04162024 Masdar – Green Hydrogen Summit Boris Johnson

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**Boris Johnson – Former Prime Minister, United Kingdom**

**Abu Dhabi, UAE**

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**RT. HON. BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you so much. Thank you. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, my friend, Doctor Sultan, it’s a great, great honor to be here in Abu Dhabi, fantastic to be here, wonderful. I think I’ve brought the London weather with me. Wonderful to follow that fantastic presentation from Bertrand Piccard. Totally inspirational.

There could be no better place than Abu Dhabi to hold a summit on the vital subject of green hydrogen, because we all know that this, the place we’re in, the city we’re in, the country we’re in is one of the world’s great, great centers of technological innovation.

I discovered this more than 10 years ago. When I first came to the UAE, as you will remember, Sultan, as a mere representative of United Kingdom local government, I was then mayor of London. And after an enormous banquet of camel, which I found absolutely delicious, my friend and colleague, Sir Edward, now Lord Lister or Sheikh Lister, as he’s known to some of you, was unaccountably indisposed afterwards. He got the hump, as we say in England.

After that delicious banquet, Sultan took us to Masdar. You’ve probably forgotten this. For the first time in my life, I travelled in a completely electric, battery powered vehicle, with no driver. Absolutely true. My eyes were opened. I sat next to you, Sultan, as we scooted through the traffic, and I saw the technical flair of this country.

For me, this was the beginning of a golden age of cooperation and partnership, investment partnership between the UK and UAE. I’m proud to say that under my mayoralty of London, the connections with this country, UAE, were so strong, that London was sometimes known as the eighth emirate. Since then, of course, the partnership has only deepened and no field have we done more together than in the field of green technology.

Sultan. Dr. Sultan, I want to congratulate you particularly on COP28, because it was only a few years ago that I ran or helped to run COP26. I know in Glasgow, and I know how difficult it is to run these COPs, and getting 198 countries in the UN to agree on measures to tackle climate change is like herding cats.

As I look back at Glasgow in 2021, December 2021 I think it was. I’m of course immensely proud of many of the things that we did, getting 145 countries to agree to protect their forests, getting 65 countries to agree to phase out the use of coal power altogether, getting pledges to cut 6 gigatons of CO2 that would otherwise have been emitted, and under the UK presidency of COP26, moving from 30% of the world committed to net zero by 2050 to 90%.

But look, I’ve got to be honest, there was a difference, wasn’t there, between COP26 and COP 28. The difference was that the Glasgow UN summit was before Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and before the spike in inflation, before we saw the prices of hydrocarbons jump, and before everybody, frankly, started to get quite so skeptical about net zero. And so, I have to admit it, frankly, and hats off to you here in in Abu Dhabi. We did the soft COP; you did the tough COP, if you see what I mean.

Yet you triumphed. You absolutely triumphed. The UAE presidency prevailed over the negativity in some of the global media. I won’t name the organizations that were gloomy about the prospects of the COP 28 but they were there. You way exceeded the expectations of the NGOs. And here in the world’s greatest and richest basin of hydrocarbons, you persuaded the world at COP28 to move beyond fossil fuels, and you did it by sheer force of technological argument.

When the UAE says it can cut CO2 by introducing new solar farms and produce 50% of your electricity from renewables by 2050, that is obviously true because you’re already harvesting so much of the golden sunlight of this country, which I’m sure is already reappearing after the very, very big thunderstorms earlier on.

For years you have been helping us in the UK to change the whole way we think about power generation. When I was mayor of London, I’m proud to say that we launched the London Array, the vast forest of white windmills off the coast of Essex that was made possible by Emirati investment. These windmills are absolutely amazing, and in 2022, when I was prime minister, we had 26% of our electricity generated by wind power alone.

