

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

Oral evidence: Net zero and UN climate summits, HC 144

Tuesday 1 December 2020

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Members present: Darren Jones (Chair); Alan Brown; Ms Nusrat Ghani; Paul Howell; Charlotte Nichols; Mark Pawsey; Alexander Stafford.

Questions 69 - 135

Witnesses

I: Claire O'Neill, Managing Director, Climate & Energy, World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

II: Peter Betts, Associate Fellow, Chatham House, and Professor of Practise, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment, LSE; Farhana Yamin, Chief Executive Officer, Track 0, Vice-Chair, The Climate Vulnerable Forum Expert Advisory Group, and Senior Advisor, SYSTEMIQ; Dr Emily Shuckburgh, Director, Cambridge Zero, and Reader, Environmental Data Science, University of Cambridge; Dr Jennifer Allan, Lecturer in International Relations, University of Cardiff.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Peter Betts [COP0002](#)]



Examination of witness

Witness: Claire O'Neill.

Q69 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's session of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee for our first hearing today on net zero and the UN climate summits, talking about Britain's co-presidency of COP 26. For our first panel this morning, we are delighted to welcome Claire O'Neill, who is familiar to many of us in Westminster as the former Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth and the first COP 26 president for Britain's presidency of COP, but who is now the managing director for climate and energy at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Good morning to you, Claire.

Claire O'Neill: Good morning. It is a pleasure to be giving evidence today.

Q70 **Chair:** I just want to start with some reflections from your time as the initial COP president. When you were appointed to the role, you said that we could have "the most ambitious COP ever". What did you mean by "ambitious" and why were you so confident that we could meet that?

Claire O'Neill: Would it help if I gave a one-minute summary of what COP is and is not? Until I became the president, to be honest, having been the Minister and attended several COPs, it was still not clear to me what COP actually did. The COP process—it stands for Conference of the Parties—was set up after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, a moment where the world came together and Governments came together and said that we have to develop in a more sustainable way. The first COP was held in 1995 with Angela Merkel as the president. COP is simply a gathering of representatives of Governments with one aim, which is to negotiate a text, as many UN processes and indeed the G7 and G20 meetings are. The whole process hinges on whether you can create a communique that essentially achieves consensus.

What the COP is not, or historically has not been, is a place for all the activities and ambitions that are going on outside Governments to come together, be challenged and added up. It is also not a process that has any legal mandation. After the attempts made in the early noughties to create something that was a legally binding framework, the extraordinary leadership of the French Government in the run-up to Paris basically showed that, in order to achieve a good outcome, you had to retreat from the idea of top-down measurement and anything that is legally binding, into a bottom-up and best-efforts basis. That was the way to get countries to participate effectively in this process.

Paris was this high point of global diplomacy in the whole history of COP. It had focused on delivering an agreement that was simply a recognition of the concern over climate change and a statement of intent to work together with three parts. The first is a requirement for countries to come forward every five years with a single statement—a nationally determined



HOUSE OF COMMONS

contribution—and then a five-year ratchet. The second is a commitment on fund flows because, of course, the big focus is on how much money the developed world can give to the developing world for both mitigation and adaptation. The third is a focus on action, on what is called real-world action, which always rather confused me because I was not quite sure how Governments were outside the real world.

Paris, extraordinarily, joined all that together. Since Paris, a whole series of negotiations happened, which, despite the best efforts of many very talented people, had not really achieved much. They had pulled together a Paris rulebook, a framework for how you deliver this, and, increasingly, helped by the IPCC reports, there was a growing drumbeat out in the world that this was something that was incredibly important.

That brings me to the point about the Paris COP being so ambitious. 2020 was marked as the year where we had to stop negotiating and start acting. This was the year where the Paris Agreement was supposed to come to life. It was my belief, having identified the opportunity for the UK to host the COP, that we could have a massively important role in pushing forward the delivery of these updated NDCs, closing the Paris rulebook and making sure heads of states attended but, almost more importantly, using this COP moment as the big tent to bring forward all of this growing ambition, commitment, investment and activity in the corporate sectors, in the financial sectors and out there in civil society.

That was the plan; that we would host this COP, we would use our track record in the UK of decarbonisation, of which we should be very proud, and that we would work like stink to not only deliver a successful set of negotiations—I am very happy to talk more about what that means—but also dock in all of these other parts of the puzzle that have been ignored for too long. They do not have a natural resting home in the COP process and we have to make one for them.

Q71 Chair: If that is your definition of what the most ambitious COP could be for COP 26, how likely do you think we are to achieve that, given where we are at the moment?

Claire O'Neill: One of our challenges was in actually getting a COP team together, and you may want to ask more about that. We were not well set up across Government to pull together an extremely effective COP team. My first port of call, when I became the President-designate, was to go and speak to the successful president of the Paris COP, Laurent Fabius, and ask what it is we have to do, and he shared various learning.

I wrote, because we apparently were not capable of pulling one together across Government, an action plan for COP 26, which I believe is still largely extant. I would be very happy to share that with the Committee as confidential written evidence because it sets out exactly what we needed to do both in terms of the negotiations and also in terms of the real-world action.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There were seven key points. The first was that we had to move from the vague definition of “Paris-compliant”, which can be anywhere from an outcome of 1.5 to 2 degrees and anywhere from an outcome of 2050 to 2099, to a much more manageable landing zone for countries and companies. We picked the idea of the net zero COP as the mantra. We needed to basically get as many countries, sectors, cities and states to commit to net zero by 2050 or earlier and really sharpen up this landing zone.

I brought in the net zero legislation for the UK. “Net zero” is a dirty phrase in some circles in the climate space because it implies that you can net off emissions by using natural carbon sinks or technological means of carbon removal and that you are not going to focus hard enough on emissions reduction if you do that. There is a raging debate that is still going on, but the point of this was that it was much easier to work to net zero as a landing zone, so this had to be the net zero COP.

We had to get every head of state to attend. One of the great successes of Paris was the extraordinary efforts made by the Americans and by the Europeans in particular to make sure that Mr Modi attended from India and that we had a really good head-of-state attendance. Since then, it has not been a must-do visit for many heads of state. Indeed, at the Madrid COP, I believe only 30 heads of state attended and some of those were there just for a few hours. We had to have this real way of getting it to the head of the politicians’ inboxes.

Q72 Chair: Can I come in on the point about heads of state and the team structure? We will probably come back to the detail of the seven points in further questions with you this morning. You will know that the structure at the moment is that there is the Cabinet Office COP team, which is working very closely at the moment with the team in the BEIS Department, because the Secretary of State for BEIS is the COP 26 president. BEIS then has this co-ordinating function across Departments and feeds back up into the Cabinet Office Committee, which feeds into the Downing Street Committee with the Prime Minister. I would be interested to hear your reflections on whether you think that is the most effective structure, and also specifically, in terms of the engagement of heads of state of engagement, what role you think the Foreign Office has to play, or is playing, in that process.

Claire O’Neill: It is entirely up to the Government how they want to structure their COP efforts. As long as those efforts are led from the top, are a whole-of-Government priority and play to whatever strengths we have externally and domestically, there is no right structure.

The challenge we have is that the COP unit was originally set up as an independent unit, reporting in through the Cabinet Office to the Prime Minister. I, as the president, was the first non-politician to lead it. That was exceptionally difficult for the Whitehall system to manage because, essentially, it descended into a whole series of turf wars about budget and influence that were being expressed both by Ministers and by civil



servants. The result of that was a view that this could not be done and that it had to be done within a Department and that BEIS, which was providing the majority of the budget, was the right place.

It is striking that the talents of the Foreign Office are very many. Having seen very successful COPs work when led by the foreign office in other Governments, I would like to think that those talents, and the role of the Foreign Secretary, which is enormous, are being used adequately at the moment. I cannot comment because I have not seen the latest, but I know that the diplomatic network we have is exceptionally strong and that the role of the climate attachés in that diplomatic network is enormously powerful.

Q73 Alexander Stafford: I would like to focus my questions on the role of the Prime Minister in all this. When you were COP president, what discussions had you had with the Prime Ministers that you served under about the summit? What was their level of involvement and interest? How easy was it to talk about this issue with them?

Claire O'Neill: We identified the opportunity to host the COP at the COP in Poland several years earlier. Basically, Italy, which was going to be the COP president, said, "We do not think we are going to do it", or there was a sense of that. One of the first people I phoned was the then Foreign Secretary, Boris, who is the current Prime Minister, to say, "This ball is coming loose. It is an extraordinary opportunity for us because we have this great net zero track record and this is a great opportunity for us to have a post-Brexit renewal". He was extraordinarily enthusiastic about that idea.

By the way, the BEIS civil servants adamantly did not want to host the COP and neither did the Treasury, and that took a lot of persuading. Working with both the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister May, who was also extremely positive about this, we were able to create a very compelling narrative. Both the previous Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister were very positive about the idea of hosting the COP.

There was a question about how much work was required and what was actually required to deliver a successful COP and how much it would require political leadership. It was striking, as I wrote in my letter to the Prime Minister, that, having set up the COP and having created the COP unit, the Cabinet sub-committee on climate did not meet once between that period and when my contract was terminated.

Q74 Alexander Stafford: You mentioned that various Government Departments were not supportive of COP. Why was that? What were the reasons against it?

Claire O'Neill: COP is owned by the parties. What that actually means is that COP is owned by the negotiation teams that represent the Governments. In some cases, like ours, the negotiation teams work very closely with their sponsoring Departments. In other cases, they will be, or



appear to be, diametrically opposed to what their Governments are actually saying in public. It is a very contentious and zero-sum process.

The view, when I first suggested hosting the COP, was that we would upset the negotiations apple cart if we were to host it because we are seen as this powerful northern country and that this would be very difficult. We managed to persuade people that that was not the case but one of the proposals I had for the negotiations was that we livestream them. It is extraordinary what is said and what is not said in those negotiation rooms and how far it is removed from the real-world demands.

Suggesting things like livestreaming the world's most important negotiations was very well supported by many but not supported by others, particularly those who have been involved in the negotiations for many years. I do not underestimate the importance of the negotiations but the COP is not owned by the citizens of the countries that the negotiators are sent to represent, in my view, and it should be.

