

Greta Thunberg accuses world leaders of being in denial over climate crisis

Activist says countries such as UK, US and China use ‘creative carbon accounting’ to augment green credentials

- **There are no real climate leaders yet – who will step up at Cop26? | Greta Thunberg**



The 18-year-old believes ‘there are no climate leaders’ due to a lack of public awareness and pressure from the media. Photograph: Mauro Ujetto/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Nadeem Badshah

Thu 21 Oct 2021 11.32 BST

Greta Thunberg has accused countries including the UK of being in denial over the extent of the climate and ecological crisis and using “creative carbon accounting” to augment their green credentials.

In an [opinion piece for the Guardian](#), the Swedish activist says world leaders have been responsible for several years of inaction in reducing emissions which she has termed “their decades of blah, blah, blah”.

Thunberg also accused the UK, the US and China of spinning emissions statistics to make it appear that their levels are lower.

She wrote: “Between 1990 and 2016, the UK lowered its territorial emissions by 41%. However, once you include the full scale of the UK emissions – such as consumption of imported goods, international aviation and shipping etc – the reduction is more like 15%.

“And this is excluding burning of biomass, like at Drax’s Selby plant – a heavily subsidised **so-called “renewable” power plant** that is, according to analysis, the UK’s biggest single emitter of CO₂ and the third biggest in all of Europe. And yet the government still considers the UK to be a global climate leader.

“The UK is, of course, far from the only country relying on such creative carbon accounting. This is the norm.

“China, currently by far the world’s biggest emitter of CO₂, is planning to build 43 new coal power plants on top of the 1,000 plants already in operation – while also claiming to be an ecological ‘trailblazer’ committed to leaving “a clean and beautiful world to future generations.”

The 18-year-old also believes “there are no climate leaders ... at least not among high-income nations” due to a lack of public awareness and pressure from the media. Her comments come ahead of the UN **Cop26** climate talks which the UK is hosting in Glasgow starting on 31 October.

Thunberg’s stance echoes remarks by the Queen who criticised world leaders’ inaction on addressing the climate crisis last week after acknowledging she is **“irritated” by individuals who “talk but don’t do”**. Other royals, such as **Prince William** and **Prince Charles**, have also recently weighed in on the climate breakdown.

The UK government published its net zero strategy on Tuesday ahead of the Cop26 climate meeting, pledging more investment into electric cars, on-street charging points and planting trees.

It detailed plans to meet legal targets to cut emissions to net zero by 2050, but it was met with criticism for not providing enough policies or investment to drive the transformation needed.

The strategy said it would support 440,000 jobs in new sectors or for people moving from high-carbon industries to cleaner ones, along with unlocking £90bn in private investment in 2030 on the way to the mid-century goal.

Officials insisted the policies would deliver the carbon cuts needed to meet UK legal targets in the 2020s and 2030s and deliver on commitments to cut greenhouse gases by 68% by 2030 under the Paris climate accord.

However, the shadow business secretary, Ed Miliband, said: “The plan falls short on delivery, and while there is modest short-term investment, there is nothing like the commitment we believe is required.”

Greta Thunberg: 'We need public pressure, not just summits'

Published
2 hours ago



Watch: Greta Thunberg says she's 'completely different' in private

Climate activist Greta Thunberg has told the BBC that summits will not lead to action on climate goals unless the public demand change too.

In a wide-ranging interview ahead of the COP26 climate summit, she said the public needed to "uproot the system". "The change is going to come when people are demanding change. So we can't expect everything to happen at these conferences," she said.

She also accused politicians of coming up with excuses.

The COP26 climate summit is taking place in Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, from 31 October to 12 November.

It is the biggest climate change conference since landmark talks in Paris in 2015. Some 200 countries are being asked for their plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions, which cause global warming.

Ms Thunberg, who recently launched a global series of concerts highlighting climate change called **Climate Live**, confirmed she would be attending COP26. She said her message to world leaders was to "be honest".

"Be honest about where you are, how you have been failing, how you're still failing us... instead of trying to find solutions, real solutions that will actually lead somewhere, that would lead to a substantial change, fundamental change," she told the BBC's Rebecca Morelle.

"In my view, success would be that people finally start to realise the urgency of the situation and realise that we are facing an existential crisis, and that we are going to need big changes, that we're going to need to uproot the system, because that's where the change is going to come."

COP26 climate summit - The basics

- **Climate change is one of the world's most pressing problems.** Governments must promise more ambitious cuts in warming gases if we are to prevent greater global temperature rises.

- **The summit in Glasgow is where change could happen.** You need to watch for the promises made by the world's biggest polluters, like the US and China, and whether poorer countries are getting the support they need.
- **All our lives will change.** Decisions made here could impact our jobs, how we heat our homes, what we eat and how we travel.

[Read more about the COP26 summit here.](#)

Ms Thunberg did not believe that **UK plans to curb greenhouse gas emissions to reach a target of net zero by 2050 were sufficient**, or that the UK was a climate leader.

"Unfortunately there are no climate leaders today, especially not in the so-called global north. But that doesn't mean that they can't suddenly decide that now we're going to take the process seriously," she said.

Speaking about the targets for reaching net zero - which means not adding to the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere - she said that it was a "good start", but cautioned that it "doesn't really mean very much in practice" if people continued to look for loopholes.

COP26 will be attended by climate activists from across the world.

Kevin Mtai, a climate justice campaigner from Kenya, told the BBC that inclusivity at the summit was important.

"I hope this climate conference is going to be an inclusive conference, to include all voices in the talks. They need to use indigenous people in the talks, marginalised people in the talks, people from the most affected areas," he said.

"It's very important for people from the global south to speak for themselves, not other parts of the globe to speak on their behalf. Because we are the ones who have been affected by climate change, so it's very important we can hear from our own people, with our own ideas, our own voice."

- **What does net zero mean?**
- **Who is Greta Thunberg and what are her aims?**

From her home in Sweden, Ms Thunberg also spoke about her own role as a campaigner.

"I don't see myself as a climate celebrity, I see myself as a climate activist... I should be grateful because there are many, many people who don't have a platform and who are not being listened to, their voices are being oppressed and silenced.

"I'm a completely different person when I'm in private. I don't think people would recognise me in private. I'm not very serious in private. I appear very angry in the media, but I am silly in private."

When asked about why **she sang a Rick Astley hit at the launch of Climate Live**, she said that it was a climate movement in-joke. She has previously taken part in the internet phenomenon "rick-rolling" by tweeting out what she said was a link to a new speech, but actually linked to the music video for the song.

"Why not? I mean we have internal jokes within the climate movement, where we always rickroll each other."