

Full transcript of David Attenborough's speech at COP26 in Glasgow

As you spend the next two weeks debating, negotiating, persuading and compromising, as you surely must, it's easy to forget that ultimately the emergency climate comes down to a single number — the concentration of carbon in our atmosphere.

The measure that greatly determines global temperatures and the changes in that one number is the clearest way to chart our own story. For it defines our relationship with our world.

For much of humanity's ancient history, that number bounced wildly between 180 and 300 (parts per million). And so too, did global temperatures. It was a brutal and unpredictable world.

At times, our ancestors existed only in tiny numbers. But just over 10,000 years ago, that number suddenly stabilised and with it, Earth's climate.

We found ourselves in an unusually benign period with predictable seasons and reliable weather. For the first time, civilisation was possible and we wasted no time in taking advantage of that.

Everything we've achieved in the last 10,000 years was enabled by the stability in this time. The global temperature over this period has not wavered over this time by more than +/- 1 degree Celsius. Until now.

Our burning of fossil fuels, our destruction of nature, our approach to industry, construction and learning, are releasing carbon into the atmosphere at an unprecedented pace and scale. We are already in trouble.

The stability we all depend on is breaking. This story is one of inequality as well as instability.

Today, those who've done the least to cause this problem are being the hardest hit. Ultimately all of us will feel the impact, some of which are now unavoidable.

Is this how our story is due to end? A tale of the smartest species doomed by that all too-human characteristic of failing to see the bigger picture in pursuit of short-term goals.

Perhaps the fact the people most affected by climate change are not some imagined future generation, but young people alive today.

Perhaps that will give us the impetus we need to rewrite our story, to turn this tragedy into a triumph. We are, after all, the greatest problem solvers to have ever existed on Earth.

We now understand this problem, we know how to stop the number rising and put it in reverse.