Q75 Alexander Stafford: Moving back to some stuff about the Prime Minister, you mentioned in your resignation letter how surprised you were at the lack of involvement in some ways. What should the Prime Minister's role be in this? I do not mean what happened, but what would an ideal Prime Minister do to support you? How much free rein should a COP president have to get on with it themselves?

Claire O'Neill: Ultimately, the COP president is there to hold the gavel during the 10 days of the actual COP meeting. In theory, the diplomatic efforts and the leading from the front should be a Cabinet-led process with a very committed Prime Minister with, in particular, an extremely committed diplomatic focus. There should be an ability to engage with other countries and to be very closely involved, not just in picking up the phone once a week or every couple of months to have a chat with heads of state but actually engaging in what this is going to take. To give a case in point, there were conversations by the French Prime Minister around levels of military support and sales of particular goods and services to countries that may well have wanted to come forward with a less ambitious package at the COP.

It really is a whole-of-Government effort if we are to deliver something very focused. To his credit, the current Prime Minister does pick up the phone and does get involved. What has been lacking is the sense of this being job number one for the Government because, of course, both with Brexit and Covid, there are other extremely important jobs that need to be taken care of.

May I throw in a supplementary point that may be of interest to Scottish colleagues? There was a very strong view that this was an opportunity to show the UK's ability as four nations at its best—that we had four countries that were negotiating together but that had their own very ambitious climate plans. This was one of the reasons for the decision to



host the COP in Glasgow; there was a sense that this was a very strong unionist moment. The original work with both the Scottish First Minister and, if I may, previous Prime Ministers was really poor. We should have been going out there and involving previous Prime Ministers and the First Minister in an extremely serious diplomatic way, turning them into ambassadors for this exceptional event. There were some very petty conversations about why that was not a good thing to do, and I do chalk that up as a failing.

Q76 Alexander Stafford: Just picking up on that, are you saying that failing happened before the previous Prime Minister or under the current Prime Minister?

Claire O'Neill: It happened under the current Prime Minister's leadership.

Q77 Alexander Stafford: You mentioned what the role of the Prime Minister, in your view, should be prior to the actual COP event. What should the Prime Minister's role be at COP? You said that the COP president is holding the pen. What should the UK Prime Minister do, apart from glad-handing lots of nice representatives who come?

Claire O'Neill: They should be straining every possible sinew to ensure that we get the politicians that matter to attend, so the heads of state of the largest emitting countries; to ensure that we are working with our Commonwealth colleagues—an extraordinarily powerful bloc—to make sure that those heads of state attend and are well-treated; and use any opportunity to show the people of this country, who are paying for the COP—it is £250 million of taxpayers' money that we are spending—that this is something that is good for us to host.

I very much welcome the 10-point plan and the focus on green jobs. The original plan was to have a festival of green Great Britain—a four-nations COP, if you like, of course with Italy as our COP partner—and I am not aware of any plans for that process to go ahead. That is a really big missed opportunity.

Q78 Alexander Stafford: From some of your comments—I do not want to put words in your mouth—you seem a bit disappointed with the way things are going.

Claire O'Neill: There was a misunderstanding of what was actually required to host what is the most important diplomatic event of the last 20 years and possibly of the next 20 years. There was a cavalier attitude to what was required and there was a view that you could wing it with a few press releases and that that would all be fine.

The Prime Minister's former chief adviser phoned me up to explain that he did not believe that the COP needed a president. I explained that it was a UN statutory role and therefore we did need a president. There just did not seem to be any sense of what we were actually doing. This is a deadly serious diplomatic moment on which the future trajectory of CO2



depends, and I do not think that sense of gravitas had percolated through. I would like to think that it is starting to and hopefully, with the evidence of this great Committee, we can give that a big push.

Q79 Alexander Stafford: You mentioned the 10-point plan for the green industrial revolution and there have been quite a few other announcements in last week's spending review. Does that give you more confidence in where this Government are currently going when it comes to COP and climate issues? Now we are almost going through Covid, they can focus more on the issues. Do you think that this level of leadership at home in the 10-point plan is enough to make those conversations happen at COP to show that we are serious about climate?

Claire O'Neill: It is super-welcome. The 10-point plan is great and it is very much an extension of the green growth plan that we published in 2017. The whole-of-economy approach is fantastic.

I find it to be quite retail. There are lots of good things that people can put on their leaflets. The tough thinking about how we are going to build an energy grid that supports some of these rollouts—the underlying thinking—still needs to be developed. It is fantastic for us to show these net zero credentials and that we are serious but, in a way, the thing about COP is that the axis of disagreement is very much about developed northern economies that have gone through their industrial revolutions telling developing countries what to do and not giving them funding to do it. There is a very interesting diplomatic play in COP. You need to show that you are ambitious but you also need to show you are very committed to helping other countries with their transition. If I may, the axing of the 0.7% budget, which under Minister Stewart's role had turned very much into a support mechanism for climate mitigation and adaptation, is a signal that perhaps is not aligned with an understanding of the role that we have to play globally.

The other thing we are not doing enough of is engaging with the EU and others who would like to create trading regimes that have carbon border tax adjustments. That is the only way we will persuade the big emitting economies to decarbonise rapidly. I believe those have been rejected out of hand by those who are seeking our future trade relationships as putting up unnecessary tariffs.

While we are doing well at home, we do not understand enough the role that we have to play internationally to really deliver this successful pivot. It is not about the COP; it is about whether you can start to see the CO₂ curve start to inflect and go down.

Q80 Ms Ghani: I want to talk to you about the role of the president. You have just mentioned earlier that the role requires gravitas and how key and important the role of the president of COP is. You felt that possibly that was not understood previously. You may think it is still not understood now; you may want to comment. Do you think that the COP president is sitting in the right place and do you think the person holding that role has



the key qualities and skills required to do the job?

Claire O'Neill: The template for a good presidency, as I say, was what happened in Paris and the run-up to Paris. The advice from both the president and his chief civil servant at the time was that you need to relentlessly focus on the three or four things you want to deliver in COP and that that has to be your messaging throughout the whole year. That is what you have to do. Of course, that was what I was attempting to do, albeit in an unusual format of not having a Department behind me. There will be those who say that, with my desire to livestream negotiations and actually create real outcomes, I was perhaps departing too much from the role of presidents historically, and that may well be a fair criticism.

I cannot comment on the current president's capabilities. I know him as a former colleague who is highly dedicated and extremely committed. It seems to me that BEIS is swallowing an awful lot at the moment in terms of the Covid response and it is, I would imagine, very difficult to get enough mindshare out of the leadership team in BEIS to really focus on what the COP can deliver. Thank goodness, in a way, it is delayed, because it gives us an opportunity to refresh and, post the Covid wind-down, hopefully, we can do some more. If we are going to do this, we have to get very serious about the whole-of-Government commitment and the role of the president.

The president, as I say, holds the gavel. It may be that this is something that can be done between the highest echelons of Cabinet. What I would say, though, is that using the First Minister, former Prime Minister and former Foreign Secretaries as ambassadors could be enormously helpful in this process. I really believe that this is something that everybody wants to be a success. I would urge the Government to put aside petty politics and bring in those people who have played an incredible role on the world stage historically.

Q81 **Ms Ghani:** Do you think, considering all the issues that you have raised, that the COP president could be a standalone Minister? Do you think they will have enough power then to galvanise support from different Departments?

Claire O'Neill: Having tested that model, that is a recipe for massive Whitehall infighting, if I am totally honest. You have to get a Department and a Permanent Secretary, particularly ones with spending commitments with the COP, to be aligned. The idea of having a Minister of State host doing it or somebody doing it, as I was trying to do, with a standalone budget does not work in the current Whitehall structure. For me, it is something where you have a person who is there in charge of the negotiations but you basically now get the absolute SWAT team out there on the global stage amplifying this messaging and making sure it is a huge success.

Q82 **Chair:** Claire, if you had to put the COP president somewhere in Whitehall, where would you put them? Would it be BEIS? Would it be the



Foreign Office? Would it be the Cabinet Office?

Claire O'Neill: Gosh, you are inviting me to upset former friends and colleagues. The Department that feels to me to have continued its focus, particularly on the international diplomacy, is the Foreign Office. There were some excellent secondees into the COP unit, such as John Murton—former ambassadors who have been doing a great job. It feels to me that would be a possible shift. Having said that, it was quite disruptive. The transfer of presidency was not well perceived on the global stage. What we need now is to be creating a huge sense of confidence and momentum.

I have talked a lot about the diplomatic effort in getting countries to show up with their upgraded NDCs but what we have not really talked about is this real-world action. I made a lot of bad and some good decisions in politics. One of the best decisions I made was to hire Nigel Topping and Mark Carney as our climate action champion and our COP 26 finance champion. The work that they are doing is extraordinary in bringing together corporate commitments, states and cities and financial flows. That work may well sit best in BEIS; that is where the business support is.

Again, this is an opportunity to down some of the traditional Whitehall arguments about resources. If I may appeal to some of the external help, I was very keen to recruit talent, for example, who had delivered the Olympics for us so successfully, and we were barred from doing any external hiring for the COP unit. We were also subject to quite draconian headcount and various staffing metrics in a way that, for example, the no-deal Brexit unit was not. I felt then, and I feel now, that that was a huge mistake. I am pleased to see that the Prime Minister has appointed one of his friends as the net zero business tsar. Doing some of that internationally and really forming that SWAT team would be a great way to re-establish momentum.

Q83 Chair: To push you slightly further, you said there that it was not welcome when there was the change in COP presidency. Is the suggestion therefore that yet another change in the COP presidency at this stage would be a bad idea?

Claire O'Neill: Yes. We were lauded for wanting to become COP president and for working so closely with Italy. There was the level of ambition that we had set out, which I will send to you, in terms of what this COP needs to deliver. We had established a very high-profile group of friends of COP around the world and this was seen as absolutely game-changing. When the staffing change happened, that was a moment and the information about the lack of engagement in many parts of Government was not helpful.

The 10-point plan has restored a lot of that. The work that is going on in the natural climate space led by Minister Goldsmith is also really



HOUSE OF COMMONS

welcome, but we need to show the world that this is something that we are deadly serious about and want to be a massive success.

