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Subject: What can we expect to be achieved at COP26 in Glasgow?

1. Introduction – What is COP26

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and its 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) for signatory governments, will take place in Glasgow from 1st to 12th November 2021.

The 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted at COP21, committed the majority of the world's nations to containing global warming to well below 2°C and preferably to 1.5°C. It was agreed in Paris that each country would submit updated national plans – known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - every five years for limiting emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Since 2015, more than 190 countries have published at least one version of their NDC. But NDC ambitions do not yet rise to the level of the Paris Agreement, as the most recent progress report affirms.

The United Nations and officials from the COP26 host government - the UK – along with other major figures involved in the talks are now privately admitting that pledges on greenhouse gas emissions cuts from major economies will fall short of the halving of global emissions by 2030 needed to limit global heating to 1.5°C. However, the broader goal of the conference – that of “keeping 1.5°C alive” – is still in sight, and world leaders could still set a pathway for the future that would avoid the worst ravages of climate chaos. That pathway, in the form of a “Glasgow pact”, would allow for future updates to emissions pledges in the next few years that could be sufficient for the world to stay within scientific advice on carbon levels. And UK officials are hoping that progress will be made on other issues, including phasing out coal, providing climate finance to poor countries, and improving the protection of forests. (1)

2. The Consequences of Failure

If policy ambitions follow current trends, 2.7°C of warming by the end of this century is likely, relative to pre-industrial temperatures. If emissions do not come down drastically before 2030, then by 2040 some 3.9 billion people are likely to experience major heatwaves. By the 2030s, 400 million people globally each year are likely to be exposed to temperatures exceeding the workability threshold. Also, by the 2030s, the number of people on the planet exposed to heat stress exceeding the survivability threshold is likely to surpass 10 million a year. By 2040, the average proportion of global cropland affected by severe drought will likely rise to 32 per cent a year, more than three times the historic average, and almost 700 million people a year are likely to be exposed to droughts of at least six months' duration, nearly double the global historic annual average. Cascading climate impacts can be expected to cause higher mortality rates, drive political instability and greater national insecurity, and fuel regional and international conflict. (2)

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If countries only meet their current pledges, rather than keeping the global temperature rise to 1.5°C by 2100 then 1.8 billion more people will be exposed to tropical storms, with millions dying or suffering strong economic damage and forced migration. (3)

3. What are the big issues going to be at COP26, in the run-up and at the summit?

In an interview for the New Scientist “Countdown to COP26” Christiana Figueres, former executive secretary of UN Climate Change, said COP26 is “*the deadline for all countries to come forward with their new higher goals and much more ambitious nationally determined contributions [emissions reduction plans].*” (4)

“In addition to that, we have to have the promise fulfilled of the funding for developing countries, the famous \$100bn [a year] that has been on the table forever, and should have been fulfilled by 2020. [Thirdly] we have to make more commitments to adaptation, because we have delayed so much.”

“And then, perhaps most difficult of all, the price on carbon pollution. That is the famous Article 6 that was not agreed to at Paris in 2015, and has been straggling along ever since then without agreement among all countries. We had a thriving carbon market operating in the global north and south, called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), under the Kyoto Protocol [the climate treaty before the Paris Agreement]. It had its rules, regulations, methodologies, it was actually a very mature system. We need an upgrade of the CDM, and inserted into the Paris Agreement. Let no one say we don’t know how to do it, because we do.”

Asked what would a good outcome be for COP26, she said “*we are expecting every country, every head of state in fact, to come to the COP and announce what she or he are actually going to commit to in terms of emissions reductions in the next five or 10 years. For me, the expected outcome is that the sum total of that cannot guarantee that we’re going to be at [on track for] 1.5°C by 2030. That is unrealistic. But it should put us on the path towards [having] one half emissions by 2030. That for me would be successful.”*

4. Nationally Determined Contributions

In September, the UN published its latest Synthesis Report into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted as part of the Paris Agreement. This provides an up-to-date assessment of the intended climate action by all 191 Parties to the Paris Agreement based on their latest NDCs available up to 30 July 2021.

The report found that the updated or new NDCs submitted by 113 Parties would contribute to a projected decrease in global emissions of 12% by 2030, compared to 2010 levels. But taking together the plans of all 191 Parties imply a sizable increase in global Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in 2030 compared to 2010, of about 16%. This could lead to a temperature rise of about 2.7°C by the end of the century. (5)

Some of the new NDCs are in the upper limits of what many had expected. The UK has, for instance, pledged to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, and 78% by 2035. The European Union (EU) is aiming for a reduction of at least 55% by 2030 relative to 1990 levels, and the US target is ‘a reduction of 50-52% compared to 2005 levels.

