

COP26: Many of our worst fears were realised, but the movement is unbowed

Monday 28 February 2022, by [GUERRERO Dorothy Grace](#) (Date first published: 31 January 2022).

Many of those following the UN climate talks at the 26th annual Conference of Parties (COP26) were frustrated, but not surprised, with its dismal results last year. Even the scientists and researchers involved in setting the process of the annual negotiations - the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which started from the historic Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 - [publicly expressed their dissatisfaction](#).

The 197 parties to COP26 themselves recognised during the two-week negotiations that the total of their combined voluntary national commitments or [Nationally Determined Contribution](#) is insufficient to reach the target of limiting global heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels agreed in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) they adopted specified the need to return at the COP27 negotiations, to be held this year in Egypt, with stronger commitments which align with the Paris Agreement. Targets will now be reviewed annually instead of every five years. The global average temperature rise [could top 2.4°C by the century's end](#) with the current 2030 short-term goals.

There are simultaneous negotiations in the annual COPs, all of which are administered within the UNFCCC. There are three main “governing bodies” - the [COP](#), which is the “supreme body of the Convention”, [CMP16](#) (serving the Kyoto protocol) and [CMA3](#) (serving the Paris Agreement). There are also two main “subsidiary bodies”, known as Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice [SBSTA](#) and Subsidiary Body for Implementation or [SBI](#).

Unequal from the start

Global Justice Now [warned](#) that countries in the global south that are already severely impacted by climate change despite very little contribution to its cause were marginalised before COP26 even started. Climate negotiators, representatives of UN accredited observer organisations and climate activists from these countries were practically prevented from participating due to the problems related to the ongoing pandemic - vaccine inequality, difficulty and increased costs of travel to the UK, and confusing and fast-changing travel rules and related factors.

Those who reached Glasgow faced additional obstacles from the official venue's capacity limits. Many were told to follow the COP from their hotel rooms on crucial days. There were more delegates associated with the fossil fuel industry - [503 lobbyists and consultants](#) - than with any single country delegation

There is also the issue of the [dangerously misleading 'net zero' targets](#), which the UK as COP26 host country encouraged other parties to base their climate ambitions around. [Net zero targets now cover approximately 90% of emissions](#). While this may look like an important signal, especially with key countries' announcements of accelerated climate action with net zero targets, the targets are still not proportional to the responsibilities of big and historic emitters. Even if, and this is a big if,

all net zero commitments or targets are fully implemented, the most 'optimistic scenario' would still produce 1.8°C global average temperature rise by 2100, with peak warming of 1.9°C. Corporations and countries are evasively using net zero jargon to delay real, transformative action toward real zero.

Let us not forget that the COP's history is replete with broken promises by rich countries; changes, delay or undermining of previously agreed goalposts; and reinterpreting agreements to suit the global north's vested corporate agenda.

Climate finance remains elusive

'Climate finance' refers to money provided in different forms from advanced economies to countries in the global South. From the very first COP (Berlin 1995), the climate agreement specified that richer countries, because of their high levels of emissions, would provide funding for poorer and climate-vulnerable countries, as an obligation, to help them with climate change impacts and technology advance for their development transition with low emissions. At COP26, we once again saw the big failure of rich countries in fulfilling their climate finance commitments. The annual \$100 billion climate finance envisaged to start flowing to developing countries from 2020, as promised in the 2009 COP15 in Copenhagen, was postponed again until 2023.

In Glasgow, finance ministers and a consortium of investors pledged to 'align' [\\$130 trillion](#) of private finance assets to net zero. But these will come as loans and investments that will merely facilitate corporate money-making in the guise of climate action. Of the 97 pointers of the Glasgow Pact, 14 were dedicated to [Loss and Damage](#), the inevitable consequences of [human-caused climate change](#) on lives, livelihoods and infrastructure. However, the US and EU shot down the proposal to have a Loss and Damage facility, a formal delivery body for funding demanded by developing countries.

The long-term demands from the global south for climate debt reparations, grant-based finance for adaptation and loss and damage have been routinely watered down or delayed completely by rich nations. This finance must be at the heart of any just, equitable and effective climate action. The UK government alone should give [\\$46 billion in climate finance](#), with at least half going to adaptation, to account for its historical responsibilities. Finally, the widely covered watering down of a pledge to 'phase out' coal in the Glasgow pact, blamed on the Indian government, represented another sleight of hand by rich countries. Coal, like all fossil fuels, should indeed be phased out as soon as possible as part of a just transition which recognises the common but differentiated responsibilities of global north and global south. But the fact that phasing out oil and gas never even made it into the draft text - fossil fuels which the US and EU have not already begun to phase out, as they have with coal - indicates where the power continues to lie in the negotiations.

Climate justice to cool the planet

Despite the failures of the talks, many drew hope from what happened outside the negotiations. People travelled to Glasgow during a pandemic, took health risks and spent huge amounts of money for overpriced tickets and accommodation because they saw the importance of meeting in person to discuss and push governments to produce just outcomes.

The [COP26 Coalition](#), of which Global Justice Now was part, reported that over 800 actions were organised across the world on the global day of action on 6 November, with more than 150,000 people taking to the streets of Glasgow. Over 15,000 people attended both in-person and digital events during the People's Summit for Climate Justice to discuss, learn, network and strategise about building the movement. The diversity of organisations that attended showed the strength of the alliance it brought together.

There is also an increased awareness that the climate crisis is already, and will increasingly, affect everyone globally. As a global crisis it also demands global collaboration and the UK public supports strong domestic actions according to polls. Ideologically, climate denialists finally lost the argument that climate change does not exist.

At the start of the second week of COP26, Global Justice Now together with partners in the global climate justice movement, the majority of them from southern countries, organised a [People's Tribunal](#) where the Jury of the Peoples and Nature found the UNFCCC guilty of failing to address the root causes of climate change. It is high time too that the COP process itself is held to account for the continuation of climate disasters, species extinctions, increasing global inequality, poverty and indebtedness of poorer countries.

As Christmas and New Year rolled around to the backdrop of a worsening global pandemic, news reports shifted between Omicron's alarming rise and the devastating super-typhoon Rai in the Philippines, which affected millions of people and caused 407 deaths, damage to infrastructures, homes, agriculture and people's livelihoods. Damages are estimated at [£339 million](#).

The Philippines is one of the world's [18 mega biodiverse countries](#), which contain two-thirds of the Earth's biodiversity and 70-80 percent of world's plants and animal species. However, this biodiversity is under threat, as the Philippines is also amongst the world's most climate vulnerable countries, despite contributing [less than 0.4% of global greenhouse gas](#) emissions.

We won't be able to tackle climate change without a radical transformation of the global economy and reparations from those who fuelled climate change to those facing its worst impacts. Many are connecting the dots and getting the message clearly that the fight against climate change is a fight for system change. We need to rewrite the rules of our global economic system if we want to save ourselves.

Dorothy Grace Guerrero

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