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This is the Future I Want

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I am 16 years old and I am currently in my home in Laurelton, Queens. It is day nine with no heat, no power and no gas in my mom's car to escape. As a climate change activist, I knew something like this was bound to happen, but I never expected something this big. I feel proud that I've been working with other activists to get our elected leaders to take immediate action on climate change. However, I feel heartbroken that it's taken a major storm that has taken over 40 lives and counting for my elected leaders to acknowledge the reality of climate change. We may have heard about how climate change affects far off places such as the Maldives or the Arctic. But here in New York City, it's our reality now more than ever.

Trees are down all over my neighborhood and at night it is pitch dark, with only the moon as light. I feel paralyzed with cold. It is a freezing chill that goes deep to the bone and makes me worried about the future I can have on this planet. It scares me to know that I am going to leave my family when I go to college next year -- my grandmother, mom, aunt and sister -- in such an uncertain place, knowing that they can be trapped, unable to go anywhere, if another heavy storm comes. We may not be so lucky the next time.

This past June, I traveled to Rio de Janeiro to attend the United Nations Conference on Sustainability, also called Rio+20. Twenty years ago, before I was born, the first United Nations Earth Summit in Rio established benchmarks and promises to ensure a sustainable world for the future generation that meeting. Those promises were not kept. I worked with other youth activists in Global Kids, a New York City-based youth organization, and with many partner organizations, to persuade our leaders to attend the conference and to take action on climate change. At the conference, we were excited by the work of other citizens like us, all advocating for the changes we need to sustain our planet and our future. But we also felt let down and disappointed that many world leaders didn't attend and just a few were willing to commit to the necessary work that needs to be done to make sure other young people like me are guaranteed the future we deserve and the basic rights to food, water, air and health.

I am happy to hear that our Mayor has decided to endorse a president who realizes what a problem climate change is. As climate change has become more of a reality, some people have been trying to dispute the fact that it is as grave of an issue as it is. My message to them and to all of our leaders in the wake of the election is simple: Do not let any more time pass before you take action. Our nation is in danger and my future is in danger.

This is the future I want: a country that is better prepared for climate and environmental disasters, and is working proactively to mitigate global warming. Just like we have fire drills in school, we need to have evacuation plans and disaster preparedness kits. We must rely less on oil and more on alternative energy, and reduce carbon emissions by any means necessary. We cannot continue to provide subsidies to oil and gas companies that are wreaking havoc on our earth. We need more preservation of natural resources and less consumption. Science matters, and we must educate the next generation on the realities of climate change so we are all working to promote a better, more sustainable future. I am more committed than ever to work to make the future I want a reality.