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I'm going to start today with a question. In other contexts, perhaps, a risky question, not one you would expect from somebody in my position in a talk about climate change. But it's important. Does size matter?

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(Laughter)

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My answer, perhaps also unexpected, is that no, it really, really doesn't.

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(Laughter)

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And Scotland --

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(Applause)

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Scotland is proving that. About a mile from here, in the National Museum of Scotland, you will find on display a steam engine designed by the great engineer James Watt. A hundred miles from here, just off the coast of Aberdeen, is the world's biggest floating wind farm. And then just a bit further north from there, in the Pentland Firth, we find the biggest wave power turbine being tested. These are all extraordinary feats of technology and engineering, but they also demonstrate how Scotland, a relatively small country, led the world into the Industrial Age and is now helping to power the world into the Net-Zero Age.

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And there's a lesson for us in that. When we talk about tackling climate change, we so often talk about the contributions of America, Russia, China, Brazil, and that's important. We won't limit global warming without these countries, but we also have to recognize that the ambition, the leadership and the action of small countries matters too.

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Small countries have no time for small objectives, and I really agree with that. And we see examples of the leadership that small countries show everywhere we look. Take Bhutan. One million people or thereabouts became the first in the world to commit to being carbon-neutral for all time. Since then, 130 countries of all sizes have followed suit. Or Fiji. In 2017, it hosted the UN Climate Conference and did so much to highlight the existential threat that climate change poses to island nations.

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Now, a country like Scotland with a rich industrial past has a special responsibility. We have disproportionately contributed to climate change, so we must do more now to help tackle climate change.

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So in recent years, Scotland, this small country, has decarbonized faster than any G20 country. We have just become --

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(Applause)

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We have just become the first nation in the world that is not an independent nation -- yet -- to publish --

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(Laughter)

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(Applause)

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to publish an indicative, nationally defined contribution showing how we will meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement. So we've pledged to cut emissions by three quarters by 2030 and to be net zero by 2045.

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We're also seeking to galvanize change on the global stage. So we are currently the cochair of a coalition that brings together 200 states, regions, devolved countries like ours to demonstrate leadership in meeting the challenge of climate change. Now that coalition is not represented formally at UN summits, we are not signatories to the treaties that emerge from these summits. But collectively, we represent two billion people across the world, and about half of the reduction in global emissions that we need to see will depend on the actions we take. They will depend on the legislation we pass, the infrastructure we build, the investments we fund.

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So my point today is that, yes, big countries matter, but the leadership of small nations matters too. It's often states and regions and small nations that can step in when the bigger countries fail to act. So when Trump disgracefully took America out of the Paris Agreement, it was a coalition of states and cities that kept the momentum going. And if we raise our ambition and if we follow that through with action, then we can spark the bigger countries to go further and faster, too.

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And there's one final point where our voice and our contribution matters. So often it's states or devolved nations like Scotland that have to respond most directly to the impacts of climate change: heatwaves, floods, hurricanes. We have to deal with the implications. Now, for Scotland, California and New South Wales that's difficult but manageable. For many others across the world, it is not. So climate justice matters, too. It's not enough to cut our own emissions, although that is vital; we have to make sure we are helping those who have done the least to cause climate change to do so too. And with the spirit of justice and fairness absolutely at the heart of that.

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So to conclude, my message today is that countries of all shapes and sizes must step up to this challenge. We cannot allow our size to be something that we hide behind. When it comes to tackling climate change, size really, really does not matter. We must think big in our ambition. We must act big in what we do, and we must be big when it comes to the impact we make.

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Thank you very much.

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(Applause)

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Bruno Giussani: First Minister, thank you. I would like to ask a couple of questions because you mentioned the wind farms up north, but there is a new field opening up in the north, it is an oil field, the Cambo oil field. It's been licensed by the UK government, and a few weeks ago you wrote to the prime minister of the UK government, and you asked him to reassess that field and the licensing in view of the climate emergency. There's also a growing movement in Scotland against that project. What are people to make of opening up a new gigantic oil field while at the same time pushing for decarbonizing policies at COP?

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Nicola Sturgeon: I think people are right to ask big questions and be concerned. Oil and gas is important to Scotland. It has been for four, almost five decades important to fulfilling our energy needs, but it's important to our economy. But if we're not prepared to ask ourselves the hard questions, we're not really facing up to this challenge. We can't switch fossil fuels off overnight, but we must accelerate the transition away from them. And therefore the question is: Is new exploration consistent with that? And that's the question I posed to the prime minister where the power over this lies. Yes, we need to make sure that we make the transition sustainably and fairly. But if we just rely on new exploration of the old ways of doing things, I think the question is whether we do that at the pace we are required to do. So a country like Scotland, we can't just answer the easy questions. We've got to face up to the hard questions as well. But we must make sure the transition is just -- just for people, for communities and for the planet as a whole. And that's what we are committed to seeking, to show leadership on.

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BG: What was your exact demand? Redraw the lines? Suspend it? Change it? Reanalyze it?

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NS: Well, the license was granted 20 years ago. There is a process now it has to go through to get approval for development. And my argument is just if a company was now applying for a new licence, there would have to be a climate compatibility check. Now, arguably that's not robust enough, but the same thing should happen if our existing license is turned into development consent. And that's the process I think should happen. We've got to be careful that we don't leave communities and people behind in that transition. We've got to be careful we don't switch domestic production to imports of oil and gas. That would be counterproductive. So the way in which we make the transition matters. But we can't have a business as usual. Because if we keep telling ourselves we can rely on fossil fuels forever, then we'll never meet that transition. And that's the key point I think we've got to address.

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BG: Let's hope it goes in that direction. First Minister, thank you for coming to TED.

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Thank you.

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(Applause)