HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: International Climate Negotiations: COP30, HC 1427

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Mr Toby Perkins (Chair); Olivia Blake; Julia Buckley; Carla Denyer; Barry Gardiner; Sarah Gibson; Alison Griffiths; Chris Hinchliff; Dr Roz Savage; Blake Stephenson; Alison Taylor; John Whitby.

Questions 39 - 53

Witnesses

III: Tom Evans, Senior Associate, Global Solidarity Levies Task Force Secretariat; Clement Metivier, Senior International Advocacy Adviser, WWF UK; and Rachel Solomon Williams, Executive Director, Aldersgate Group.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Evans, Clement Metivier and Rachel Solomon Williams.

Q39 **Chair:** We come to the third of our three panel events today, looking ahead to COP30. I am pleased to be joined by Tom Evans, senior associate from the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force Secretariat; Clement Metivier, senior international advocacy adviser at the WWF; and Rachel Solomon Williams, executive director of Aldersgate Group. All three of you are very much welcome. I will start with Sarah Gibson for this panel.

Q40 **Sarah Gibson:** Thank you all very much for being here. First, I have a generic question, which I will let you all answer in whichever order you think is most appropriate. What should the UK's focus be while it is at COP30? Where can the UK demonstrate a leadership role, and where should it focus?

Rachel Solomon Williams: Hello, everyone. For those who are not familiar, the Aldersgate Group is a membership organisation for large businesses, primarily, and other organisations, making the case that environmental progress is absolutely one with economic progress.

I thought that Nigel Topping's distinction between negotiating priorities and other implementation priorities was helpful. From a UK perspective, the negotiating part should be pushing others to set strong NDCs. Of course, we have a great platform on which to do that. The implementation element of that is making sure that we have published a strong Carbon Budget Delivery Plan, which is due next week. That is perfect timing to use as a platform to say that we have set a strong framework ourselves and now other countries need to step up to the mark.

The other negotiating element is around adaptation plans and pushing forward the UAE to Belém work programme in support of that. We encourage the Government to press on that.

The last part is delivering on the Global Methane Pledge. Obviously, some very good work has been done on that in the past. I believe that the UK Government will publish its own methane plan soon, so again that is a fantastic platform on which to go into COP and encourage others to do the same.

Clement Metivier: I am happy to come next. First, thank you very much for having me today. I should probably start by saying that it is positive to see that the Prime Minister has confirmed that he will be attending COP. That does send a strong signal that climate change is being tackled in the UK as a national security and national prosperity priority.

In terms of expectations for what the UK could be delivering at COP30, I will focus on issues related to deforestation because COP30 will happen in the Amazon. It is the first climate COP happening in the Amazon. The UK

has a strong platform to play on that topic, first because it did a lot at COP26 with the Glasgow leaders' declaration on forest and land use. More than 140 countries endorsed that declaration. The UK is also one of the co-chairs of the Forest & Climate Leaders' Partnership. The UK has that legacy from Glasgow and that credibility to act on forests.

What does that mean, to be a bit more concrete? There are four elements. One would be for the UK to work with Brazil and other countries to elevate deforestation to the top of the agenda at COP30 and support a landmark agreement to phase out deforestation and conversion this decade, in a similar way to how there was an agreement on fossil fuel phase-out and transitioning away from fossil fuels two years ago in Dubai at COP28. That is the first element.

We discussed earlier the Tropical Forest Forever Facility. That is a bold and critical initiative. The UK should invest into the TFFF and make that announcement at COP30.

Then, there is the issue of the UK walking the talk at home and delivering this due diligence regulation and announcing that ahead of COP. That very much works as a bit of a package between TFFF on one side—the investment—and then the regulation on the other.

Last but not least, the UK should also announce a strong international climate finance budget, with nature being prioritised in that budget, as it is already the case now. Maintain that commitment.

Tom Evans: Thanks for having me here today. I am sorry I cannot be there in person. I work for the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, which is a diplomatic initiative led by the Governments of France, Kenya and Barbados. It is looking at ways to raise new climate finance, specifically from innovative sources—levies on polluting sectors of the economy—and using the revenues from that to build international climate finance.

Finance is one of the top priorities for this COP and for the UK. Last year at COP29, of course, there was the negotiation on the new climate finance goal—the $1.3 trillion goal that we need to deliver by 2035. The Baku to Belém road map was talked about earlier, but this year is about taking the first steps on delivering on that promise, and showing concrete and tangible delivery. As was just said, coming forward with the UK's climate finance will be important.

I would like to profile one initiative, in particular: the premium flyers solidarity coalition. This is coming together as we speak. Nigel Topping spoke earlier about clubs of the willing and coalitions of champion countries coming together to make progress by themselves. This is one such example. It is a coalition that looks specifically at premium flyers and introducing levies on business class, on first class and on private jets, to target the wealthiest and most polluting and then increase contributions to climate finance. The UK could join this coalition at COP30 and show that it is looking at new ways of raising climate finance.

Q41 **Sarah Gibson:** Thank you, Mr Evans. You have answered my next question, which was whether you thought the UK should join exactly that premium flyer levy.

Moving on, what leadership role should UK and international civil society, businesses and investors take at COP?

Tom Evans: It was talked about earlier, with what Nigel Topping said about the action agenda and what non-governmental institutions can do around leaning in and demonstrating leadership. The finance agenda has been a challenging scenario, where we have seen some financial institutions under pressure to roll back on their commitments. COP30 does offer this opportunity to renew the efforts of champions.