Q84 Alan Brown: Claire, if we go to when your contract was terminated at the end of January, one aspect you highlighted was that the UK's COP 26 preparations were miles off track. I just wondered if you could highlight a couple of key issues that could illustrate that. Could you also advise if you think that the Covid delay has actually been put to any beneficial use in terms of tangible gains since then?

Claire O'Neill: It may be the case that I was in too much of a hurry but I was very seized—*(Inaudible)*—with our early messaging and devote all of our attention to delivering that over the period we had remaining, which was less than a year because this was a very accelerated presidency.

We were very slow to establish the COP unit. The COP unit did what Whitehall often does, which is recreate itself like a little amoeba that grows so we did not have a COP action plan but we had invitations to set our year-end development goals. We did not have a communications strategy but we had a staff newsletter. We were just not focusing on what needed to happen.

That was amplified by the election and by the lack of engagement from the Cabinet. What we needed was the Cabinet to basically say, "This is a massive priority. Go away and sort out your infighting and just get on with it". That was not happening. I felt that, in terms of where we needed to be versus where we were at the end of January, we were miles off track.

Having said that, Covid has provided everyone with breathing space. It has allowed diplomatic efforts, particularly from the EU, to bring China to a much better place and it has delivered a new Administration in the States, which I think will be much more climate-positive. From that sense, the world has changed dramatically in terms of the likelihood of a successful negotiated outcome of COP. I hope it has given us a chance to establish ourselves a little more within Government.

I am afraid I cannot comment, Mr Brown. It has been a long time. I clearly speak to many former friends in the COP unit but I would not be able to comment on the level of progress towards the COP and towards the original action plan.

Q85 Alan Brown: It was quite high profile at the time in terms of what happened to yourself. What explanation were you given for the reasons of your dismissal? What was your response to this? As we know, a source in the COP 26 unit was reported as saying that you "seriously underperformed" as a diplomat, including at Davos and on a ministerial visit to India. Do you have a comment on that? I know you did the letter to the Prime Minister and you pointedly mentioned Dominic Cummings and dark ops. Is there anything else you want to add?



Claire O'Neill: I had just returned from the Raisina Dialogue with emails and texts from the ambassador in India saying what a successful visit it was and how much it had reset the conversation about climate. On the Davos work, I had been there with the Chancellor at the time and we had agreed that we were really moving. I do not know where that came from. I have no idea.

I was given three separate explanations for my dismissal, one of which was, "Whitehall cannot cope with this unit. You are treading on too many toes". The fact that I had been allowed to go to Davos when other Ministers had not provoked a lot of jealousy, so there were Ministers on the warpath. They said, "We cannot cope and we do not need a president so you have to go". I said, "We actually do need a president". "It will just have to go into BEIS then. Whoever is the Secretary of State can do it".

Then I was given an explanation that I had not treated my staff well. Several years earlier, one of my underperforming civil servants had raised a complaint that had been fully investigated by the Cabinet Office with nothing to find. I pointed that out to the Prime Minister and, of course, in light of the subsequent information about what behaviour is tolerated in the Cabinet, that was quite entertaining.

There was simply no explanation. I was terminated. I had a contract. There was no redundancy payment made. As is, I fear, the mark of the previous group in Number 10, it was accompanied by what attempted to be a public monsterring of my reputation. People who had worked with me and seen what we had delivered over the years out of that portfolio felt a bit incredulous about that. I was encouraged to sue for unfair dismissal and gender bias, because there are very few women involved in this COP process. That is not my style and it is not about me; it is about a successful outcome for COP. It was a sign of the extraordinary ineptitude and amateurishness of those who should have been doing a better job for the Prime Minister. It did not help our international reputation at all.

Q86 **Alan Brown:** In the same letter of response to the Prime Minister you described internal Whitehall battles, and you have touched on that quite a lot this morning. Are there any particular Departments that were in conflict? Was much of this driven by other individuals that were working for the Government?

Claire O'Neill: BEIS had a massive issue in that it was funding a lot of the COP. The core negotiations sit in BEIS and the Secretary of State and the then Permanent Secretary basically set up a shadow COP unit as did, I believe, the Foreign Office. There was a lot of lack of acceptance that this COP unit actually needed to be a place where all of this activity was put together.

The inexperience of some of those we hired in to lead the civil service part of the COP unit played out in poor management of those interdepartmental relations, and also very poor management of our relationship with the devolved Administrations. We ended up making



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some very large and costly errors between the Scottish and the Westminster Administrations in the actual delivery of COP and the policing presence, which was just not accepting what was happening.

I would like to think that has been resolved. I believe that relations are better and, of course, we are now committed to delivering this in Glasgow, which is a great thing for the city. Again, it was just not understanding that this was an Olympic-style event that we had to deliver and far more important in terms of the world's future trajectory. We were treating it a bit like amateur hour, despite my and many others' efforts to professionalise it.

Q87 Alan Brown: You will be aware that the Prime Minister called devolution Tony Blair's biggest disaster. Do you really think that at the top there is still a willingness to work with the First Minister of Scotland?

Claire O'Neill: I would not want to comment, Mr Brown. I am a unionist, as you know, and I think we are stronger together. Equally, I think that the Scottish First Minister has been a very effective advocate of ambition in the climate space. There have been some very good policies in all of the devolved Administrations and it seemed to me that this was an opportunity to actually work together. I advocated very strongly for the First Minister to be given a role and for former Prime Minister Brown to be approached to take a leadership role, and these ideas were rejected as preposterous.

Q88 Alan Brown: Can we go back to the Whitehall internal battles, et cetera? Are there any measures that you think could be put in place to improve cross-Whitehall co-ordination, both on COP 26 as well as climate change policy?

Claire O'Neill: I believe that the inter-ministerial meetings are now happening. I believe the Cabinet Office is taking a more effective role. As we have got more comfortable with this process, this is starting to move forward in a better way.

I have been thinking hard overnight because I knew you would ask this question. I attended Cabinet, clearly. Would I make it a Secretary of State position? I would do that on the basis of the climate recovery. It is not just about the doom and gloom that is associated with this; it is about seizing the economic opportunities that will accrue for cities, states and companies. We do not need to do that to do a successful COP; we should be able to pull together. We also have the G7 presidency to prepare for, so there are opportunities to cross-fertilise both of those with this very positive climate messaging.

I hope it has calmed down and that the units are working a little more effectively. Perhaps some of your other future witnesses will be able to reassure you on that point.

Q89 Paul Howell: I am going to go back to what you described earlier as the real world and come away from Whitehall a little. I want to talk about the



role of business. There are two dimensions to that. There is the impact that business is going to have on the negotiations and then there is the other side as to what business requires from the process in terms of trying to help. You have nicely digressed as we have gone through this, so I do not want to repeat some of the points, but it might be useful for you to elaborate on some areas. I know you have quoted about companies' ambition being greater than Government's at times. I wonder if you can just talk around that subject a little.

Claire O'Neill: We are in an evolutionary phase. It was an original construct of COP that this was all about Governments pulling levers and somehow we would have a series of regulatory alignments across the world that were legally binding with a global carbon price and that would all be great. I just think we are a very long way from that. We do not have the levers in the COP process to do that.

What we do have is a sense that now 70% of emissions are actually coming out of the corporate sector. The biggest emitting sectors are energy, oil and gas, cement production and heavy transport. These are corporate activities, by and large, either in publicly traded companies or in state-owned enterprises. There is therefore a sense that, when you pull the levers, you actually want businesses to start responding, and also subnational actors—the cities, the states and the metropolitan regions—who have many devolved powers that they can use.

This is partly what my new organisation does. We have been in the sustainability space for 25 years. Companies are not just setting net zero targets like Governments—in some cases, Governments have legislated for them—but they are setting the intermediary targets, the governance structure, the investment profile and the transparency of reporting that we need to hold them to account. Increasingly, providers of debt and equity and secondary trading organisations are focusing on companies with ESG credentials as a way of differentiating their cost of capital and their share price.

These signals are starting to emerge in the private sector that are so much stronger than the real signals that Governments tend to care about, which are ballot boxes in the democratic world. It is humbling, in a way, when you sit in the WBCSD council meetings and you hear the ambitions and the commitments of companies that are not in the EU or the UK, where we have a carbon price and an ETS scheme; they are operating in countries that have none of that infrastructure, but they are determined to do this.

I would not for a second suggest that this is all about the private sector and the markets; it has to be a private-public blend. The COP has nowhere really for that action and that ambition to dock. The action days are seen as a sideshow for the negotiators. The sense of, "What does this all add up to? What does this net zero private sector commitment mean? How do we amplify it? How do we use the best of the private sector's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

brain and innovation to deliver really rapid technology cost changes?" has not been focused on enough, and it is so massively important.

Q90 Paul Howell: There is also a development of that in terms of the opportunity to see good benchmarks. We all know that the private sector likes first-mover advantage and things like this. It is about trying to stimulate and share the good elements that the private sector sees to get more private sector engagement.

Claire O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. If I may share an example, the offshore wind sector deal that I negotiated was the world's first public-private deal, where we asked the offshore wind sector to come forward with its cost reductions and its supply chain involvement and to onshore manufacturing to the UK, but I set a gender diversity target of 30% female workforce. In return, we termed out the auction structure from the Treasury so we were able to give them a 10-year view of offshore wind demand, which dropped the cost of capital by half in that sector in a matter of months. It is incredibly powerful. We do not join up those public-private conversations nearly enough. As you say, companies are prepared to stand up and be held to account on this now, in a way that was not imagined in Paris six years ago.

Q91 Paul Howell: Is there anything you would like to elaborate on in terms of what business would require from COP to help them deliver on net zero? Is it a mirror image of what went on in the wind sector?

Claire O'Neill: Interestingly, there is a lot of work going on at the moment with organisations like WBCSD, the World Economic Forum and others to try to help sectors form these net zero sector plans. The other big known thing now is that it is all very well for a company to set their decarbonisation targets but you need the whole ecosystem to decarbonise—their suppliers, their logistics providers, their investors. You need to have this ecosystem approach. We are trying to replicate that sectoral approach globally and we would like to bring some of those net zero sector deals to the COP as a way of showing what can actually be achieved.

