

COP21 deal & climate schizophrenia: From Paris with love for lake Poopó

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Lake Poopó becomes a desert while in Paris, governments conclude an agreement they call “historic” to address climate change. Will the Paris Agreement save over 125,000 lakes that are in danger of disappearing in the world due to climate change?

The second largest lake in Bolivia did not disappear by magic. The causes of their demise are many and complex, but among them is the rise in temperature and increased frequency of natural disasters like El Niño caused by climate change. The lake Poopó that had an expanse of 2,337 km² and a depth of 2.5 meters, is now a desert with a few puddles in the middle with no more than 30 centimeters of water depth.

If the average temperature rose globally by 0.8 °C due to climate change, on the lake Poopó the increase went to 2.5 °C leaving in its path thousands of dead fish, dead flamingos, fishing boats anchored to the ground, and hundreds of indigenous people, who for centuries were devoted to fishing, that now roam for help thinking of a very uncertain future. That is the true face of climate change that expands like a cancer throughout the world.

Paris and the break with reality

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which a person breaks with reality and thinks he is doing one thing while in practice he is doing something very different. Something very similar is happening with the governments and the Climate Paris Agreement. In its Article 2 that agreement says the goal is to limit “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C”. These words makes us think that the spirit of Lake Poopo and thousands of other lakes, glaciers, islands and hundreds of thousands of people who die each year from climate change has finally touched the hearts of the governments of the planet.

But wait! Paragraph 17 of the decision that approved the “historic” Paris Agreement states “with concern that the estimated aggregate greenhouse gas emission levels in 2025 and 2030 resulting from the intended nationally determined contributions do not fall within least-cost 2 °C scenarios”. In other words, one thing is love professed by the political world to lakes like Poopó and a very different thing is what they are actually willing to do.

To really limit the increase of the temperature and prevent the planet from burning with an increase of more than 2 °C governments must agree to leave 80% of the known fossil fuels reserves under the

ground. This includes hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and coal. But when one reads carefully the Climate Agreement there is no reference to put a limit on the extraction of fossil fuels.

The other urgent measure to prevent more greenhouse gases from going into the atmosphere is to eliminate deforestation. However, in its so-called “contributions” countries with large forests are not committed to halt this crime even in the next 15 years.

Overall, thanks to the “contributions” of emission reductions presented in Paris, global emissions of greenhouse gases that in 2012 were 53 Gt CO₂e, will continue to climb up to around 60 Gt CO₂e by 2030. If governments really want to limit the temperature increase to less than 2 °C they should commit to reduce global emissions to 35 Gt of CO₂e by 2030. Governments know this and yet do the opposite and even shout: “Victory! The planet is saved!”. Is it or is not a particular type of schizophrenia?

Meanwhile more than 10,000 kilometers away from Paris the increase in the temperature continues to evaporate a lake where the Urus, indigenous people also known as “the men from the water”, struggle to survive. These ancient inhabitants that some researchers say came thousands of years from Polynesia soon will be “the men from the desert”.

Impunity and climate crimes

If we can be sure of something is that the Urus are not guilty at all of climate change. Per capita, their greenhouse gas emissions are among the lowest in the world, yet they are one of the first victims of climate change. Could it be that the Paris Agreement will allow the Urus to sue the countries and corporations responsible for this ethnocide? Ultimately Article 8 mentions a loss and damage mechanism, but paragraph 52 of the decision that approved the agreement clarifies “that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation”. The Urus, along with millions of people around the world that did not cause climate change have been totally silenced by this schizophrenic agreement that mentions the “rights of indigenous peoples” in its preamble and at the same time negates their right to demand those responsible for this climate crime. What kind of rights are these that are not enforceable? And all “made in Paris” which is the city of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789.

Some will say, that they are not given the right to make legal demands but there will be a multi-million fund for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Will this fund be provided by the countries that are mainly responsible for climate change? The truth is that developed countries in a very clever way replaced the word “provide” with “mobilize”. Article 9 of the Agreement states that “developed country Parties should continue to take the lead in mobilizing climate finance from a wide variety of sources, instruments and channels, ” such as public funding, private investment, loans, carbon markets and even developing countries.

And how much will the developed countries “mobilize”? A similar amount as the military and defense budget of the world that is around 1,500 billion dollars? Or maybe half of that? After all the more important issue of human security in present days is climate change. The Paris Agreement is silent in relation to the figure of climate finance, but the decision which approves the agreement is very clear in paragraphs 54 and 115. Developed countries will mobilize just 100 billion dollars for the year 2020-2025, which is 7% of the military budget worldwide.

While the tragedy of Lake Poopó is a small sample of what is yet to come, the climate summit in Paris teaches us that the real solutions will not come from international negotiations where the interests of large corporations and governments are predominant. The future of life as we know it

depends on what we do today as the grassroots inhabitants of the blue planet.

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P.S.

* “From Paris with love for lake Poopó”:

<http://obccd.org/2015/12/21/from-paris-with-love-for-lake-poopo/>