

## Glasgow Pact: A setback for equity, the poor and planet

Penang, 24 Nov. (Meena Raman) – Contrary to the mainstream spin that the Glasgow outcomes (called Glasgow Pact), were “historic”, for the first time mention of the ‘phase-down of unabated coal’ and ‘phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies’, and in managing to “keep the 1.5°C temperature limit alive”, an honest assessment of the decisions reached will show that there has been a grave setback for equity, the poor and the planet.

The Pact has been viewed as being relatively strong on the steps to be taken on mitigation (but in the wrong direction with net zero targets in 2050), but without the commensurate scale of finance for developing countries, including for adaptation and loss and damage.

While developing countries have expressed disappointment in this regard, especially on the failure to deliver on the USD 100 billion per year by 2020 promise, in the case of mitigation, the Glasgow Pact has enabled the undifferentiated sharing of the responsibility between developed and developing countries for meeting the current emissions gap (i.e. reductions needed to limit temperature rise as per the Paris Agreement [PA] goal and what are in the nationally determined contributions [NDCs] of all Parties), without any regard for the historical responsibility of developed countries and their overuse of the atmospheric space since the pre-industrial era.

Instead of being true to ensuring international climate cooperation on the basis of equity and in respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) between developed and developing countries, which is the bedrock of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the PA, developed countries persisted in subverting the equity principle to one of ‘common and shared responsibilities’ by ignoring their historical responsibility.

In fact, they have successfully managed to chart their ‘great escape’ from the much needed rapid emission reductions today, to distant pledges of 2050 net zero targets, coupled with the potential use of carbon offsets in nature, including forests and oceans, through trading in the international carbon market, all of which have been made possible by the decisions reached in Glasgow.

Despite the persistent efforts of some developing country groupings such as the **Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)** to influence the draft texts against legitimising the net zero targets by 2050 especially of developed countries, and to take into account the latter’s historical responsibilities and overuse of the atmospheric space, the Glasgow Pact failed to reflect these concerns, due to opposition from developed countries.

This led to **Bolivia**, speaking for the **LMDC** in its intervention on the final day in response to ‘keeping the 1.5°C goal alive’, to express that calls for net zero targets by 2050 by all was a “great fallacy” and a “great escape by the developed countries” from “doing real rapid emissions reduction now” and that this amounted to “carbon colonialism”, with the exhaustion of the remaining carbon budget left within this decade.

This narrative of the “great escape” and “carbon colonialism” of the developed countries escaped the mainstream media, but what prevailed was the scape-goating of **India** and **China** as the ‘villains’ of Glasgow.

It was the ‘common and shared approach’ in blurring differentiation between developed and developing countries on climate actions, that led to the highly sensationalised drama over a paragraph in the Glasgow Pact, that called on all Parties to “phase-down” on “unabated coal” and to “phase-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” and cast India and China in bad light.

The controversial paragraph in point, prior to the gavelling of the final decisions, referred to a “phase-out” of “unabated coal” and did not have any reference to “provision of targeted support for the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances”, which were insertions proposed by India, and supported by China.

Invisible to many were the billions of poor people in developing countries with either limited or no access to modern energy at all, including in India and China.

For all their spin about the need to keep the 1.5°C temperature limit alive, according to sources, developed countries had no intention of any reference to the phase-out of all fossil fuels, despite calls to do so, given their own plans for continued expansion in extraction and dependence on oil and gas.

In fact, the irony was that US President Joe Biden, just ahead of the Glasgow talks, asked the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to

pump more oil, in order to keep energy prices low.

The doublespeak of developed countries in not walking the talk in showing real leadership in climate action and in enabling the just transition in developing countries, were plainly obvious to many developing country governments and climate justice movements.

## **UNDERMINING OF EQUITY AND REFUSAL TO ACKNOWLEDGE HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY**

If one thing is clear from the climate talks, it was the persistent efforts of developed countries in undermining equity and the principle of CBDR-RC.

The UNFCCC notes that “the largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) has originated in developed countries, that per capita emissions in developing countries are still relatively low and that the share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and development needs”.

Even at COP 16 in 2010, it was acknowledged “that the largest share of historical global emissions of GHGs originated in developed countries and that, owing to this historical responsibility, developed country Parties must take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.”

In Glasgow, efforts by developing countries to even include such references to historical emissions and responsibility into the draft decisions were thwarted, due to opposition from developed countries, despite such language existing in the UNFCCC and in previous decisions.

