

COP26 – What next for the Christian Community?

Whilst COP26 in Glasgow did mark a step forward in global efforts to address climate change, it failed in two major respects:

- The pledge to restrict global temperature rise to 1.5°C was not even close
- There was a failure to achieve the financial target of raising \$100 billion dollars for developing countries, whilst recognising that, even now, they require more than that in total.

Those two facts are disappointing.

So, what was achieved? What were the successes?

1. The Glasgow Climate Pact.

After tense last minute negotiations, the Glasgow Climate Pact was signed by all 197 countries. Instead of the original aim to 'phase out' fossil fuels like coal and oil, the signatories agreed to 'phase down' (many nations expressed their opposition to the final alteration). At least fossil fuels were on the agenda for the first time in a COP meeting, which is a step forward in itself. The fact that the pact's language on coal was diluted was disappointing.

The pact didn't limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C. Countries did, however, agree to deliver stronger national plans to limit the temperature rise, thus keeping the 1.5°C target alive. There was a request for countries to update current (inadequate) emissions cut pledges to bring them in line with the 1.5 target and commit to consider the adequacy of those at COP27 in one year's time rather than the usual five years.

There was a commitment to increase financial support to developing nations to help them cut their emissions 'in the 2030s'

2. No coal by 2040 or 2050 for some countries

There was a 'Global coal to clean power transition statement'. Forty-five countries and the European Union agreed to completely transition away from coal and increase green energy production. The signatories, however, only included 5 of the top 20 coal producers and the top three polluters (China, USA and India) were absent.

3. An end to many overseas fossil fuel projects

25 countries including the USA, Canada, Denmark and the UK committed to stop financing unabated fossil fuel projects by the end of 2022. This should stop wealthier nations from claiming that they are cutting their carbon footprints whilst, in reality, exporting their emissions by funding fossil fuel projects in poorer countries.

4. An agreement to protect the world's forests

A declaration on forests and land use was signed by 141 countries. They pledged to reverse deforestation, halt land degradation, and restore forests by 2030. There was a pledge to resurrect grasslands and wetlands, which act as carbon sinks. The signatory nations comprise some 85 to 91% of the world's forests (depending on how you calculate that).

5. Fossil fuel car sales to be massively reduced by 2035

24 governments agreed that all new cars and vans sold in their countries will release zero emissions by 2040 with leading markets going for 2035. The USA, China, India,

Germany, Russia and Japan did not support this – surprise, surprise – self-interest at work there!

6. China and the USA will work together

The global superpowers will collaborate on new technologies and policies to accelerate the transition to a global net-zero economy. They also laid out a series of actions to reduce CO2 and methane emissions. That announcement was something of a surprise!

7. Global methane pledge

There was a US and EU-led global methane pledge signed by 105 countries to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030

8. India joined the climate fight

India's prime minister pledged that they would reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2070.

9. Innovation in and promotion of sustainable agriculture

45 countries and many organisations signed up to the 'Global Action Agenda on Innovation in Agriculture'. It is aiming to raise and use \$5 billion (£3.7 billion) to turn agriculture into an industry that works for the benefit of people, the environment, and the climate.

The big question is: "Is all that enough?" - Most people feel that the answer is 'NO'.

The United Nations Secretary General told the conference that the goal to keep global temperature to 1.5°C rise "was on life support". The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that emissions must be reduced by 45% by 2030, from the 2010 levels, to keep temperature rise under 1.5°C. It has been estimated that if all the COP26 targets are adhered to, then there would be less than half the reduction needed in greenhouse gas emissions.

The UK retains the presidency of COP for the next eleven months until the next COP meeting in Egypt in 2022. So, the UK Government continues to play a big role in maintaining the impetus of the resolutions for this period of time.

What can we, as Christians, do now?

We have a window of eleven months to influence the UK government and to agitate for the UK government to push other nations to stick to their pledges made at the conference. Potentially we will, therefore, have more influence on the international situation over these eleven months than we will after the UK relinquishes the presidency.

We should be lobbying our local MPs, we should be putting as much pressure as we can on our national government, urging them to convince other nations to stick to or exceed their climate change targets and their emissions. We should hold them to their promises. We should hold them to account. We should ask our government to maintain as strong a Climate Change Committee as they possibly can.

The fossil fuel issue remains a large problem. The fossil fuel companies still receive millions if not trillions in subsidies. We should, as individuals and as churches, disinvest our savings in fossil fuel companies. We should put pressure on our banks to make it clear that if they don't disinvest, then we will withdraw our business from them. We should put pressure on the UK government to withdraw the projected plans for a new oil field in the Shetland area.

The news about reducing deforestation was good, but we as individuals should not give up our own efforts to plant trees and to back local tree planting. We should support organisations like

the local 'Heart of England Forest' and national charities such as 'The Carbon Community'. We should also put our support behind rewilding projects, whether they be local or national.

Perhaps, most importantly, as Christians, we should use the power of prayer. We should pray for all in our country who have influence over decisions about climate change. We should pray that the UK government continues to push as hard as they promised **before** the COP26 conference and ensure that they don't take their foot off the accelerator. We should pray, in particular, for those nations' leaders and those nations that didn't sign up to the major initiatives.

We can support organisations such as A Rocha which have programmes like Wild Christian and Eco-Church. They will be providing initiatives that we can join to put pressure on our government.

We can put our trust in God's plan for this planet.

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