

# **PARIS COP21 and Climate Change: Solving a real and present crisis with false and unjust solutions**

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Many have already called the ongoing 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of Parties or COP21 climate negotiations in Paris, which started in November 30 and is expected to close in December 11 as another grand exercise of discussions and promotion of false solutions to the biggest global crisis that is awaiting us all and thus predicting its failure. Attended by 195 country delegations and over 150 world leaders, it is so far the largest diplomatic conference on climate change. Global climate activists also came out to the streets ahead of the talks in record-breaking number in November 28 and 29. More than 600,000 marched in 175 countries around the world, including Paris where marches were banned due to grave security concerns following terrorist attacks in the French capital weeks before COP21, to call for a strong deal. This is bigger than the New York People's Climate March in 2014, which was also organized to put pressure on leaders attending the COP20 in Peru.

It is already clear even before it started why the results will not measure up to what must be done, especially in the light of what was already produced after more than two decades of high level climate talks. The trends since COP15 in Copenhagen shows the ambitions on emission reduction going downhill and the measures for reductions seriously flawed.

COP21 is not a negotiation for the world's temperature to stay below 2°C. Majority of the negotiating countries have already submitted their voluntary national contributions, or Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in UN parlance last October. INDCs are the plans to be nationally executed by the countries as their demonstration of responsibility to lower their emissions in order to stabilize the greenhouse gas in the atmosphere and solve global warming. Several studies, including that of the U.N. itself and which UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres confirmed in her many pre-COP21 briefings, show that these voluntary contributions will lead to global warming of around 3°C by the end of the century.

A global 2°C average increase in the temperature was already deemed irresponsible and dangerous by many vulnerable countries as climate change impacts differ in every country. A 3°C global average increase could mean a more than 6°C temperature increase scenario in Africa and more than six-fold increase in the frequency climate-induced calamities that are already ravaging climate vulnerable countries. Since the INDCs are voluntary, countries can just do whatever they want. This is the best of more than twenty years of climate Summitry came up with, despite mandates and declared commitments by heads of states to do everything that is necessary to stop climate change.

## **The Crisis that Governments Refused to Acknowledge and the Global Elites Do Not Accept**

It is very clear now that commitments and good intentions, if backed by inappropriate steps will not deliver the right and just solutions needed to even begin to address a huge challenge that is climate change. Despite volumes of studies and information about the phenomenon and the impacts that a warming world creates, real commitments, especially from historical and huge greenhouse gas producers are still missing. This is bringing us to a point of no return. Carbon dioxide levels rose by 60% since climate talks started in 1992. According to U.N. estimates, greenhouse gas emissions will increase by another 10 % by 2030.

Past and new agreements that will emerge from Paris will allow developed countries to continue to emit dangerously high levels of greenhouse gasses and will let them get away with it through dangerous techno-fixes, and trading schemes that will result to land grabs and human rights violations in the Global South.

What negotiating parties do not acknowledge is that capitalism especially its current globalized form, is directly connected with climate change. Society's relationship with nature under the capitalist mode of production follow the principles of ownership and rights of access, modes of production and consumption, need for permanent added-value, as well as class and gender relations, which are associated with profit maximization and exploitation of people and nature. The extraction of fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas), which is the biggest cause of climate change, enables large-scale production of goods, transportation systems and efficient distribution networks of products and services. Climate change, therefore, is not just an environmental issue; it is both a social and ecological crisis.

Inequality and injustice continue in the climate talks. The countries which are most affected by climate change, but have contributed the least to it have very little say to influence climate politics due to the asymmetry of political and negotiating power between the Global North and Global South. At the same time, Parties to the Convention do not acknowledge that the capitalist economic model they espouse and rely on is based on plunder, waste and pollution. The general public also have very little understanding of structural conditions as climate change is not seen as a class and gender issue despite the reality that the poor, especially women, who are already feeling its brunt are left to rely on their resilience while corporations and industries are continuing usual destructive operations and even making profits in delaying or burying real solutions.

As the impacts of climate change intensify, free market ideology, big business and financial actors increasingly shape the strategies and priorities in addressing it. This is the reason why the negotiations are also moving backwards. The UN capitulated to the corporate agenda of voluntary pledges and market-based initiatives that will do more harm than good to the environment and the global climate system. Although many responses have been proposed, including the Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), Climate-Smart Agriculture, and various carbon markets schemes. These initiatives are false solutions that will not reduce emissions nor address the social crises causing climate change, but rather allow business as usual and create corporate profits in the name of combatting climate change.

## **The Corporate Capture of Climate Politics**

The climate crisis must be understood as one of the many elements of the deep crisis of capitalism,

and has always been both an ecological, and a social problem. Real catastrophes in the Global South and in pockets of communities in the Global North like destruction of livelihoods through floods and droughts, death and starvation are already happening. The real solution of a deep cut in emissions and ending the use of fossil fuels will not be easy, but there is no other way. Reductions require a fundamental shift from the extractive economy and stopping climate pollution at the source, not paying pittance to poor countries to shoulder the reductions that must be done by rich and polluting countries.

Climate politics even in poor and developing countries have yet to, or even refuse to, question, challenge and problematize the key role of capital in the causes and effects of climate change. The powers of the WTO, international financial institutions (IFIs), TNCs and other agents of neoliberal capitalism must be confronted as they move to eliminate environmental policies defined as “barriers to trade” and to prevent governments to discriminate against polluting products through bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations. New, aggressive and very comprehensive trade and investment agreements (ex. EU-US Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIP and Trans-Pacific Partnership or TTP) that are being negotiated by governments in highly secretive and exclusive processes include an extremely dangerous element, the Investor- to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism. Once implemented, corporations can use ISDS to sue governments for passing laws protecting the environment, but will diminish corporate profits like closing/banning polluting coalmines.

Powerful corporations, through their lobbyists have been influencing climate negotiations. Business lobbies are ensuring the protection of business interests, especially in COP21 through promotion of global carbon market as the solution to climate change and guaranteeing that climate policies do not conflict with business interests. International financial institutions, that historically and still fund climate change-inducing large-scale projects like fossil fuel development, huge hydropower and those that are under CDMs play key roles in climate finance and pushing loans to victims of climate-induced natural calamities to forever bury them in debts.

The corporate capture of governance did not happen overnight, there are conscious and elaborate preparations over several decades to build the economic architecture that supports the current system/order: (a) global trade and investment regime, (b) economic policies of “opening” encouraged by International Financial Institutions, (c) the hegemonic development paradigm followed; and lastly the (d) the solutions offered now to address global warming. The increasing capture by large transnational corporations (TNCs) of various policy spaces and decision-making processes posed big challenges to democracy in both developing and developed countries alike. The role of the state and what kind of governance can support climate justice is important.

Climate change will never be solved through negotiations dominated by corporate interests.

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\* <http://focusweb.org/content/paris-cop21-solving-real-and-present-crisis-false-and-unjust-solutions>