But a study by Climate Action Tracker found that of the G20 group of leading industrial nations, only a handful have strengthened their targets to cut emissions. The World Resources Institute and Climate Analytics highlight how China, India, Saudi Arabia and Turkey - together responsible for 33% of greenhouse gases - have yet to submit updated plans. Australia and Indonesia have the same carbon reduction targets they did back in 2015 - while the Paris Agreement is meant to involve a “ratchet mechanism” of progressively deeper cuts. Brazil, Mexico and Russia all expect their emissions to grow rather than to shrink. (6)

A sizeable number of NDCs from developing countries contain conditional commitments to reduce emissions, which can only be implemented with access to enhanced financial resources and other support. The report suggests that the full implementation of these components could allow for global emissions to peak by 2030.

There are hopes that China's pledge not to fund any new coal-fire projects abroad, will help to smooth the way for a successful COP26, but details are sketchy. (7) The impact will depend on implementation. Ending Chinese coal financing has long been near the top of climate activists' wish-lists. Hopefully it will affect the 54 gigawatts in active development but not yet under construction. It's not clear yet whether Chinese banks and power firms will only pull out of projects that are at the planning stage, or also those under negotiation or at an early stage of construction. This year alone, Chinese companies have facilitated an additional 10 new coal-fired power plant projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Turkey, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates, according to Just Finance International. (8)

5. Financing

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) developed nations committed to financing \$100bn (£72.5bn) annually by 2020, but, so far, they have failed to fulfil this commitment, with as little as \$70bn (£50.75bn) provided in recent years. It will be one of the crucial discussion points at COP26 and, if not addressed sufficiently, could lead to the collapse of global negotiations geared at combatting the climate crisis. Research by Oxfam found that up to £57bn may not be delivered across a six-year period. (9)

Developed countries provided only around £58bn in climate finance in 2019. Of this figure, 70% of public climate finance was given out as loans instead of grants, which could push some nations into more debt. According to Oxfam, this trajectory will see developed nations offer up to £69bn annually by 2025 - five years after the goal should have been met. Oxfam states that developing nations could miss out on up to £57bn over a six-year period as a result.

Oxfam's global climate policy lead Nafkote Dabi says: *"Millions of people from Senegal to Guatemala have already lost their homes, livelihoods and loved ones because of turbo-charged storms and chronic droughts, caused by a climate crisis they did little to cause. Wealthy nations must live up to their promise made twelve years ago and put their money where their mouths are. We need to see real funding increases now."*

This year's G7 summit agreed to get back on track to deliver \$100bn of climate finance to less-wealthy nations.

Fortunately, Joe Biden's promise to double climate finance to \$11.4bn by 2024 puts rich nations back on track to meet the crucial climate finance promise. That means current pledges and plans from rich nations total \$98.7bn – \$100.7bn a year of climate finance, according to Oxfam. Developing countries say the funding is crucial to help them transition to greener technologies and cope with extreme weather fuelled by climate change. But hitting the \$100bn target 5 years late will leave poorer countries short of billions they were promised. *"Vulnerable countries have been clear that the 100bn had to be met in 2020,"* says Iskander Erzini, a climate finance expert from the think tank E3G. The US funding *"comes too late"*. (10)

6. Carbon Pricing

Article 6 of the Paris Agreement contains three carbon pricing mechanisms, two of which are market-based, but it does not contain detailed rules regarding the operation of carbon pricing mechanisms. Despite discussions at subsequent COPs, the Parties have yet to reach agreement in relation to a number of key issues, meaning a final 'rulebook' for these mechanisms has not yet been established. A consensus of the Parties is required in order to adopt the rules and procedures that are necessary to implement the mechanisms. However, there are a number of issues which have proven to be obstacles to reaching this consensus; these will need to be

resolved before the 'rulebook' can be agreed and the mechanisms under Article 6 can be implemented. (11)

Carbon pricing charges emitters for the carbon they release into the atmosphere. This should encourage emissions reductions by applying a financial cost to emissions. The revenue received can then be used to support clean energy, although this is the subject of debate. Some believe it should be used to compensate consumers hit by the carbon tax.

64 countries currently have some form of carbon pricing implemented covering about 20% of global emissions. The current global average price of carbon is €2.50 per ton – though the OECD has estimated that a price of €125 is needed before 2030 if the world is to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Even the country with the highest carbon price in the world, Sweden, has a carbon price of only €116 per ton. More than 100 countries have expressed interest in using carbon pricing to meet their Paris Agreement NDC targets. (12)

The European Union has now proposed a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) that represents a departure from the voluntary spirit of the Paris accord. The new mechanism would impose the equivalent of tariffs on imports from countries where producers pay a carbon price below that of the EU's, set either directly or through an emissions trading system (ETS). The Brookings Institution - a non-profit public policy organization based in Washington – says they should focus more on helping to mobilize the finance that most developing countries need for the green transformation. This would likely be a more effective way to shift the emphasis to the great opportunities arising from new technologies and achieve crucial global climate goals, while preserving the chance of a “whole of humanity” accord on this planetary challenge. (13)

7. What can we expect from UK policy?

In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September, Boris Johnson said:

“We are approaching that critical turning point – in less than two months – when we must show that we are capable of learning, and maturing, and finally taking responsibility for the destruction we are inflicting, not just upon our planet but ourselves. It is time for us to listen to the warnings of the scientists ... In just 40 days’ time we need the world to come to Glasgow to make the commitments necessary.” (14)

He continued: “... if we are to stave off these hikes in temperature we must go further and faster – we need all countries to step up and commit to **very substantial reductions by 2030** ...” [emphasis added] The UK has pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 68% by 2030 compared to where we were in 1990.

