real possibility.

The planet’s climate has been relatively stable between 15 and 16 degrees over the last 10000 years. Three degrees my sound small, but raising its global average temperature by three degrees in just two centuries would be a dramatic shock.

I sometimes compare global warming to a fever. Our normal body temperature is around 37 degrees. At 38, we have a fever. At 39, we may be seriously ill. At 40 or 41, the situation becomes extremely dangerous and potentially life-threatening. The Earth is not a human body, of course. But the analogy makes the point: as temperatures rise, each additional tenth of a degree is more dangerous than the previous one.

We already see the effects of climate change. Heatwaves break records. Floods destroy homes. Droughts and fires threaten lives. Food and water are at risk. At three degrees, all this will be far worse. Some places will be impossible to live in. Harvests could fail. Millions could lose their homes. Nature would suffer too.

There is another danger: climate tipping points. These are changes that may become impossible to reverse. Greenland’s ice could melt over centuries, raising sea levels by metres. Parts of the Amazon rainforest, the world’s lungs, could collapse and release more carbon when the forest disappears, and biodiversity suffer.

Children will pay the highest price

Children’s health, education, safety and opportunities are at risk. This is especially serious for families with few resources to protect themselves.

My fellow panellists know the challenges facing children in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region better than I do. I will focus on the global decisions that will shape their future.

Solutions exist — but time is running out

We know much of what must be done. Clean technologies are available, and renewable energy is expanding rapidly.

Our priority is clear. We must move away from coal, oil and gas, and do it fast and fairly. Fossil fuels cause more than three quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions. Clean energy must replace them, not simply be added on top.

We must protect communities against heat, drought and floods. But adaptation treats only the symptoms. Unless we address the main cause — burning of fossil fuels — the symptoms and costs will worsen.

Norway and Iraq both produce oil. Our situation differs, but we must both must prepare for a world that uses less oil and gas. Norway has the resources to lead.

When I visited Save the Children's center in Chamchamal the other day, a city that had a severe flood last year, I saw a new solar installation supplying electricity to a cement factory. To me, it was a tangible example of what clean energy can make possible in the Kurdistan Region.

At COP30 in Brazil, governments did not agree on a formal fossil-fuel roadmap for transforming away from fossil fuel. The Brazilian COP30 presidency has since advanced a separate roadmap initiative. At COP31 in Antalya next week, we need to turn that momentum into concrete plans.

Climate justice and COP31

Climate change is unfair. Countries that caused the least pollution often suffer the most. Rich countries must cut their emissions. But they must also help poorer countries with money and technology.

Iraq is a clear example. Its updated climate commitment aims to cut emissions by five per cent by 2035 using domestic resources. With international support, that ambition rises to 22 per cent — more than four times as much.

Climate finance is not charity. It protects our shared future. Poor countries also need help adapting to climate change and recovering from damage they cannot prevent.

Next week I will attend COP31 in Antalya, where I hope to see commitments translated into real financing, projects and emission reductions.

Children and grandparents are speaking out

Let me share two examples from Norway.

Today, as we meet here, the Norwegian Grandparents' Climate Campaign is launching a climate appeal, calling political leaders to take urgent action.

As a grandfather, I strongly support their message:

"Our children have the right to inherit a planet as rich and diverse as the one we have enjoyed."

The appeal calls for an international plan to phase out fossil fuels as rapidly as possible. It also calls on Norway to end new oil and gas exploration, protect nature and increase climate finance for vulnerable countries.

The grandparents are asking political leaders to act now, before it is too late.

Norway also has a Children's Climate Panel: six elected young representatives between 11 and 15 years. Their 2026 report, Our Future, draws on contributions from more than 15,000 children. They ask for stronger nature protection, better climate education, less overconsumption and a genuine say in decisions about their future. Yet only six per cent of children surveyed felt adults listened to them on climate and environmental issues.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says children have a right to be heard. But listening is not enough. Their ideas must shape decisions.

At COP31 next week, the panel plans to present its report and meet Norway's climate minister, members of the Norwegian Parliament, Norwegian media and most importantly, young people from other countries.

We have seen that children can help shape the outcome. At COP26 in Glasgow, the Norwegian Children's Climate Panel and Save the Children Norway advocated for children's rights. The final Glasgow Climate Pact explicitly recognised the importance of respecting and promoting children's rights when taking climate action. That is meaningful progress, even though much more remains to be done.

The Norwegian panel has also proposed an international children's climate panel. I believe this idea deserves support, and I would be very happy to help connect the Norwegian panel with children and young people here in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

They could share ideas and make proposals together. Children need real influence, not just a seat in the room.

Children are demanding a future. Grandparents are asking today's leaders to take responsibility for delivering it.

The world we choose

Let me return to our theme: The World They Inherit.

A three-degree world is not inevitable. We have the knowledge and technologies to change direction. But we need political courage, cooperation and urgency.

We must address the root cause by moving away from fossil fuels. We must support vulnerable countries. And we must give children a genuine voice.

Every tenth of a degree matters. Every year matters. And every decision matters.

Children did not cause the climate crisis. But they will live with its consequences.

We must leave them a better world — not a more dangerous one.

Thank you very much.