That is alongside very specific asks for Governments. Hydrogen is the miracle molecule that everyone wants to talk about now. We are not talking enough about hydrogen infrastructure and how we are actually going to store and transport hydrogen. Infrastructure is often very much a Government-led development priority. These conversations about what we actually need with specific countries in order to decarbonise will not happen at the COP. There is currently no place for those conversations to happen. The COP will be countries setting their ambitions and then business saying, "We can help you achieve it". I would love to think that COP could be one of those places where those ratchet conversations actually happened.

Q92 Paul Howell: Just taking as an easy example your comment on hydrogen, as you say, it is a flavour of the moment in terms of UK



conversations. Is that something that can be encouraged more globally? Is it something that is already out there that I just do not know about?

Claire O'Neill: The 10-point plan very helpfully had a good hydrogen commitment. We have been talking about hydrogen for years and this is something that I talked about a lot in BEIS. This is the only known way to decarbonise steel, cement and these hard-to-abate sectors. This is what you need for these high heat processes but green hydrogen, particularly created from renewable energies, is fiendishly expensive at the moment relative to alternatives, so we need a lot of innovation. We also need to work out how to decarbonise hydrogen production from gas.

It is a bit like the renewables conversation 15 years ago. Everyone says, "Yes, this is the answer", and we could make an awful lot of expensive mistakes with it. There needs to be a joined-up approach, which the EU is doing with its Hydrogen Council; there are lots of companies involved in that. I do not know what our level of involvement is with the EU conversations. I would like to think that was a very fruitful area, because we absolutely could collaborate very effectively there in the reduction of that cost.

Q93 **Paul Howell:** Something else you have touched on is the involvement of the Foreign Office and other parts of Government in the trade negotiations, trade envoy appointments and things like that. Can you talk about how that becomes an asset in this process?

Claire O'Neill: The UK's emissions are less than 1% of the total, and they are dropping very rapidly, as you know. One of the stats we used to use was that emissions were this low when Queen Victoria was on the throne. The EU is dropping its emissions substantially as well. China's emissions are the equivalent of America plus the EU. India's emissions are bigger than the OECD's. The battle for the change in the shape of the CO2 curve is not going to be fought in northern Europe but in the big developing countries of the world.

That gets to this problem about what the right levers are to pull and who are the right organisations to do that. We know that China is a coal-dependent country, as is India. I started the Powering Past Coal Alliance, but the ability of these countries to shift off coal is very difficult. Of course, they are producing goods for the West in that. The idea of having a carbon border tax adjustment that would penalise products made in high-carbon environments and also support domestic products that were being produced in these decarbonised ecosystems is really attractive. Indeed, this is being discussed in the US. When I spoke to John Kerry a couple of weeks ago, this was something that was on their agenda. It is also being discussed in the EU.

My sense is that the current focus in post-Brexit free trade arrangements does not include this and, indeed, it would be seen as a negative and as an additional tariff. Certainly, given our desire to forge these post-Brexit trade agreements, I would imagine that if we said to Australia that we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would like to add this into the free trade agreement, it would be met with a big resounding raspberry on both sides. I do not think this Government are serious about these carbon tax adjustments. For me, it is the number one tool that trading nations can use to encourage high-carbon countries to decarbonise, again with sufficient support and development help.

Q94 Paul Howell: Is there a conflict, Claire, in terms of the trading agreements? You used Australia as an example there. Obviously you want trading agreements with them but then, if you start to talk about things like food miles and the integration of transport costs into carbon cost evaluations, that all pulls it exactly in reverse and talks about, "Let us make it in our back garden", as opposed to extending supply chains.

Claire O'Neill: Yes. Again, I am not an economist and I am not a trading expert, and the last thing you want to do is prop up uncompetitive industries, but it seems to me that, if we have industrial clusters like the one led by Mayor Houchen in Teesside, which is making strenuous efforts to decarbonise and produce goods for the global market, those are more competitive if the fact they are being made in a lower-carbon environment is recognised. That is good for local jobs, it is good for transport miles and it is good for the climate. It gives the other countries an incentive to decarbonise. It is a bit of a win-win, whether you sit on the free trading or, as some call it, the protectionist part of the continuum.

Q95 Paul Howell: It is also a proper evaluation of the type of transport we are talking about. If you can bring it by ship a long way, it might be about which port in comes in to the UK, so, for example, whether it is going to Mayor Houchen in the port of Tees as opposed to arriving in London and getting trucked up on the road. It is the whole-cost evaluation.

Claire O'Neill: Yes, exactly. This is very important. If I may flag something for the Committee's attention, this is the other thing about the rhetoric versus the reality. We have made great noises about the global shipping industry moving to a much better place and there is a lot of innovation. The International Maritime Organization's meeting in the UK a couple of weeks ago did not suggest that this was an industry serious about decarbonising. Again, these proof points, as opposed to what people say, are what really matters. It is the same with the countries' NDCs and what is actually happening with their emissions. We have to keep holding people to account with their plans and their targets.

Q96 Chair: Claire, I am interested in the comments you have been making today about how the UN process is very much about communiques, diplomacy and getting some form of consensus and agreement, but you are talking about the real-world implementation. The assumption has always been that countries therefore lead that conversation. I do not know if you had any reflections on the spending review last week and whether that is ambitious enough for meeting our own target. Do you think there needs to be something else at the UN level around



implementation? If so, what should that look like?

Claire O'Neill: Yes, I do. I am conscious of sounding negative about the COP. I sat in all the way through the two weeks of negotiations in Madrid; I felt it was the right thing to do. The COP is stuck on some particular issues. I sat in one room where we were negotiating one of the sticky issues. We had 500,000 protestors assembled outside. We spent 20 minutes of the hour just arguing over whether the meeting could be termed an informal or an informal-informal. We waste hours of negotiating time on the colours of the greyscales in the reports that will support the Paris rulebook. It is shaming. I am ashamed that we allow that to happen. We have to inject that sense of transparency and urgency into the process and find a place for this real-world ambition and desire to work together to come in.

At the moment, the COP presidency transfers to countries and the president's agenda is whatever you want to do. In Chile, with the Chilean president, we had a big focus on the cryosphere and oceans. It will fluctuate year to year. We need to embed the action agenda, which is where the real-world stuff comes together, into the official part of the COP agenda. We need a reporting-back moment every year where the pledges that are made by companies, cities and states is added up so that we can see if we are on track or not.

Thank goodness we have the COP. It is the most massively important big-tent moment for climate. It is wonderful that these countries come together and is not to be underestimated, but we must use that to really force out not just ambition but action.

The thing that always terrifies me is that, since we started this process in 1991, emissions from energy have more than doubled. We have done an awful lot of talking and an awful lot of diplomacy, and that curve keeps going up inexorably. If we do not pivot this curve in the next five years, we are straight through 1.5 degrees, we are post 2 degrees and we genuinely do not know what the world's climate looks like at this point. That is why the desire to make the COP 26 such an important moment is still so relevant and has to be shared. If you can do anything to spread that across Government, I would be eternally grateful to you.

Chair: Thank you for that, Claire. Thank you for your time this morning. We appreciate you appearing before the Committee. Thank you to you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Peter Betts, Farhana Yamin, Dr Emily Shuckburgh and Dr Jennifer Allan.

Q97 **Chair:** Our next set of witnesses are Peter Betts, who is an associate fellow at Chatham House, a visiting professor at the LSE and, for a long



time, was senior counsel to the Cabinet Office on COPs; Farhana Yamin, who is a lawyer and CEO of Track 0, the vice-chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum Expert Advisory Group and a senior adviser to SYSTEMIQ; Dr Emily Shuckburgh, who is the director of Cambridge Zero and a reader in environmental data science at the University of Cambridge; and Dr Jennifer Allan, who is a lecturer in international relations at the University of Cardiff.

We are delighted to have all of you with us this morning. You just heard, hopefully, the last question from Mrs O'Neill there about the 1.5 or 2-degree landing zone and what that might look like for the world. Emily Shuckburgh, can I come to you first? Based on the emissions reductions pledges—the NDCs that we talk about in COP language—that have already been made, where do you think we are going to land? Are we going to hit 1.5 or are we landing more towards the 2-plus degrees above industrial levels?

Dr Shuckburgh: After the Paris Agreement, all the countries associated with that put in their pledges. At the time, it was estimated that that meant that we were roughly on course for something like 3 degrees of warming by the end of this century. More recently, we have had some really positive announcements coming from China with their announcement of net neutrality by 2060. We have a President-elect in the United States who is suggesting that he is going to try to encourage a net zero target for the US by the middle of the century.

If we start to look at the potential pledges and the pledges that are coming in now, that draws that number down closer towards 2 degrees but it is still quite a long way away from the Paris Agreement commitment, which, let us remember, was well below 2 degrees, with an ambition to reach 1.5 degrees.

Q98 **Chair:** What does that mean in terms of near-term impacts in the next 10 years? What does it look like for people when we talk about these temperature targets?

Dr Shuckburgh: We are already seeing the impacts of climate change here and now today around the world in terms of extreme weather events. We have seen heatwaves, floods and wildfires causing devastation around the world in Australia and California, in particular. The greatest concern, if we are in the zone of 2 degrees, 3 degrees or potentially more, is that low-lying coastal zones and islands become uninhabitable. We will see inland flooding destroying lives and livelihoods and we will see extreme weather resulting in the breakdown of critical services, in death and disease, in the breakdown of food systems and in severe water shortages. Many of those things are associated with migration but also with conflict. It is a critical set of impacts around the world that can come together.

The other thing that is a real concern, if we are starting to reach those higher temperatures, is the risk of really catastrophic and potentially



irreversible changes occurring. The sorts of things we are concerned about there are the vast ice sheets that cover Greenland and West Antarctica. Those hold within them huge stores of water, equivalent to meters in sea level rise.

I used to work for the British Antarctic Survey. The British Antarctic Survey, together with other colleagues around the UK and in the United States, have been conducting a field campaign looking at the Thwaites Glacier, which is a key part of that West Antarctic ice sheet. There is evidence that that may already be in irreversible retreat. If that West Antarctic ice sheet collapsed, it would put us on course for many meters of sea level rise. There are other concerns, for example, about the melting of vast frozen stores of methane in the Arctic. Methane is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. All these things becomes a greater risk at the greater levels of warming.

