



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 21, 2015
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT “MODERN
SLAVERY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: THE COMMITMENT OF THE CITIES” AT
THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: *Buongiorno a tutti*

Unknown: Good morning, everybody.

Mayor: Mayors and governor, governors, leaders from cities all over the globe, it is so encouraging – it is so motivating to be with you here today, and to be in your company. I’d like to extend a special acknowledgement and thanks to Mayor Ignazio Marino, a powerful advocate for justice who is doing so much to help the people of his city. And, Mayor, it is a joy for all of us to be in this place where such great history has been made in the past, and I know will be made again, including today.

I humbly give all respect to His Holiness, Pope Francis, who has awakened people across the globe to the dangers we face as a planet. He has brought us together today in that spirit of action. And I think it is fair to say he is the most powerful voice on this earth for those all over the world whose voices are not being heard. And he has brought the issue of inequality to the fore in this world, and has shown how it directly connects to issues of climate change and undermines the stability of all of our societies.

Now, His Holiness did not convene us here to ratify the status quo, but in fact to upend it. The very name of this gathering indicts the resurgent reality of human trafficking and demands that each of our governments act urgently to end this scourge.

But His Holiness chose a harsher and a perfectly just term as part of the title: the words “human slavery.” Those words should jolt us – they should jolt us into a realization that a part of our global history that was supposed to have been in our past is all too alive today, and has simply taken another form.

And I’ll argue that there’s another way to think about this conference’s title, and it’s consistent with the Pope’s recent encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. His Holiness challenges us. He challenges us not to be captives, not to be slavish to consumerism – as citizens, to rise above it. He also challenges us not to be captive as leaders to powerful corporate interests.

The encyclical is not a call to arms – it is a call to sanity. It’s a reminder that we as leaders have a sworn duty to protect. But how can we protect our people, if we accept a status quo that is slowly killing our earth?

I humbly submit that we were called here not to be congratulated for whatever progress we’ve made, although it is certainly worthy. We were called here to take *Laudato Si’* and give it life – to systematically address the danger of climate change with every tool we have. And it’s increasingly clear that we, the local leaders of the world, have many tools – more than we may have in fact realized – and that we must use them boldly, even as our national governments hesitate.

In my city, it has become painfully obvious that we have to set difficult goals for ourselves. The extent of the climate crisis demands it. Any city, any nation, any corporation not straining to reduce emissions simply isn’t doing enough. The facts of this crisis make that self-evident.

Our hope is that each of us – and thousands more like us all over the world – will act boldly, and in doing so, will jolt our national paradigms and the collective global paradigm.

His Holiness has implicitly demanded that we give new meaning to the phrase, “we will do all within our power.” It’s now a matter of survival. Who in their right mind skimps on the things that allow them to sustain life? How do we justify holding back on any effort that may meaningfully improve the trajectory of climate change? Which political allies, or generous financial backers, or vocal constituencies are more important to us than preserving life for future generations? How could any version of business as usual make sense at this moment in history?

We now ask the same question of nations. Is it not the definition of insanity to propagate governmental policies and consumer habits that hasten the destruction of the earth – and yet somehow expect some other result?

Pope Francis’ encyclical burns with urgency and demands answers to these questions. It holds individuals accountable for the fate of our planet, but it rightly asks the most of governments. So we will remember Rome – we’ll remember this moment as a time and a place where we weren’t offered soothing, reassuring words, but were, in fact, pushed by the highest moral authority to take the next step, no matter how challenging it appears to be.

It’s my honor to be here speaking on behalf of New York City as we take our next steps. Our blueprint for the future, One New York – a Plan for a Strong and Just City, has within it ambitious goals to fight both climate change and poverty. As I announced last September at the United Nations Climate Summit, we are committed to an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050, mirroring the pledge of so many of you represented here today. And we’re proud to be the largest city in the world to make that commitment, and hope that the scale of our effort helps to inspire others to go farther and to be even more ambitious.

And today, I’d like to add to all that we are doing in New York. I’d like to announce our next big step. We are committing to 40 by 30, on our way to 80 by 50. A reduction of our emissions levels by 40 percent by the year 2030.

In this, we follow the example of our colleague here today, Governor Jerry Brown. And we thank him for his leadership as the leading voice in our nation who first set this goal for his state. And we're proud to emulate that action, Governor Brown.

[Applause]

And Governor, you don't mind if I say to all our American colleagues – I hope you'll join us in following what the Governor started in California.

We look ahead to Paris, Mayor Hidalgo. The Paris summit is just months away. We need to see it as the finish line of a sprint. Each of us should take every local action we can in the coming months, as quickly as we can, to maximize the chance that our national governments will act boldly when they gather.

Paris has a rich history as a city of revolutions. We'll need another revolutionary moment in December – a revolution of decisiveness. It's not an overstatement to say that Paris may constitute our last best hope. And for that reason, we need to foster the kind of public discourse worthy of such a critical moment. Let's demand of our friends in the media, gathered here and all over the world, that they give the airtime and the column inches to the lead-up to Paris that such a crossing-of-the-Rubicon deserves. It isn't unfair to say that the media gives immeasurably more attention to the results of climate change, meaning our ever more dramatic weather, than to the causes and the solutions. And again, when the issue at hand is our survival, we shouldn't tolerate business as usual, and that includes for those who cover the news.

I'll conclude with the most helpful and hopeful element of this puzzle. The people – the people we all represent. Their wisdom and their perceptions of our new reality may be the thing that saves us. I learned long ago that the people often lead the leaders. And in recent years, I've seen this phenomenon come to life, with respect to the changing climate. I've seen it vividly in my hometown. Nearly three years ago in our city, Hurricane Sandy left 44 dead and thousands lost their homes and their businesses. And this tragedy made the people of New York City understand climate change in a very different way. It became personal. It became real. It was no longer an abstraction.

And the same city that saw such a shock to our assumptions and our complacency in 2012 – we saw an immense outpouring of focus and determination in 2014. Few thought that the protest march connected to the UN Climate Summit would be that notable. But it ended up being a signal event. Hundreds of thousands marched in the streets of New York and many more in cities around the world. My friends, they weren't deniers. They were demanders – making clear their readiness to act, to sacrifice, to change – and asking the same of us, as leaders. It's our job to be as good as them. Thank you.

###