

The Paris Agreement turns five

Respect the people, respect the deal: the absurd dissonance between rhetoric and action in an age of global crises

December 2020

Governments are coming together on 12 December 2020 to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, where they are invited to present new, ambitious climate commitments ('nationally determined contributions', or NDCs, and other pledges including 'long term strategies', or LTS). The formal deadline for revised NDCs was in 2020, but in the absence of the UNFCCC COP 26 this year, this jointly hosted virtual event¹ acts as a defining moment for governments to prove their integrity and honour the promises made to the world in Paris five years ago. **The outcomes will define the climate political landscape as we enter 2021.**

Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, all nations agreed to commit to reducing their GHG emissions to hold global climate heating, "well below 2°C ... and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C"; countries are also expected to address adaptation measures and finance flows for achieving climate resilience in their NDCs, which must reflect their "highest possible ambition". **Commitments shared this year are critical for measuring our collective progress towards a 'climate safe' world.**

The COVID pandemic has taken over our lives and our politics, while **the fundamental interdependence of health, wellbeing and resilience with climate and our natural environment continues to be ignored** by those in government who can and must protect us. NDCs are a reflection of this basic obligation; December 12th will be a **moment of accountability for leaders** who must act now in good faith to **renew momentum for climate action** on the road to COP26, and answer the **demands of a global movement**. A movement which has grown unstopably over the five years since Paris, **opening up political space and bringing us to a new place of possibility**. The world will be watching.

Expectations

While some COVID recovery packages have partially supported climate action, most countries have paid little attention to the ongoing climate emergency. Among those that have:

China's announcement in September to reach carbon neutrality by 2060 is notable; it is the first time China moves unilaterally and not in lock step with the EU or the US, while the US has officially now withdrawn from the Paris Agreement². Expectation is now on **China to deliver on this ambition with an NDC which locks in a 2025 emissions peak**, and with a dramatic downsizing of coal power in the upcoming 14th Five Year Plan.

¹ The summit will be hosted by the United Nations Secretary General, the UK and Italian COP26 joint Presidencies, as well as the Chilean COP25 Presidency, and France

² The exit from the Paris Agreement (4 Nov) cannot be reversed until Biden takes up office in January 2021. Even while he is President elect, protocol would ordinarily prevent him from participating on 12 December, though it's unclear how this may play out in a virtual setting

The EU did make climate somewhat of a defining issue in its recovery package, but failed to pass any stringent rules to exclude support for polluting industries. **The proposed increased EU 2030 climate target is too low and must not be further watered down by the inclusion of natural sinks.**

Nevertheless, the EU remains thus far the front runner, and if China will present a robust near term target, a potential joint leader in international climate politics.

Countries expected to present stronger climate commitments are likely to be the most vulnerable and least developed countries, together with China, the EU and the UK. There will also be space for those countries who already presented ambitious NDCs in 2020. Commitments from middle income countries like South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia, crucial for driving momentum, remain uncertain and expectations are low. **At the same time we expect little to nothing³ from countries such as Australia, Russia, and Brazil,** countries whose leaders continue to place the interests of polluting industry before their obligations to the global commonwealth, even as wildfires destroy their own pristine landscapes and drive communities from their homes.

The absence of the US will be a reminder of the pivotal nature of the US post-election moment. Heads of Government will position themselves towards the ambitions of the Biden-Harris administration which has pledged to dismantle obstacles to domestic action and set a new path towards a 100% clean energy economy and net-zero⁴ emissions by 2050. Internationally, special envoy John Kerry seeks a much needed rebuilding of multilateral alliances around climate.

Countries will make much of their climate actions and targets on 12 December, hoping to sustain a narrative of global solidarity, but it will be important to weigh concrete action against otherwise empty promises.

Demands

Transformative action on climate and environment requires international cooperation. We demand that all countries honour the spirit of the Paris Agreement, **presenting new, updated and ambitious NDCs in line with 1.5°C⁵.**

NDCs cannot be empty promises. We demand national and global **green and just recovery packages** aligned with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, with **no money (subsidies or recovery funds) for high emitting sectors, particularly fossil fuel companies,** except as needed by way of worker just transition funds.

We demand a commitment from governments to **put the health, safety and wellbeing of people before profit,** committing to prioritise public funds for 'common good' investments

³ Not all countries will present NDCs in 2020.

⁴ Net zero projections deserve intense scrutiny since they typically seek to balance uncertain future (nature based) carbon uptake against definite and immediate (fossil) emissions. The concept offers easy reassurance while failing to recognise credible limits on present and future natural sink capacity, especially considering accelerating rates of land and ocean degradation.

⁵ Based on domestic emission reductions, guided by the IPCC science (LED pathway) and without reliance on international offsets or other untested, false solutions.

which **reduce societal inequalities and build in the resilience needed to face ongoing and future global crises**. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Boosting resilience, governments must commit to **funding nature protection and restoration, keeping natural resources out of false solutions like carbon offsets**. We cannot continue business as usual in the false hope that future, unpredictable sink capacity will magically resolve the **massive outstanding carbon deficit** already present.

International cooperation assumes a shared respect for foundational values of equality and human rights: countries in poverty and debt, and those made vulnerable by the climate emergency are in urgent need of support. We demand Parties **meet their climate finance obligations to developing countries, and call for more support going forward**.

We need new and powerful policies for **advancing equity, resilience and sufficiency**, which speak to **systemic, interconnected problem solving** in order to **heal divisions and bring common purpose** for an even stronger global climate citizen movement. People demand their governments change course and embrace a new set of values, match promises with action for a fairer, more cooperative, stable and healthy future. **Respecting the people means respecting the Paris Agreement by implementing its goal to stay within 1.5 °C**.

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