Q99 Chair: Peter Betts, you were involved for a long time in advising Ministers on these issues. What do you think would be an ambitious but realistic aim for COP 26 to try to bridge this gap?

Peter Betts: I agree with what Emily just said. The prospects for Glasgow and for raising ambition are much better than they were even three months ago. That is slightly strange in this Covid world but I think it is true. The Chinese announcement is hugely significant. It is the first time that China has adopted a target that is not just the summation of what they are doing anyway, as it were; it is a top-down role that is going to drive action in the Chinese system, so I do think that is very significant, as Emily said.

The new US Administration is very important, both because the US is the second biggest emitter and will need an ambitious commitment and because the US will use its heft, as it did before Paris, to put pressure on other emitters—its allies—to bear down on their emissions. The EU is in a pretty good place and will probably adopt a 55% target later this month.

You even have countries such as Colombia, which had a very modest intent for its NDC revision and its target revision but has just announced a much more ambitious target than people thought.

We can get a very substantial set of commitments in the right environment. We have seen the Chinese long-term goal. We have not seen its NDC yet. That matters more than anybody else, of course. We can get a very substantial step-up in ambition. If we cannot get all the way to a 1.5-degree trajectory, we need to harness all those real economy trends the previous speaker referred to and we need to think about how we build pressure for urgent further action after Glasgow.

Q100 Chair: Again on the previous panel, it was suggested we ought to be focusing on three or four things and trying to get those done really well at COP 26. What would be your number one top priority in the context of your answer just now?



Peter Betts: NDCs are the most important, but they need to be tied with other action that is going to accelerate further action. Long-term net zero goals are an important part of the picture. The work that Mark Carney has been leading on really internalising risk into investment decision-making can have a huge impact and we are seeing these shifts in decisions being made by companies and Governments all the time. The coalitions that have been put together on things like electric vehicles can have a powerful impact on mitigation.

What we must not lose sight of is many vulnerable countries are extremely concerned about impacts on them, so we do also need a very strong resilience and adaptation package for those countries. The UK has great strength, both in the public and private sector, in that area and we should really exercise leadership in that space.

Q101 **Paul Howell:** I will start with yourself, Jennifer. I would like to talk about COP 26 and what countries and country groups the Government should be focusing on for its diplomacy? Is it the big movers, such as China and the States, is about full inclusivity or is it something around the combination thereof?

Dr Allan: It is about inclusivity. The phrase used very often in negotiations is that it is a party-driven process. Leaving out countries because we do not seem to think they are important—it may be small-island states or the least developed countries—can undermine the quality of decisions that are taken, but also undermine the likelihood that any decision will be adopted, because every country has equal say. All decision making is done by consensus. I would say certainly the Alliance of Small Island States—AOSIS—the least developed countries and a coalition in Latin America called AILAC would be some key partners to work with.

Q102 **Paul Howell:** You would see that as more important than hitting the big numbers of China and the US.

Dr Allan: We are going to get China and the US regardless. They will certainly tell us what they think, and what they do matters extremely. The relationship between those two countries matters. It was key to getting agreement in Paris, but we cannot forget those smaller countries. They use the media increasingly if they feel they are being left out. We saw that in Chile and Madrid last year. They have also blocked decisions if they felt that they were not ambitious enough or if they were left out of the decision-making process.

Q103 **Paul Howell:** Can I just broaden the conversation and bring Farhana in for that as well, please?

Farhana Yamin: Thank you for inviting me to this session. I work very closely with a group of countries, which are now 48 in number, that represent 1 billion of the world's population. They are called the Climate Vulnerable Forum. The Climate Vulnerable Forum was set up, actually with British support initially, in the run-up to COP 15, which was back in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

2009, in Copenhagen. That was the COP that collapsed. It was meant to adopt what is now the Paris Agreement. We had to wait five more years to put the global negotiations back on track because there was such lack of consultation with the vulnerable countries. The 1.5-degree goal was put forward at the Copenhagen conference by over 100 countries, including the Climate Vulnerable Forum countries. It is actually 11 years to the day, almost, that that conference collapsed among acrimony. One of the chief achievements of the vulnerable countries at Copenhagen was to reference the 1.5-degree goal in the Copenhagen Accord, which was the two and a half pages we managed to adopt then.

I am saying this historically a little, because I see a real danger of some of the mistakes that we had learned from being repeated as we focus on the EU, China and the US and as we abandon, frankly, the concept that the COP president is, on the day that he or she is elected, an elected official representing every single party. The diplomacy, the ambition, the views and the actual interests of all of those countries must be balanced and equally held.

I am also slightly appalled, I have to say, that the word "realism" is being used to deny the reality of where climate impacts already are and that, by 2030, we may already be breaching 1.5 degrees. I want to reference the IPCC special report, which spelled out, again many years later, in detail, the huge impacts. As Emily has already outlined some of them, I will not repeat them, except to stress two that are very critical right now: water security and food security in the short term, apart from the impacts that she suggested over the longer term, such as sea level rise and collapse of major ecosystems, such as the Western Antarctic ice sheets and so forth, which we are imperilling as we delay and as we risk that narrow window of keeping to climate safety.

That is not a nice-to-have. I am slightly concerned. The Committee, everyone watching and all of the MPs should not think that 1.5 is some nice-to-have. We are beyond that conversation. We need to understand that realism involves understanding why the world's scientists and ecosystem need 1.5 degrees and that requires us to be at net zero around 2030.

My very simple manageable landing point, as Claire put it, for COP 26 is net zero by 2030. 2030 is the new 2050. That is all you need to remember. We have to phase out, especially in the richer countries, basically by 2030, and I hope that the UK will put forward an NDC with a clear plan that shows it is on track in the interim in this next 10-year period, which it currently is not. I hope it will follow the Scottish lead and put forward a target of something like 75% reduction, which is what we need for the UK to be aligned with 1.5 and for it to have credibility as a COP presidency. Thank you.

Q104 **Paul Howell:** I will come back to the NDCs in a second, but in the meantime I just want to continue on the discussion about inclusivity and



getting involvement. Peter, with regard to the challenges that are involved in getting high ambition and support from all these different blocs, bodies or individuals, how do you address all of the changes?

Peter Betts: If I have understood the question, first of all, on the scale of the challenge, I definitely agree with Farhana that we need to keep temperature increase below 1.5 degrees. If you look at what that requires on UNEP's medium scenario, the world would need to cut its emissions by more than half from today's levels by 2030.

Q105 **Paul Howell:** Sorry, Peter, to interrupt, as we will go all over the place in the subjects, but it is really about how we get the different countries and different blocs involved in this. How do we motivate them to participate as opposed to what the actual target is at this point in discussion?

Peter Betts: The EU is in a reasonably good place. They are maybe not reducing by as much as Farhana would like, but they will have a big step up in ambition. We should work closely with them. Clearly, the new US Administration is going to have to come up with an ambitious number for themselves. It looks unlikely the Democrats will take the Senate, so they are not going to be able to get full legislation through as they otherwise would have done, but we need a very ambitious reduction from them.

China, which is the biggest emitter, has announced this very promising, ambitious and positive step of a net zero goal by 2060. We do not know if that is greenhouse gas or CO₂. That sounds techy, but it is really important for the scale. There needs to be a continuing conversation between the EU, China and the US, with the UK. We need some bilateral conversations with some of the really big emitters.

I completely agree with Farhana that we need to work closely with vulnerable countries. The UK has done that a lot over the years, probably more than any other developed country. My experience leading negotiations for the EU was that if we did not have the vulnerable countries in the room, we got a worse outcome for the climate, because the EU would essentially get squeezed between the EU and the big emerging economies towards a low-ambition outcome. We definitely need to work closely with the vulnerables and that definitely means responding on their asks and priorities. I hope that gives a sense of how the UK should play it.

Q106 **Paul Howell:** I just want to hear Jennifer's take on that, because we started about making sure we get everybody involved. How do you think that can be best levered through the COP 26 event?

Dr Allan: Previous presidencies have found it useful to engage their embassies quite extensively and have regular conversations with as many people in-country as possible. I agree with Peter. Bilateral conversations with key countries and coalitions are useful. The French experience was also bringing in, at the time, Francois Hollande to be speaking with key countries and having a clear call with what is expected to bring countries up will be useful.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Everyone is on board. They have NDCs. The question is in what way we want those NDCs to be more ambitious. That might be tailored to countries, because for some countries it is unreasonable to be asking them to engage in reducing emissions when the key call is building adaptive capacity. Working with those countries around that, especially in a post-Covid era, will be key.

Paul Howell: It is different things for different places.

Farhana Yamin: Engaging all of the countries means listening, and that is one of the key skills of a COP presidency. The developing countries are also looking to this COP for a full delivery of the finance package that was agreed in Paris and had the \$100 billion pledge, basically, which has not been met and is still very inadequate from the point of view of only 20%, roughly, going to adaptation and a very small amount of that—only 14%—going to least developed countries. Most of the money is still going on mitigation and to richer countries within the developing countries, so middle-income countries and so forth.

It is about what is needed for countries to go away from Glasgow feeling that it was worthwhile to come and that they have not come yet again to sign, frankly, another suicide note and applaud the COP for doing that. That is what the countries I work with felt at Paris. The financial aspects, the inclusion of loss and damage in the Paris Agreement and the raising of ambition in parts of Paris are what gave them hope. When they are coming to Glasgow this time, all of those elements must be fulfilled and all of the NDCs must be tabled. The fact that we still do not know exactly when the UK will table it and what exactly it is is a source of regret and has actually slowed down and confused the date by which everyone else is submitting their NDCs. Diplomatically, the UK is not giving clear leadership signals.

I watched the ambassadors of the climate vulnerable countries and a very senior representative of the UK saying the timing of the NDCs was not important; it was their ambition. That is not the case. The Paris Agreement is very clear. The process for this year is very clear. Midnight on 31 December is the deadline, and that is when the vulnerable countries are asking every country to submit the most ambitious NDCs, because it is seen as a survival deadline.

It is not those countries that are not submitting their NDCs. It is the larger countries, which before Covid struck had not raised their ambition and had not got the preparations in hand to submit their NDCs this year. We have already had a nine-month delay and that is not a welcome delay at all. That is seen as an appalling delay that has happened and it should be made good very swiftly, with every single country submitting their NDC by December.

