

COP26 Summit Fails to Take Decisive Action on Climate Change

Majority of world's population dissatisfied with final document approved in Glasgow

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Another annual international conference on the climate crisis ended on November 13 in Glasgow, Scotland where a contentious debate over the final document revealed fundamental differences on key issues.

Officially labeled as the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), the event was attended by representatives of approximately 200 countries and territories.

Undoubtedly, the broad character of the summit which included representatives from government delegations alongside Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and independent mass groupings, constrained the ability to pass sweeping resolutions in favor of radical programs for addressing the climate crisis. For example, references to the phasing out of coal production and usage was altered to eliminate any real commitment to shift to more environmentally safe energy sources.

A proposal for the payment of loss and damages to lesser developed countries was removed even from the draft document. The final resolutions made no mention of compensating the former colonial territories for the impact of centuries of mineral extraction, the dislocation of populations and the western demand for cheap labor and control over waterways.

The United States, which was represented by former U.S. Senator John Kerry, was involved in the negotiations over the final document. Although Kerry's comments appeared to have expressed empathy for poor countries, the actual decisions made in Glasgow were devoid of basic concerns expressed by the peoples of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Moreover, tens of thousands of youth staged demonstrations outside the conference hall over the two weeks duration of the summit. The main criticism levelled at the COP26 was that it was just another talking session which shied away from making the decisions necessary to mitigate and reverse the process of environmental degradation.

Developments over the last several years have been devastating for the peoples of the Global South and indeed throughout the world. Flooding, severe storms and drought have plagued people internationally. These environmental problems have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic making the distribution more difficult of medicines, including vaccines, to population groups which are not easily accessible by modern transportation.

There were 40,000 delegates to the COP26 gathering yet only a small number were actually allowed to enter the area where the serious discussions were held among participants representing their governments. Assessments of the outcome of the summit will be ongoing. However, there were divergent views on the impact and effectiveness of the gathering. (See [this](#))

[The Scientific American magazine](#) wrote in an analysis of the event emphasizing that:

“The final 11-page document, called the Glasgow Climate Pact, says that greenhouse gas emissions must fall by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 for global warming to be maintained at 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. It notes that, under existing emissions reduction pledges, emissions will be nearly 14% higher than in 2010 by 2030. Countries acknowledged the need to reduce emissions faster, and also agreed to report on progress annually. For the first time in a COP text, nations agreed to begin reducing coal-fired power (without carbon capture) and to start to eliminate subsidies on other fossil fuels.”

China and U.S. Announce Agreement During Summit

During the course of the summit, it was announced that China and the U.S. had agreed to work together on the reduction of carbon and methane greenhouse emissions. The current worsening relationship between Beijing and Washington was reflected in the statements made by those representing the administration of President Joe Biden.

The Chinese reaffirmed that the developing countries could not make the transition to green energy sources and production in light of the economic costs involved. China supported the demands for the payments by the western capitalist states for loss and damages to the developing regions of the world.

[According to China Daily newspaper](#): “Both countries have agreed to cooperate on the implementation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement on the development of international markets for carbon offsetting. This could help the development of clear international standards to promote the effective functioning of carbon markets, including the voluntary purchase of offsets by companies, which could mobilize billions of dollars of investment in developing countries. The two major powers have also agreed to communicate new nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement in 2025 with targets for 2035. However, given the shortfall in planned emissions reductions in relation to the 1.5 C target, the world needs revised and more ambitious nationally determined contributions from all countries well before 2025.”

Who Is Responsible for Climate Change?

Critics of the COP26 summit denounced the event for being the most exclusionary in its history. This was due in part to the lack of vaccine availability and adequate economic resources to facilitate the travel by peoples from the Global South.

Middle East Eye (MEE) website noted that there are 20 corporations which are behind a third of all carbon emissions between 1965-2017. The news agency emphasized that the blaming of China and India for the deteriorating climate situation overlooks the role of fossil fuels and the demand for this energy resource.

An important liberation movement in North Africa, the Polisario Front, which has fought a decades-long struggle against Spain and now Morocco for its independence, complained that they were excluded from many of the critical deliberations at the summit. The Polisario Front is the major political force within the provisional government of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) that is represented at both the United Nations and the African Union (AU).

[MEE describes](#) the situation related to the Saharawi by noting:

“Sidi Breika, a representative for Polisario, the Western Sahara independence movement, told MEE the UN’s climate summit ‘endorses illegal occupation via climate injustice and people’s exclusion from adequate participation and subsequent funding in order to tackle climate change’. Breika, who was in Glasgow, believes the summit was representative of the fact that the international community favors Polisario’s enemy, Morocco. ‘Our exclusion from global climate governance and finance mechanisms means the Sahrawis are denied access to technical and financial support to address climate change, contrary to principles of equity and inclusion.’”

Another major aspect of the rising temperature of the planet is the role of the Pentagon as a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Several studies have been published documenting that the U.S. military is the planet’s largest polluter. With the escalation of its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region in confrontation with China as well as the numerous military bases and direct occupations throughout Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, this situation is unlikely to change without a radical departure from the imperialist projects dominating Washington’s foreign policy.

Interestingly enough, the Pentagon was not represented in the U.S. delegation to the COP26 summit in Glasgow. Although there has been much rhetoric from the Defense Department equating the rapidly evolving crisis of climate change as being a threat on the level with the People’s Republic of China, military officials were not requested to attend the gathering. By keeping the Pentagon away from Scotland, the U.S. is attempting to obscure the role of its security apparatus which is endangering the planet. (See [this](#))

[Science Daily in 2019 reported](#) on independent research conducted by two universities in the United Kingdom which evaluated the Pentagon’s massive polluting impact. The summary of the study says:

“The U.S. military’s carbon footprint is enormous and must be confronted in order to have a substantial effect on battling global warming, experts argue. Research by social scientists from Durham University and Lancaster University shows the U.S. military is

one of the largest climate polluters in history, consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more CO₂e (carbon-dioxide equivalent) than most countries.... In 2017 alone, the U.S. military purchased about 269,230 barrels of oil a day and emitted more than 25,000 kt-CO₂e by burning those fuels. In 2017 alone, the Air Force purchased \$4.9 billion worth of fuel and the Navy \$2.8 billion, followed by the Army at \$947 million and Marines at \$36 million.”

Any serious program aimed at curtailing the most devastating effects of climate change will require a political confrontation with the Pentagon. This is where the struggle against imperialism, unjust wars and the existing international division of labor and economic power converge. The abolition of the ongoing threats of imperialist war combined with the reorganization of the extraction and distribution of energy resources will require a global movement whose mission will be to bring environmental justice and peace to the world.

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