Despite saying that Parties must be guided by the best available science, there was clearly an effort to selectively use what the ‘science’ says. The Glasgow Pact, adopted under the COP as well as the CMA (Conference of Parties to the PA) welcomed the recently released report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on ‘The Physical Science Basis’. This report, viewed as the ‘code-red’ for humanity and the planet, reaffirms the linear relationship between cumulative emissions and rise in

global surface temperature. It notes that from 1850 till 2019, approximately 2,390 (GtCO<sub>2</sub>) were emitted, and this was responsible, along with lesser contributions from other greenhouse gases (GHGs), for an increase in global surface temperatures of about 1.07°C compared to pre-industrial times.

According to experts, the report reveals that for a 50% probability of limiting temperature rise to below 1.5°C, the total carbon budget remaining is only 500 GtCO<sub>2</sub> of emissions, and with current emissions trends, this will be exhausted within a decade or so. According to experts, global emissions databases reveal that developed countries have been responsible for over 60% of these past emissions. Yet, these facts did not find their way into the Glasgow Pact.

Developing countries had a tough time in having the principles of equity and CBDR-RC respected and operationalized in the decisions. The task was monumental, as developed countries in their interventions spoke of ‘shared responsibilities’ and not ‘differentiated responsibilities’ and focused on future emissions and not past emissions. It was as if history needed to be wiped out, including references to the Convention provisions.

### ***Typographical errors in the Glasgow Pact or deliberate sleight of hand?***

The COP 26 cover decision (1/CP. 26) referred to “processes” and has no reference to the word “provisions” of the UNFCCC anywhere, – a concern raised by the **LMDC** on the final day, prior to the gavelling of the decision.

The LMDC was referring to the following preambular paragraph of decision 1/CP.26, which states “*Recognizing* the role of multilateralism and the Convention, including its processes and principles, and the importance of international cooperation in addressing climate change and its impacts, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.” (Emphasis added).

Also missing in paragraphs 4 and 23 of decision 1/CMA3 was the ‘comma’ that is in Article 2.2 of the PA in relation to the CBDR-RC’ before the words “in light of national circumstances”.

Paragraph 4 “*Recalls* Article 2.2 of the PA, which provides that the PA will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of CBDR-RC in the light of different national circumstances.” Paragraph 23 “... *recognizes* that this requires accelerated action in this critical decade, on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge and equity, reflecting CBDR-RC in the light of different national circumstances and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.”

(Article 2.2 of the PA reads- “*This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of CBDR-RC, in the light of different national circumstances*”).

**Bolivia**, speaking for the **LMDC** in its intervention in this regard suggested “...some editorial amendments to the texts. There is the need to change the thinking in the proposed 1/CP.26 decision that instead of processes and principles under the Convention, we have principles and provisions. There is the need to introduce a comma in between respective capabilities and in light of national circumstances” which it said “was a Paris fight”.

(In the run-up to the negotiations in and at Paris, in issue was whether and how the principle of CBDR-RC will be operationalised in all the elements of the Agreement. Developed countries had insisted that the PA must reflect the “evolving economic and emission trends” of countries in the post-2020 time-frame, while developing countries continued to argue that given the historical emissions of developed countries, the latter continue to bear the responsibility in taking the lead in emission reductions and in helping developing countries with the provision of finance, technology transfer and capacity-building as provided for under the UNFCCC. What is captured in Article 2.2 is the ‘landing-zone’ arrived at in reflecting the CBDR-RC principle, following the China-US joint statement issued in 2014, prior to COP 20 in Lima, which found its way to the PA. According to sources who were involved in the joint statement, the ‘comma’ was a big battle between China and the US, signifying in China’s view the continued differentiation between developed and developing countries).

Were these omissions in Glasgow a deliberate sleight of a hand or were they really typographical errors? Given the considerable lack of trust in the process, such concerns from developing countries are not far-fetched.

Also noteworthy is that there are paragraphs in the Glasgow Pact that do not refer to CBDR-RC but to just “taking into account of different national circumstances”, meaning that there is no differentiation between developed and developing countries, and what matters is the “different national circumstances” of all countries, thus diluting further the concept of equity.

For instance, paragraph 29 of decision reads as follows: “...requests Parties to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their NDCs (which means the current NDCs) as necessary to align with the PA temperature goal by the end of 2022, taking into account different national circumstances”. (Emphasis added here and in paragraphs below).

Again, paragraph 32 of the same decision states: “Urges Parties that have not yet done so to communicate, by ... (CMA 4), long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies...towards just transitions to net zero emissions by or around mid-century, taking into account different national circumstances”.