Q107 **Paul Howell:** I would like to think that progress was made on that. I will go through the NDCs now and come back to another couple of points I had earlier. Emily, would you like to contribute on NDCs, in terms of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

timing of things and the importance that the UK gets its leadership in place by establishing its position?

Dr Shuckburgh: The NDCs, as everyone has said, are critically important and the UK holding the presidency of COP has a particularly important role in terms of setting its NDC. It will be the first NDC that we ourselves as a country have put forward outside of the European Union, so that also holds an important point. I would just endorse what everyone else has already said: it is going to be a very important announcement and it going to be very important that we show both fairness and ambition in terms of our commitment.

Q108 **Paul Howell:** Do you think there are any policy changes that are going to be needed to make sure that we actually make whatever we put out there a deliverable NDC target?

Dr Shuckburgh: We have recently heard the 10-point plan from the Government, which speaks significantly to that.

Q109 **Paul Howell:** Is that enough, or do we need more?

Dr Shuckburgh: Just today the Prince of Wales's Corporate Leaders Group together with Cambridge Economics put out a study where they had estimated that that 10-point plan would be consistent with reducing emissions by around about 59% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, so nothing quite as ambitious as the levels that Farhana was indicating would be desired. If our ambition is to keep temperatures at that 1.5-degrees level as a maximum warming, then the science really does say that we need to be, as Peter said initially, halving our global emissions by 2030 over the next decade. It really is beholden on the developed countries to contribute very significantly to that reduction.

Q110 **Paul Howell:** Just coming back around in terms of the questions I started with, just in terms of countries' engagement and things, I would just like an observation, which is probably a fairly obvious one, as to the impact you think the change in the US President has made to the actual tone of the whole COP 26 agenda.

Dr Shuckburgh: The most important thing is that the current US President has withdrawn the US from the Paris Agreement; hopefully, we will see a reversal of that. If the US can reposition itself in a leadership role in terms of encouraging not only its own ambition, but encouraging ambition of other countries around the world, then perhaps we might be seeing a turning point in terms of a global response to climate change.

Q111 **Paul Howell:** Farhana, I will finish off with you, and throw another point in at the same time. We seem optimistic that the US is moving in the right direction in terms of that, but do you think that the UK is sending the wrong message by dropping the aid number from 0.7% to 0.5%?

Farhana Yamin: Yes, absolutely. That is one of the things I wanted to highlight. While many good things were signalled in the green industrial package and the 10-point plan, many other things, in terms of money,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are sending the opposite signals. For example, look at what the UK spends on domestically, going ahead with massive road building, while only giving £12 billion in terms of a green recovery package, compared with the £30 billion and the £40 billion that the French and Germans have put forward

Our spending domestically is not on target and the final insult, frankly, to the credibility of the UK saying that it wants to encourage a fulfilment of the Paris pledge is for the UK itself to cut its 0.7% target, saying, "We cannot afford it at this point and we cannot justify it to the British people at this point in time". I really hope that Alok Sharma and all the MPs who were appalled by that decision reverse that in time for when the COP convenes, and that we go back to being a world leader in terms of recognising that both Covid and climate chaos, which is already locked in for 2030, are going to lead to hundreds of millions of people being in poverty, additional to what we were expecting.

Q112 **Paul Howell:** Peter, do you want to come in? Maybe you could also make a comment as to the significance of the Government saying that they are going to double their international climate finance and spend £11.6 billion between 2021 and 2025.

Peter Betts: I would like to talk to that, because I agree with Farhana, but I will say something very briefly on the US first. The US change of Administration is hugely significant, first because the US will have a target, and having the second biggest emitter having a target does change the politics for other countries to show ambition. Secondly, the US will put pressure on all of its allies, such as Japan, Canada, Australia and others. It will also engage bilaterally at the highest level with Mr Modi, as Kerry and Obama did before Paris.

It is not all about the COP. We have many global processes that can be driven much more effectively if you have the weight of the US behind you. If you want to reform the way the multilateral development banks and the IMF work and how they incorporate climate, or if you want to have a global process on countries thinking about green recovery and embedding that in their recovery programmes when they come, or thinking about debt for developing countries, you need the US onside. China is by far the biggest creditor country, they charge near commercial rates of interest and they do not, by and large, do debt cancellations, so we need to try to further drive that conversation, and the US makes that much more possible.

On finance, reducing the 0.7% to 0.5% is a really bad signal and will weaken the UK's authority at this time. The UK has been strong in this area. We have not just spent the 0.7%, but we have prioritised adaptation and the poorest. We have had a much higher proportion of grant than others. We are in a position where it looks likely that developed countries collectively, as Farhana said, will miss the \$100 billion, and we are in the business of banging the table to get other donors to do more. This is not a good signal, and it also is a bad signal to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

our allies in vulnerable countries. Anything the Committee could do to bring to Ministers' attention reversing that, or at least limiting it to one year, would be very valuable.

Paul Howell: We have dropped from 0.7% to 0.5%, but if everybody was at 0.5% we would all be in a better place. We would start with the big numbers.

Dr Shuckburgh: We have been talking about green recovery, and I just wanted to emphasise that there is a lot of evidence now that investment in terms of green measures brings significant returns, as we are all, not just in this country but around the world, looking to recover from the coronavirus. It is estimated that, for each percentage point of GDP that you invest in green measures, you could expect to ultimately receive a 2% to 3% increase in GDP. That rises because of the benefits in the short term in terms of green jobs, but also the benefits in the longer term in terms of increased productivity and investing in assets that are more sustainable and more resilient into the future.

Q113 **Mark Pawsey:** Emily's remarks lead on to the issue I want to talk about, which is Covid and the impact of that on the green recovery. Covid has delayed COP 26. It has gone back a year and we know in the past 12 months emissions have not increased at the rate they might have done as a consequence of Covid. Can somebody, perhaps Jennifer, just confirm to us the position we find ourselves in? The World Meteorological Organization has said that emissions have continued to grow to a record high, but they are less high than they might otherwise have been. Can you just tell us what the impact of Covid has been before we look at the measures to deal with it?

Dr Allan: In terms of emissions, we have seen a blip where they go down and then, as you would expect perhaps, as lockdown measures ease they go back up. Ultimately, the reduction in emissions will not make a big difference because they are not structural emissions. You can imagine it is like every day is a weekend, essentially. It is about a 15% reduction, which shows just how much of our emissions are actually locked into the system. Even when we are all at home, we are still emitting 85%.

Q114 **Mark Pawsey:** Is that worldwide? How does the UK compare?

Dr Allan: I believe that is the UK, but Emily is probably in a much better position on this than I am.

Q115 **Mark Pawsey:** Emily, how have our emissions compared over the last nine months compared to the rest of the world?

Dr Shuckburgh: I do not have the exact figures, I am afraid. The 15% that Jen mentioned is probably the largest reduction we saw at any point in terms of those global emissions. My understanding is that it is more likely the year will end up with something like a 7% reduction in terms of global emissions.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There are two really important things to recognise there. The first is that that is emissions; what the climate responds to is concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Our concentrations of carbon dioxide are edging up towards 415 parts per million for this year and that is vastly outside the range that we have seen in the historic past. You have to go back 3 million to 5 million years at least to find carbon dioxide levels as high as that. They are continuing to increase rapidly.

The second important point is that that sort of scale of emissions reduction is the sort of scale that we need to be having not just in one year, but for every single year of the coming decade and beyond if we are to be on course for reaching globally net zero emissions reductions by around about the middle of the century. The challenge is going to be how we persist in those emissions reductions in a planned way rather than in the unplanned way that we have been experiencing over the last nine months, and that really does mean that we need to be seeing structural changes that lock in those emissions reductions.

Q116 Mark Pawsey: You spoke about that when you said that a green recovery would lead to a higher GDP than if we do not apply green principles. The Prime Minister has brought forward his 10-point plan. We can increase our economic activity by digging holes in the ground and filling them up again. Why should a green recovery entailing changing the way we do things necessarily bring about increased economic activity and GDP?

Dr Shuckburgh: There are probably three things that are really important: we want to create a more resilient future, because the last thing we want to do is set ourselves up for another one of the disasters that we have seen over the last year; we want to create a more sustainable future; and we want to create a more inclusive future as well. Together green recovery measures can support each of those different elements.

We know that currently, not just in this country but around the world, the first impacts we are really seeing affecting people's lives are the impacts on jobs. If we are wanting to look at how to set up an economy that is fit for the coming decades, we want to be investing in those jobs that are going to be fit for the coming decades. It is very clear that the trajectory that we are on, where the real opportunities are, are in terms of green jobs.

I come from the University of Cambridge, and around the university there is huge, exciting research going on in all the green technologies of the future, whether that is in terms of battery storage technologies, looking at new construction materials to replace concrete and steel with more natural construction materials or looking at new forms of clean transport. There is a big programme here looking at how we can deliver carbon-zero aviation, for example. There are huge, exciting opportunities and that is where the jobs of the future are going to be. If we can invest now, not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

just in the jobs but also in the skills and training to support those jobs, that is where we will see those long-term benefits.

Q117 Mark Pawsey: You have referred to manufacturing, but we have a very service-based economy. How can we make our service-based economy greener and how will that help?

Dr Shuckburgh: Part of that is about creating a more circular economy. It is about a very common-sense thing: if you just waste less, that is just a common-sense good thing to do. That is feeding into creating a more sustainable economy at the same time.

The other aspect that is really important, which was probably somewhat less addressed in the 10-point plan than the straight technological side of things, is looking to support nature. That is another area where we could be investing in significant new jobs, in perhaps supporting a new national nature service, for example. One of the things that many people have really appreciated over the last nine months is the benefits of being able to experience our natural world, going out into green spaces and actually being able to benefit from nature in that sense, but nature itself can be deployed to help tackle the climate challenge. We can look to be restoring our peatlands, for example; they can be, if not treated well, a source of carbon emissions, but, if we look to restore them, they can be acting as a sinker for carbon emissions and helping us reach those carbon targets.