The Guardian points out that, according to the International Energy Agency we can get to a 45% cut in global emissions by 2030 – the key number for staying within 1.5°C – with technologies such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and electric vehicles, that are already available and in widespread use today.

Professor of energy and climate change, Kevin Anderson, says if we take Johnson's speech as an honest reflection of his views, a list of action he could initiate to shift the UK from current weak mitigation policies, might be:

1. An immediate moratorium on all new fossil fuel developments;
2. Phase out all fossil fuel production by 2035 (with a 'just' transition for the workers);
3. Immediate moratorium on airport expansion;
4. Stringent frequent flyer levy (to stop frequent flyers yet still permit occasional trips);
5. Move away from cars (incl. EVs) in cities and dense urban areas;
6. Facilitate a major shift to active, public and virtual transport;
7. All new buildings to be Passive House standard with on-site renewables;
8. Major retrofit agenda for all those buildings expected to remain in use;
9. No new fossil fuel power stations;

10. A massive programme of electrification of energy supply/use (3-4x current level in 20 years). (15)

A good time then for local authorities to support initiatives like the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group's call to build a workforce to tackle the climate emergency. The group calls for a mass retrofit programme, which it says local councils, in partnership with a National Climate Service, are best placed to coordinate this as they are democratically elected, and have a direct relationship with local residents, and already know a lot about the local housing stock through their existing responsibilities. (16)

8. What can we expect from other countries - Boris Johnson keeps talking about 'coal, cash, cars, and trees'

In a statement following the release of the IPCC's most recent report, the UK Prime Minister called on all countries to commit to achieving net-zero emissions by mid-century and on the G20 countries in particular to come forward with bold 2030 NDCs.

He also emphasized the UK is calling on all countries to make 'big commitments' in four areas:

- Coal: developed countries should have 'kick[ed] the habit of coal' completely by the end of this decade, and developing countries need to have done so by 2040.
- Cars: governments should abandon the use of internal combustion engines and transition to electric vehicles.
- Cash: developed countries need to honour the \$100 billion climate finance pledge.
- Trees: governments need to protect nature and, to use the UK Prime Minister's words, '*end the massacre of the forests*'. (17)

9. Why is the nuclear industry excluded from COP26?

The World Nuclear Association (WNA) has written to COP26 UK president, Alok Sharma, to complain that every application made by nuclear groups for exhibits at the conference has been rejected. The WNA says it is "deeply concerned" that plans for nuclear exhibits in civil society's Green Zone at COP26 had been turned down. The Green Zone is billed as a space for organisations to host "workshops, panel discussions and keynote speeches" which "promote dialogue, awareness, education and commitments" on the climate crisis. (18)

The Cabinet Office COP26 unit said it had received "a huge level of interest" from groups wanting to be in the Green Zone. "Discussions are still ongoing", stressed a spokesperson, pointing out that "limited capacity" meant not all applicants could be accommodated. As part of the application process, organisations interested in making use of space in the Green Zone were required to provide details of their "sustainability or environmental policies". (19)

The criteria for applications to put on exhibitions and events in the green zone included those "showcasing innovation helping to tackle global climate change". But 15 applications from nuclear-related bodies, including trade and research associations, are understood to have been rejected by Mr Sharma's COP26 Unit in the Cabinet Office. They included an application involving the World Nuclear Association, which represents the global nuclear industry, to put on an exhibition featuring a life-size model of a nuclear reactor. (20)

Nuclear organizations won't be entirely excluded from COP26. Some, including the American Nuclear Society, will be involved as "observer organizations" in the Blue Zone. The Blue Zone is the UN managed area where access will be limited to national delegations and accredited businesses and activist groups. (21)

10. Conclusions

According to The Guardian representatives from the UN, UK and other nations are pessimistic that the outcomes will ultimately align global policy with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C trajectory. But US President Joe Biden's pledge to double the nation's overseas climate aid to more than

\$11bn annually by 2024 and Chinese President Xi Jinping's commitment to end his government's support for coal projects overseas have boosted hopes for success in Glasgow. More recently, Angela Merkel's likely successor, Olaf Scholz, has said that his preference is for Germany to reach net-zero by 2045 and he would probably move the coal phase-out date forward from 2038. (22)

Here in the UK, we are still waiting for the Government to publish its the Heat & Buildings Strategy, the results of the Treasury's Net-Zero Review and the overarching Net-Zero Strategy. In Ireland, the Climate Change Act is now in law and moves are in place to add some detail to the commitments made within it. A good time, then for local authorities across the UK and Ireland to support campaigns for a national housing retrofit strategy whilst climate is at the top of the political agenda.

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