Further, the controversial paragraph 36 of the same decision reads: “Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition.”

Were these omissions also another sleight of hand?

Developing countries of course are bound to seek comfort by relying on paragraph 23 of the CMA deci-

sion (and a similar paragraph in the COP decision) as follows: “... recognizes that this (referring to paragraph 22 below) requires accelerated action in this critical decade, on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge and equity, reflecting CBDR-RC in the light of different national circumstances and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty,” on the understanding that this is consistent with Article 2.2 of the PA, with the comma after the words ‘CBDR-RC’, as highlighted by the LMDC.

Paragraph 22 refers to the recognition “that limiting global warming to 1.5 °C requires rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to net zero around mid-century, as well as deep reductions in other greenhouse gases”.

### *The fallacy of keeping the 1.5°C temperature limit alive*

Commenting on the Glasgow outcomes, Alok Sharma, the UK President of COP26 said: “We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 °C alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action.”

Nothing can be further from the truth, as even with the translation of words into action, the outcome on the mitigation ambition is a complete charade and farce in keeping the 1.5°C limit alive.

This, as has been pointed out above, is mainly due to distant 2050 net zero targets pledged by developed countries, coupled with the potential use of carbon offsets in developing countries through the carbon market, made possible by the implementation of the PA's Article 6.

In this regard, what **Bolivia**, speaking for the **LMDC** said in its intervention is worth repeating. It said that “We think that net zero by 2050 is a fallacy to achieve 1.5°C within reach. It is the great escape and through global carbon markets they want to escape from their responsibility with addressing climate change. Developed countries have overused their



share of carbon budget and are using those that belongs to developing country Parties, which is essential to achieve their developmental rights. Therefore, instead of moving their targets for 2050 they should achieve real reduction of emissions now. For developing countries climate change is not only about climate. It is about the life of the people, sustainable development and poverty eradication. We refuse to get trapped in carbon colonialism. Developed countries are imposing new rules for addressing climate change to establish a transition towards low carbon pathways where only they have the conditions to achieve this transition, basically financial and technology conditions, creating more dependency of developing countries to the Global North. We see with concern how powerful and rich countries do not have the appetite to provide financial support and means of implementation to the developing world. This issue will not be resolved in this COP but a real moral commitment is needed in order to solve this issue. Developed countries have to be aware ...that the net zero by 2050 is not going to achieve the 1.5°C within reach; (and) be aware that they are putting the burden on the youth and next generations”.

### **NO MENTION OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, BUT CONCERNS REMAIN**

An important concern for some developing countries was on the use of the term “nature-based solutions” (NBS) in the initial drafts of the Pact, as this term is not defined in the UNFCCC and could give rise to problems, especially when linked to carbon markets and offsets. The LMDC was among those who did not want the NBS term used. However, what has remained in the Glasgow Pact adopted, is paragraph 38 (and a similar paragraph in the COP decision) which reads as follows: “*Emphasizes* the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems to achieve the PA temperature goal, including through forests and other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by protecting biodiversity, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards”.

What is clear is that with the net-zero pledges of developed countries and their corporations, there will indeed be the use of carbon offsets in “nature and ecosystems” especially in developing countries to offset their emissions, as a cheaper alternative than undertaking real emission reductions domestically. This will be a real cause for concern for not only developing countries, but also for their indigenous peoples and local communities’ dependent on these natural resources for their livelihoods.

In an earlier version of the draft CMA cover decision, the language in this regard read: “Emphasizes the critical importance of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, including protecting and restoring forests, to reducing emissions, enhancing removals and protecting biodiversity”.

### **CONCLUSION**

There were some small important wins for developing countries, which were gained after much wrangling with developed countries, in the area of the global goal on adaptation, institutionalising the functions of the Santiago Network on loss and damage, continuing discussions on long term finance till 2027, setting out a process for defining the new collective goal on finance post 2025, ensuring the operationalising of flexibilities in the enhanced transparency framework and so on.

These small steps will be key in advancing the issues of importance for developing countries, especially at COP 27 in Egypt next year. (See all TWN Updates on COP 26 available [here](#).)

However, in the area of mitigation, it is crucial for developing countries to rebalance the set back from Glasgow, in ensuring that the meeting of any emissions gap is on the basis of equity and the CBDR-RC principle, along with ambition on finance, technology transfer and capacity building, so as to ensure the honouring of commitments under the UNFCCC, the KP and the PA, and not their subversion.