

Professor Rector Kummeling, Dear Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured and thrilled to be awarded this honorary doctorate from Utrecht University on Dies Natalis. Utrecht University is well known worldwide for its work on multiple aspects of climate change, from understanding the climate system through its work on past climate or marine biogeochemistry to finding solution through its work on low-carbon energy pathways and governance. I could not think of a better match of my own interests which have touched on the global carbon cycle and ocean biogeochemistry and marine ecosystems.

We live in an extraordinary and unique period in Earth's history. This is the period when global society has to learn to control itself and to live within the limits of the environment that supports us. It is a scary period because we don't have that control individually, we can only have it collectively. It is a scary period because failure is not an option. But it is one of those rare periods where there is an opportunity to shape the future.

I have seen scientists work tirelessly to resolve and then expose the incredible changes that human activities are doing to the world's climate, many are in this room, recently with the publication of the synthesis report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I have seen skilled diplomats work equally tirelessly to shape the texts that will make our future. The Paris Agreement is a masterpiece of diplomacy, it is there, it brings countries together, it is already making a difference to global temperature trajectories. I have seen many politicians look for answers.

The time when we could say that nothing is happening about climate change is finished. Action on climate change is in motion, in the Netherlands, in Europe, in Canada and North America, in many emerging economies. Development trajectories are being drawn by South Africa, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Senegal. The penny has dropped, finally.

Here, now, have come the difficult times. The time to do the work. The time to invest. To confront our choices to our limits. This we can do through what we learn, through our universities, Utrecht university and for me also UEA where I work. I want to thank my colleagues at Utrecht University for giving me this honour today. I also want to thank warmly my research group and many collaborators for our fruitful and stimulating exchanges over the past decades, and my family for their unconditional support.

Corinne Le Quéré,
26 March 2023