Yet today, together, UAE and the UK stand on the brink of an even more astonishing project because for the first time in six millennia, we are going to make productive use of a territory known as Doggerland, a lost world, a vast paradise of pasture and water meadow that stretched from the east coast of England to Holland and to Germany and Denmark, a place that for many centuries was inhabited by the Dogger people, who got on with their blameless lives, fishing and water fouling and so forth, doggedly dogging away in Doggerland, until there was a disaster in the form of a huge undersea landslip off the coast of Norway, a seismic event known as the Storegga, which sent a tsunami southwards so huge that it not only inundated Doggerland but cut Britain off completely from the European mainland, leaving the Doggers and their antler tools and the whole environment totally submerged, but only shallowly submerged, 25 meters or so, so as to make it ideal for a windfarm.

The UAE now has 49% of Dogger Bank South, a project now going forward for planning permission, which will be a truly stupendous generator of clean, green electricity, renewable power stretching over 500 square kilometers, producing enough juice to power 3 million homes.

As Doctor Bertrand Piccard has just pointed out, the problem with wind power is not often that it produces too little wind. The problem is what to do when it blows too much. Because sometimes, frankly, the gale blows so hard in the North Sea and the turbines turn so fast that the grid can’t cope with the surge.

Do you know what we do at present? We actually pay the windfarm operators not to produce. It’s like the insanity of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, where they pay people not to produce olive oil or wheat or whatever in order to maintain the price. It’s a system called curtailment. It’s obviously bonkers. It’s a total waste of money.

The answer is, of course, that when you have such a surge and you’ve got a risk that the whole grid is going to blow, then obviously – obviously you electrolyze that extra electricity and use it to make green hydrogen.

I know that there are skeptics out there, as Bertrand Piccard has pointed out, and by the way, I hope the skeptics will be routed at this conference as they were routed at COP28 because the use cases for green hydrogen are obvious, from energy hungry industries such as steel or chemicals, to those large modes of transport that may need the kind of grunt or torque – grunt is a technical term from physics – that you can’t get from a battery, HDVs, bigger trucks, busses and so forth.

I think of seeing Doctor Bertrand Piccard’s wonderful presentation, and I think of the beautiful Etihad plane that brought me here in such amazing state and luxury. I want you to know; I was in a room, literally it more or less had its own jacuzzi and four-poster bed, such is the luxury provided by Etihad. You might think that nothing could possibly lift those facilities aloft except kerosene, nothing perhaps except hydrogen. I think we’ll follow what Bertrand Piccard does with great interest.

People who now say it’s impractical, it’s never going to happen, they were saying all that about electric vehicles. When I was mayor of London. I tried to persuade Londoners to buy electric vehicles, and I put electric charging posts all over the city in 2008, and it didn’t take off. But look at EVs now.

What I’m saying is that these things take patience and they take political leadership and they take relentless innovation, and that innovation requires countries like the UAE and the UK to work ever more closely together on everything from battery technology to artificial intelligence.

I think the potential for our two countries is enormous, because we know each other so well and we trust each other so much. We collaborate on projects ranging from the Emirates Airline – some of you may remember a vital piece of transport infrastructure in East London, a cable car, very, very beautiful, built under the previous mayor of London – to windfarms, as I say, to nuclear reactors, where this country, frankly, is leaving us miles behind, 20% of your power already from nuclear. There’s so much, I think, that we can do together on small modular reactors of the type made by Rolls-Royce.

If you want evidence of our common position on the world, look at just the last few days where we’ve seen the UK and the UAE come together to oppose the lunacy of the Iranian drone attacks. Together, we will not only promote peace; we will develop the technological solutions that will enable the world to tackle climate change, and to cut the cost of energy in the long term, and to produce millions of good, well-paid jobs.

In routing the doubters and confounding the skeptics, as you did at COP, I know that the UAE and the UK will be in the lead on green technology, and on green hydrogen, and all other forms of green technology.

Thank you all very much for having me along today. Thank you, Dr. Sultan, and I hope you have a very good conference indeed. Thank you.

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