

Making Progress on the Paris Climate Agreement

In advance of the Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Contribution to International Action on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, 10th November

Key points

- 2016 is going to be the warmest year ever recorded globally, and even at the current 1°C of warming people are dying, livelihoods are being ruined and people are being forced to become climate migrants
- The Marrakech climate conference needs to focus on immediate actions to reduce climate emissions
- Scotland has a good example to bring to the international climate process

The Paris Agreement¹

The Paris Agreement on climate change was signed last December at the UN climate conference. Enough countries had ratified it for it to come into legal force last Friday.

It is a good agreement because for the first time all countries are obliged to contribute to global emissions reductions and the Agreement sets a goal of keeping temperature rises this century “well below 2°C” and requires countries to “pursue efforts” to keep the rise to less than 1.5°C.

It is poor because any efforts by countries to meet these targets are voluntary and only start to come into force in 2020. There will be a ‘facilitated dialogue’ in 2018 where countries will talk about how they are doing preparing for action and a full review of how countries are delivering their promises in 2023. The human race will almost certainly have emitted enough further climate pollution by then to guarantee that the 1.5°C target cannot be met.

The promises that countries put on the table for the Paris meeting would result in a temperature rise of around 3.5°C by 2100, even if fully delivered. A new report from the UN Environment Programme makes clear that no UN member state is on track to deliver the promise of limiting temperature rises to 1.5°C, and overall, countries’ promised actions still add up to a world which is a catastrophic 3°C or more warmer.²

The UN Climate Conference in Marrakech³

The climate conference in Marrakech started on Monday and runs until the 18th November. It is the 22nd conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP22) and will be the first meeting of the signatories to the Paris Agreement. It is billed as a meeting aiming to stimulate action.

A key focus at the Marrakech climate conference is to get urgent action in the period before the Paris targets come into force in 2020. Despite all the back slapping and tears of joy at last year's conference, early emissions reduction is something that the Paris meeting completely failed to stimulate.

¹ A full analysis of the Paris Agreement - <https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/paris-climate-agreement-2015-analysis-its-conclusions-101677.pdf>

² The UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2016 - <http://web.unep.org/emissionsgap/>

³ Official website of the UN climate conference in Marrakech - <http://cop22.ma/en>

Friends of the Earth's international groups will be pressing for:

- Increasing ambition - Increasing pre-2020 action to achieve the Paris Agreement's goal 'to pursue efforts to stay under 1.5°C' warming.
- Sharing the effort fairly - Ensuring all countries do their fair share of effort.
- Dealing with climate reality - The global community must begin to urgently address the lack of legal protection for 'climate refugees'.
- Supporting energy transformation - Renewable energy solutions such as the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative and extending it globally not only reduces emissions, but also improves energy access for the poor.
- Finance roadmap to 2020 - Friends of the Earth will be calling for richer developed countries to take concrete steps towards fulfilling their obligations on climate finance.

Scotland's contribution

Some countries, like Japan, have already met their national targets for 2020 but refuse to do anything more for now. The European Union has set weak targets which will be easily achieved. Scotland has also met its 2020 target early, but here we are promised a new Climate Bill next year with more ambitious targets aimed at responding to the urgency of the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C pledge. No doubt we will have a lively debate about what Scotland's fair contribution to global emissions reductions is, but the stated intent is clearly very promising. The Scottish Government is also putting the finishing touches to a new Climate Change Plan to spell out the actions that will deliver even more emissions reductions by 2020 and beyond. This will be the subject of parliamentary scrutiny in January.

The First Minister has made clear Scotland's commitment to helping deliver the 1.5°C target, saying at the Arctic Council meeting in Reykjavik last month: "like every delegate here today we are committed to acting on climate change and limiting global temperature increases to below 1.5 degrees." ⁴

Scotland is presenting the kind of good example the international process urgently needs. The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform is expected to spend time at the climate conference next week.

The US Election

Donald Trump has expressed a range of views on climate change, including calling it a hoax made up by the Chinese to destroy the US economy. Progress will no doubt be harder but the US has been on the outside of the UN climate process before, famously being booed by other countries at the climate conference in the Hague in 2000. Even if the US finds a way to unratify the Paris Agreement there are still enough countries signed up for it to remain in legal force.

For further information, see fossilfree.scot or contact Dr Richard Dixon, Director, Friends of the Earth Scotland rdixon@foe-scotland.org.uk @Richard_Dixon. Dr Dixon will be in Marrakech for the climate conference from 10/11/16 to 18/11/16.

⁴ <https://www.holyrood.com/articles/news/nicola-sturgeon-announces-£1m-funding-help-developing-countries-react-climate-change>