Q118 Mark Pawsey: Peter, if I might turn to you, what is your view of the measures that the Government have announced to build a recovery post Covid? Are the objectives that the Government set sufficiently in line with climate ambitions? How do we sit in relation to other countries in the world? Is our ambition to use Covid as an opportunity greater than other areas, or are there other countries that are moving faster than we are?

Peter Betts: If I may, I will say a few words about what this means internationally first and then come to the UK. What matters more than what we do is what the emerging economies do, of course, as others have noted. Increasingly we have a development path that is available for countries that is low-carbon and that is not more expensive. Renewable energy is increasingly cheaper than fossil fuels. Electric vehicles will soon be cheaper. We are not asking countries to do something that is against their interest. There are often major political economic and other barriers to moving in that direction.

The second thing is that lots of countries around the world are thinking about stimulus packages anyway for macro reasons. I am not an economist either, but we need to get the economies rebooted. There has been a lot of spending so far. A lot of it has rightly been on health, propping up incomes and so on, but as we move out of the crisis, there is a focus on how we reboot the economy. I completely agree with Emily that how that money is spent is hugely significant. If countries essentially go back into the high-carbon economy, they are going to lock themselves



into stranded assets. We have to try to have that argument with them, and win that argument.

The analysis has been done. Vivid Economics did some analysis that suggested that most stimulus packages so far have not been very green globally. Germany, France, the UK and the EU were a bit of an exception. They were not wholly green but they were more green than neutral, as it were. We have done a little bit better, but there is a lot further to go and we need to try to persuade some of the big countries internationally. I am not demonising China—they are a very big economy—but they are building new coal, and they are building it at home and abroad. We need to try to build the case as to why they should build other kinds of infrastructure. They will manufacture it anyway; whether it is coal plants or whether it is renewable energy, it will be manufactured in China, so it is at least as much a political economy choice for them as a straight commercial economic choice.

Q119 **Mark Pawsey:** Farhana, picking up on Peter's point there, how do we encourage developing economies, including China, to go down a greener route? We can always say, "Look at us. Aren't we wonderful? We are doing the right thing", but how can we get China to invest in renewable energy and to use more wind power than to encourage the development of coal as a fuel in their own country and the countries where they have influence?

Farhana Yamin: The short answer is by example. When we stop subsidising fossil fuels, when we absolutely raise the share of renewables to its very maximum and when we put more into the green recovery part of the stimulus package, others will follow.

Q120 **Mark Pawsey:** We are doing that, are we not, and the evidence is that others are not following?

Farhana Yamin: Peter and Emily hinted at this, but let me be more blunt: around double the amount of money is going into the dirty business-as-usual economy—the economy that has got us to the ecological precipice point. £205 billion is going to fossil fuel industries, broadly speaking, and £135 billion is going to the clean economy.

Mark Pawsey: This is around the world.

Farhana Yamin: This is one of the trackings that is done. WRI has more figures. We are still going in the wrong direction very fast. The point I wanted to make is actually we are still in the UK, sitting here in London, at the heart of the global finance economy. We have a huge leadership role. I hope Mark Carney and many others who have been trying to get finance to essentially divest from the old economy and invest in the new economy will speed that up.

We have to ask the City of London, our banking sector and our investment community to stop funding the dirty stuff ourselves. That includes our banks, CEOs, pension funds and local authorities. We have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to do that, and the more we do that, the Chinese will follow. They are looking more at what we do rather than diplomatic efforts. That signal that the end of the fossil economy has actually happened is the most important thing that we can do after Paris. Paris sent that signal that this is what we were going to do. We have to send that signal that we have done it and that the tide has turned in finance, investment, our pension funds and all of our money. Follow the money, and we have to do that as well.

I am afraid that UK's spending round this week has not shown that. It has not shown a real understanding, and this is where I feel that the Government need a cross-party approach to this. This intense cross-party collaboration is also one of the strengths of the UK and why the Climate Change Act 2008 happened. We should get everyone in to come and give their time and talent, such as Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband. Some of the Ministers who really played an outstanding role raising with developing countries and who understand global finance can support the UK presidency team. They can really rally round, and we can have a very different atmosphere from the kind of atmosphere that we had in Paris and Copenhagen.

I feel at the moment, frankly speaking, that we are on a train crash to Copenhagen. We are going to miss the \$100 billion target. We are going to miss the 2-degree target by miles. We have to accept the reality that is facing vulnerable countries now, of huge loss and damage mounting up, and a massive debt crisis in the middle of it. There cannot be a successful outcome unless we really centrally understand the magnitude of that challenge.

Q121 **Mark Pawsey:** You accept that the UK is travelling in the right direction. Is it other countries that you would like to see do more?

Farhana Yamin: The UK is not travelling in the right direction. We keep saying nice things, like, "We welcome this. We welcome that", but it is too slow, it is too little and it is disjointed right now. I hope that my testimony here can help ring the alarm bells of what the UK really needs to do to step up to this challenge.

Q122 **Mark Pawsey:** Jennifer, is what the UK is talking about in the 10-point plan inadequate, as we have heard from Farhana?

Dr Allan: Rather than thinking about a 10-point plan that is disjointed from other announcements and other plans, we need to look at mainstreaming climate considerations across Government and across the spending that we may need to do.

Q123 **Mark Pawsey:** Is that not happening already?

Dr Allan: I am not sure that the spending review necessarily supports that, given that we are building roads, which create fewer jobs than, say, retrofitting homes to be more energy-efficient.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q124 **Mark Pawsey:** Does building roads not enable goods to get to market and stimulate employment and GDP?

Dr Allan: Yes, if they are open enough and we are not all stuck in our cars in a traffic jam.

Q125 **Alexander Stafford:** I have a question to Emily about COP and public awareness of the importance of COPs. How much do the public know about COP and, even more, how much do they actually care? We talk about it a lot and it is important to talk about it, but what is your view on how the wider public view COP?

Dr Shuckburgh: I suspect you do not need me to tell you that most people probably have not even heard of COP 26 or know what on earth it means. I am sure that you all speak to your constituents and the last thing that trips off their tongues is COP 26. While there is broad awareness in the public around climate change—a recent survey by YouGov said that 87% of people said that they broadly understand climate change—when you start getting into more of the jargon associated with it, so net zero for example, many fewer people really understand what that means. It is 36% of people or something.

I suspect, or I certainly hope, that over this coming year people will become much more aware of the fact that we in the UK are hosting the next big climate conference in Glasgow next year. I have conducted studies previously looking at how people receive most information, and media is of course a significant source of information for many people. The media, rather understandably, has been very dominated by stories of Covid over the last year. Let us hope that we are moving out of that, and will do over the coming months, and we will see an increased focus around climate change.

There is very strong concern in the population around climate change, and that is undiminished by the current Covid crisis. Again, similarly, YouGov polling recently showed that two-thirds of the population say that they are as concerned, if not more so, about climate change in the context of Covid.

Q126 **Alexander Stafford:** The question is whether we need the public to be aware of COP 26? Is it important, in your view, or is it more that it is a nice addition because it is nice to talk about climate change? Does it make a single bit of difference to the negotiations going on whether the public know or do not?

Dr Shuckburgh: Who knows whether or not it makes any difference to negotiations? What is really important comes back to some of the points that have been made already about inclusivity and some of the points that Claire Perry was making in her witness statement in the previous panel. It is really important that the broader public are included in these discussions. This is something that, as we full well know, is an issue that is going to affect all of society, and not just today's society but future societies as well. That we ensure that people in this country and around



the world are represented and included in those negotiations that are going to be so central to shaping their futures is critically important from a fairness perspective, but also from an efficacy perspective. At the end of the day these big, grand global targets are going to be implemented on the ground in communities, affecting people's lives and livelihoods, so it is essential that people are involved in the decision-making associated with that.

Q127 Alexander Stafford: Looking back to other big events we have hosted recently in the UK, the Olympics being the obvious one, there was always around the Olympics a big buzz about the legacy of the Olympics and why we are doing it; there was that big train. Is there going to be a legacy, in the UK anyway, on the public engagement with climate change, and should that be a key aspect of how the UK engages with COP 26? Should there be a legacy and what should that be?

Dr Shuckburgh: There is a huge opportunity for the UK to use this. If we were not delivering that associated with hosting the COP, then we would be really missing something. In the university sector, which Jen can speak about as well because she is part of this, we have created a network of UK universities to help support our activities in the run-up to COP 26, and we hope beyond that as well.

One key element of what we are doing there is focusing on wider public engagement, recognising that universities across the country are very important parts of their communities in the towns and cities in which they are located. We have been looking at what local engagement activities, over the course of the next 12 months, we can help support to bring in a much wider community. In Cambridge we just hosted a climate change conference—it was virtual, unfortunately—where we had a huge number of community groups engaged in that. There was a huge interest from the community to be engaged in talking about these issues, so I really hope that this is an opportunity.

The other voices that are critically important, which we are similarly trying to empower through this universities network, are the youth and student voices. We have seen in this country and around the world how much enthusiasm there is from young people to make their voices heard around this topic, which is so central to their futures. Making sure that we are engaging them, but more importantly empowering them, to make sure that their voices are heard in the run-up to this big climate conference is also really important.

Farhana Yamin: Can I just add one example? Although most of my life has been in these COP meetings, the biggest learning that I have done in the last year is to support community-based groups taking forward climate action, not just through education and campaigns, and to embed that in the high street. In Camden, with the support of Camden Council, we took over a disused café and converted it into a pop-up climate action hub, which brought together the social justice people and all of the local groups. That model, which is called Think and Do, because everyone has



to think and do something differently, is a really good example. Camden has said that it will roll it out across the whole of Camden, but as a legacy every high street and every village should have a Think and Do space, where climate action and social action come together and people discuss that.

That would be a fantastic legacy: for every single high street to reflect what Paris and the sustainable development goals mean over the longer term, and for the COP 26 not to just come and go as a circus and leave nothing behind. We should embed climate emergency actions on our high streets, converting disused premises, which will also create a local sense of community as well as local jobs. That is what we are trying to do. We are working on that at the moment and it is something that would be exciting for the COP 26 presidency team to talk about.

Q128 Alexander Stafford: There is one last question, probably to Emily, about this. Over the last year or so, the Government have had to communicate a lot, more than probably at any other time, about Covid, complex missions, what we are doing and all that stuff. What lessons can be learned from the Covid crisis that we can put to the climate crisis about communicating with the public and making sure messages are known and understood?

