

Letter¹ to my great-grandchildren, to be opened in 2118
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My dear great-grandchildren,

As I am writing this letter to you I don't know the state of the world around you. Although I have been working for 40 years on the future of climate, I can't know what choices will be made in the coming years. But those choices will determine to a large extent your quality of life in 2118.

Today I fear that humanity doesn't realize quickly enough the deadlock in which we currently are. As I am writing this, a large number of people are blocking the roads because they have to pay a little bit more for the polluting liquid they want to continue burning in their old engines.

I understand their revolt, which is also motivated by injustices and the absence of sufficient alternatives (like public transport and bicycle roads). But it is sad and absurd that the trigger of this revolt is the price of petrol, since it is the usage of this liquid, and also that of coal and natural gas, that has disturbed the climate and that kills seven million people every year (by air pollution) in the world. My fellow climate scientists and I have nevertheless never stopped sounding the alarm bell and explaining that we urgently need to stop using these dangerous substances.

Too few listen to us and act accordingly. By continuing to use the atmosphere as a CO₂ dump site and by continuing to thicken the insulating blanket around the Earth, we saw off the only branch on which it is possible to sit in the solar system. Many still hold on to their old habits, their old technologies and their sad philosophy: "after me the flood may come, as long as I can fully enjoy my life"

I hope this is going to change, and quickly. I know that it is possible. Because there are also the women and men, and there are many of them, who have been touched in the heart by the graveness of the situation, and they have thoroughly understood the need to act urgently. They have started the battle to build a society, and an economic development model, that is truly "sustainable". This means: to respect all human beings and to respect the natural cycles and ecosystems that ensure the livability of the earth.

I see these people who have decided to change their way of life, or the way their enterprise works, to vote thinking of the consequences of their choice for the future of ... their great-grandchildren, indeed. If these people win their battle against the short-term profit and against injustice (these two go together), you will live well in 2118, my dear great-grandchildren.

At this moment I must confess that there are tears in my eyes, because I can't be sure that these efforts and these changes will come quickly enough and on a large enough scale to avoid the climate crash and the extinction of many living species.

In any case, within a couple of days I will leave by train to the COP24 (climate) in Poland, to continue the fight to change the situation. Notably for you.

I ask one thing of you: think, you yourselves, of the consequences of the choices you are making today for *your* great-grandchildren and for all children in the world of 2218.

¹ Original published in French in *Le Soir* (Belgium) on 1st December 2018. Kindly translated by Brigitte Van Gerven (@BrigitteVanGerv on Twitter). Versions of this letter in English, French, and Dutch are available on www.climate.be/vanyp (under "conferences", look for 1 December 2018).