Dr Shuckburgh: A common aspect is that, both with regard to Covid and with regard to climate change, there is a need to communicate quite complex scientific information. To the extent that there are lessons that can be learned around that, that is very important. One of the key aspects that we have learned over the course of the last nine or more months is the importance of transparency and of being really open with all the information and statistics. That is clearly critical.

Mostly it comes back to the last question that we just spoke about. One of the things that has been a key lesson from the last nine months is the importance of communicating in ways that are relevant to particular communities and really engaging those communities in the decision-making process, as we have just been discussing. So much of how we actually go about implementing climate change is going to be done at a local community level, as Farhana has just been giving some examples of, so bringing that communication down to that local level is going to be a key element of how we effectively deliver net zero as a country. If there is a key lesson from the last few months, it is probably that.

Q129 Alan Brown: If we go back to the practical preparations and co-ordination for the COP 26 conference, Jennifer, do you think the presidency is on track with its practical preparations for the conference, and is there anything in particular that would give you cause for concern?

Dr Allan: I would definitely have given a different answer a few months ago. It is a very difficult thing to do right now, because these COPs involve 25,000 people or more and people coming from all around the world, not just diplomats who could easily be vaccinated but community



HOUSE OF COMMONS

leaders, mayors and business leaders. In less than a year's time, to invite that sort of number to Glasgow will be very difficult, even with vaccines.

I know that the presidency is in conversations with the secretariat. There are also think-tanks that are doing analyses of various online meetings held at UN bodies to get lessons learned, but what we need soon is clarity on how the meetings will be scaled back, who will be invited and how to ensure that inclusivity, given that fewer people will be coming to Glasgow than originally anticipated.

Q130 Alan Brown: If we take a step back, pre-Covid, do you think the presidency had been on track to be able to put in place a successful COP, had it been held in the planned timescale without the events that happened?

Dr Allan: All the contracts were in place. The venues were secured. It feels like a long time ago. If I remember correctly, there were conversations about how many of the venues could be used for the COP versus profiling some of the UK and Scotland's activities, but at a very practical level a lot of logistics were in place. If there is something that the UN does very well, it is the travelling show that is COP.

Q131 Alan Brown: If you look at the bigger co-ordination and the policy bits, from your observations are the Government co-ordinating effectively with its presidency partner, Italy, the devolved Administrations and perhaps Whitehall? We had some scathing observations from Claire O'Neill, but I wonder if you can give a perspective, looking at it with your view to international relations.

Dr Allan: I have never seen an arrangement like the UK has with Italy before. This idea of co-hosting is a bit unique. Usually, one country will do a pre-COP and then the other country will do the COP, and those are co-ordinated but relatively separate, so this is a bit unique. It seems like there are regular conversations happening and that is useful. It is a bit unclear, though, what exactly Italy will be bringing beyond the pre-meeting. I can say from my position in Wales that the Welsh Government would like to have a little more regular conversations about the COP with the UK Government.

Q132 Alan Brown: Do you have any suggestions as to what effective co-ordination would look like, particularly with the partner presidency, Italy?

Dr Allan: It will depend a lot on when we can actually have meetings. There is always a subsidiary body meeting that happens six months before COP, and that is very important to move issues forward. That has not happened yet this year either. The pre-COP is very important to co-ordinate with Italy, because that is when Ministers pre-discuss a lot of the issues and it can really help lay the groundwork for a successful COP. Regular communication and a very clear set of shared two, three or four asks of Ministers to bring them on board with a small set of important issues will be important with Italy.



Q133 **Alan Brown:** It has been suggested the UK might publish our nationally determined contribution on 12 December. How important is that as a building block going forward?

Dr Allan: It is vital. If there is one thing that a presidency needs, it is credibility. No party will publicly say anything against the COP president, but, as Peter said earlier, our job as COP president is to be banging on the table to get countries to do more, and we can only do that if we have done it ourselves.

Q134 **Alan Brown:** Does anybody else feel an urge to comment on that?

Farhana Yamin: I have been to 22 of the last 25 COPs, including the first COP, and it is normal for there to be co-ordination issues, turf issues and ego issues, so we should not beat ourselves up too much about that. The most fundamental thing is that real leadership means listening to what those 194 parties want to happen at this COP, and to recalibrate and rebalance the official agenda, as well as the thousands of people who are contributing in other ways, including CEOs, the finance industry and so forth.

It is not clear to me that the UK presidency currently has a handle on what the official core business of the COP is this year that it must deliver and what it must get right and hand over to essentially what will be the African presidency and the Asian presidency that will come in COP 27 and COP 28. No COP presidency ever solves all of the issues that require attention. I am not sure that they have a real handle on that.

The core thing that people are looking for is the NDCs, which are supposed to be submitted by the end of this year. If those are not adequate, which will be shown in February 2021, in the synthesis report that the secretariat has, what is it that the UK presidency will be able to do to put us on track to the Paris goals of finance, adaptation and ambition towards the 1.5 and 2-degree targets? For me, it is not clear that they really understand what to do in February next year and the run-up to the pre-COP and subsidiary body meetings.

Why do we need heads of state? Is it that they are going to increase their own NDCs that they submitted nine months ago, or are they going to launch yet more new things? Are they going to negotiate the market rules and market-based mechanisms? I do not think so. Are they going to put more money on the table? It is not clear to me that the presidency team at the moment really understands those very big-picture things.

I feel, as an outsider, from what it looks like to us vulnerable country folks, that people are waiting really for Brexit to happen before figuring it out, and that will be leaving things quite late. There is not a second to lose, and I hope that the December summit, which is coming in two weeks' time, helps give a real clear vision of what the UK will be doing in partnership with Italy. We need the Italians, because, frankly, this will be the first time next year where we have to do so much of the diplomatic



HOUSE OF COMMONS

heavy lifting on our own and not with the EU. That is an additional challenge, so the quicker they can work out that relationship as partners, the better.

Q135 **Alan Brown:** When is too late? You have talked about February being critical. When is too late to actually pull things together in terms of these vital negotiations and understanding what the key asks are?

Farhana Yamin: Things will be a lot clearer when we get to February and March. There are many more diplomatic meetings that are smaller, which take place and are usually on the diplomatic calendar, and it will be absolutely vital to bring the vulnerable countries, which are, broadly speaking, 100 countries, into the heart of the negotiations, because they are the ones who in the end push for the highest ambition. They are the canary in the coalmine. It is they who have the ecosystems that are most critical, and so they are the driving force of the credibility of the process. If they are not included and if the issues that they are raising right now are not included and discussed in those meetings, then this inclusivity narrative will fail.

I will give just one example. The 48 countries of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, chaired by Bangladesh, are prioritising loss and damage as a major topic for COP 26. The youth coalition, which just had its mock meeting now, has written a letter saying the same thing; that is the global youth of the world. When I say that the most important thing right now is for the presidency team to be listening, that is what they should be hearing and thinking, "How can we act on those demands? How can we make sure that we hear that demand, we do something about it, we put it on the agenda, we make some progress to it and we hand over stuff to COP 27 and COP 28 that we cannot manage to do at COP 26?"

I do not really hear that at the moment. I hear a climate realism denial that 1.5 degrees is still a nice-to-have and that it does not really mean anything, and a denial of the impacts that are already being felt in those countries, which will be compounded by what they are facing with the debt crisis, frankly, that is coming up and the loans that they are going to have to start paying back.

Those are the things that I feel need to be at the front and centre of the diplomatic web right now, between now and March. We will then get to the technical negotiations in June and I am sure there will be many fights, but things do bed down. It is still early day, but the COP team has all our support. They have all of the support of all of the parties, and they represent and are the officers of all the parties. That is what I want to stress again and again. They have the support of all.

Peter Betts: I agree with much of what Farhana says, but there are two things that it is really important to understand about the COPs. The first thing is these targets from countries may well have been put forward well before the COP. I was the EU negotiator when we, with the vulnerable countries, wanted an ex-ante assessment of what was a fair contribution;



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we wanted a negotiation about draft NDCs that countries put on the table. We were fundamentally not backed by a combination of the big emerging economies, the US and others.

What we have had in the first round was NDCs brought forward well before the COP, and that is it. It would be great if we could get some kind of conversation about a collective ambition-raising during the course of 2021 on the basis of the draft NDCs. That would definitely need a sustained push from vulnerable countries for that to happen, because the big economies in the past, particularly big emerging economies, have been emphatic that once they have put their number out that is it, and that does have implications for the COP. A lot of the action could be over well before Glasgow happens.

The second point I would make about the COP is that having the COP presidency should not just be about the COP itself. It should be about how you use the platform and the authority that you have as COP president. The UK also has the G7 presidency next year. Our partner, Italy, has the G20 presidency. We have the scope to push some really big issues, particularly if there is a positive US, in other fora.

Some issues are better pursued in non-COP fora. If you want to talk debt, as Farhana mentioned—I agree with her—it is probably not something you are going to make most progress on in the COP; it is a Finance Ministers' issue. If you want to have a process about green recovery and how you really get Finance Ministers to think about how they embed these considerations in their recovery programmes, you need a finance ministry process. I completely agree with Farhana. We need to make sure vulnerable countries are part of all these discussions in different configurations.

When Claire talks about trying to make the COP be the vehicle for everything, I am not sure that is the right track. There is really significant real economy action happening. Is that going to be accelerated by making it into another COP process? You can acknowledge it and celebrate it in the COP, but thinking how you might practically help it and reinforce that action through the COP is an open conversation. I personally would be open to ideas on how you could actually do that in a way that was not going to tie it in red tape and bureaucracy.

This is also important for the public engagement point. A lot of those big decisions might have been taken well before the COP, so we need to think about how we engage the public around those decisions as well, and not just that COP meeting.

Chair: This Committee is going to be scrutinising the COP process over the next year, so there will be plenty more opportunities for us to speak on these issues as details emerge and we get closer to the COP conference at the end of 2021. We ran over a little, so thank you for bearing with us. Thank you to Peter Betts, Farhana Yamin, Dr Emily Shuckburgh and Jennifer Allan for your contributions this morning. Thank



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you to my colleagues on the Committee.