In terms of the innovative finance agenda, it would be interesting to see how polluting sectors of the economy acknowledge that they have a greater role to play in addressing the climate damages that they have caused over the past decades. The "polluter pays" principle sits at the heart of what I am focused on at the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force. It will be interesting to see if these industries and sectors can start to come forward and engage constructively, or if they continue to pollute without paying the cost of it.

Clement Metivier: I agree that the action agenda is an exciting space. The Brazilian presidency of COP30 is trying to bring this agenda closer to the negotiations, and non-state actors have a big role to play there. Also, for organisations like WWF and many others—businesses as well—we need to show the benefits of the transition towards net zero and a climate-resilient future.

A lot is happening in that space. To give you a bit of an example, WWF recently published a report called "Pounds in Pockets", which looks at the benefits of implementing policies in some sectors in the UK, such as power, home heating, land use and agriculture. We are trying to put those proposals on the table and get them taken into consideration by the Government. Non-state actors have a big role to play in being propositional and showing what can be done, what the benefits are and how they can work for the citizens and voters in the UK.

Rachel Solomon Williams: I will talk about the role of business. Climate change is a huge source of material risk to businesses now and in the future, so they are mindful of the importance of tackling climate change through the work that they do. At the same time, they have played an important role in mitigating emissions right across the economy, so we cannot do this without business playing a leading role. For the most part, they really want to do that. Cross-economy businesses are keen to play the part that they can.

But you have to say it openly: businesses are there to make a profit; they exist to return to their shareholders. If there is a market failure around certain interventions, they just cannot move fast enough. That is

where the role of policy comes in. Businesses are keen to do more and need to, for every reason—also because of the opportunities we just heard about—but there needs to be a policy framework that makes it fair for all businesses that want to do that, creates a level playing field and enables the fastest to go faster.

Q42 **Carla Denyer:** I have a little follow-up question on the theme of what the UK could and should be doing. With decisions expected soon on licences for the Rosebank and Jackdaw oilfields, and COP rapidly approaching, how important is it for the UK Government to lead by example on fossil fuels by making sure that no new oil and gas wells are opened?

Clement Metivier: Looking back at COP, a commitment was made at COP28 a couple of years ago to transition away from fossil fuels. The UK NDC is quite ambitious if you look at the target for 2035. Steps have to be taken domestically on the phase-out of fossil fuels. It would be an important signal. Bringing that to COP is also critical in terms of the credibility of the UK and the timing. So yes.

Rachel Solomon Williams: I would say a couple of things. First, consistency is vital. If we want to continue to attract investment here for the decarbonisation agenda, we have to show that the Government are completely serious about that and that investment decisions and licensing decisions are consistent with that overall approach. That applies to new oil and gas fields as much as anything else.

Separately, we know that the best fossil fuel opportunities have already been exploited in the North sea. We need to help those communities transition into new jobs. There is a perfectly fair concern about people who work in those industries and making sure that they are protected and supported in transitioning. Making sure that there is a proper strategy for alternatives is the most important thing.

Tom Evans: One potential avenue to explore on top of this would be to look at how we introduce taxes on the oil and gas sector in the UK to help fund some of the things that were being talked about in terms of a just transition and the managed transition. Of course, existing tax regimes are in place, and we have things like the energy profits levy, but we could be introducing them on a permanent basis and using that revenue—which could be in the region of billions—to fund a just transition and other causes, like resilience and decarbonisation.

Q43 **Chair:** Even without introducing new levies, we have had over many recent Budgets no increase in fuel duty whatsoever. As a starting point, would you call on the Chancellor to increase fuel duty in this Budget?

Tom Evans: The purpose of the levies we are talking about is to raise climate finance for developing countries, as well as a share that could support action domestically. It is important that we look at them and how they can be done in a progressive way that targets the wealthiest and the

most polluting. I have personally not done extensive work into this, but I imagine there could be some political concerns around the equity of that decision. It is challenging, of course. Many environmental groups would point out that it acts as a fossil fuel subsidy, and such subsidies are seriously problematic for our transition. We need to be redirecting those towards the green transition. But the task force have not looked into vehicle fuel duty.

Q44 **Alison Griffiths:** Moving on to forests, this first question is primarily to WWF and Aldersgate but, Tom, feel free to chip in if you have anything to say. First, to meet the goal of halting and reversing forest loss and land degradation by 2030, what progress would you like to see at COP30?

Clement Metivier: We know that forests are critical for climate goals. They absorb up to one third of greenhouse gas emissions. They provide livelihoods for 1.6 billion people. So they are critical. They are also critical for supply chains for food systems. With this COP happening in the Amazon, there is a big opportunity to put ending deforestation front and centre on the agenda of policymakers and decision makers.

The first outcome that we could expect from COP is this agreement on phasing out deforestation and ecosystem conversion this decade. That would build on the commitment to halt and reverse deforestation that was agreed two years ago in Dubai. Obviously, if we look at the evidence, this is not happening. Deforestation is continuing. We do need more from Governments and other stakeholders, which is why putting this issue to the top of the political agenda at COP30 is critical. We know that President Lula will feature the issue of forests at the leaders' summit, for example. That is important. That is the overall agreement, and it should be reflected in the formal outcomes in the negotiations, so that it is not just a declaration or a statement, but will be included in the formal negotiations.

The second big outcome that we can expect is on TFFF, the Tropical Forest Forever Facility.

Alison Griffiths: I will come in and ask a separate question on that. Perhaps hold your horses on that for a second.

Clement Metivier: Okay. That is the second deforestation-related outcome that we will be watching for at COP30.

Otherwise, it is also the action that countries are taking at home to tackle deforestation, which brings me back to the issue of the due diligence regulation on forest risk commodities in the UK. We do want to see countries coming up with actions at home that they can showcase at COP to show that they are serious about halting and reversing deforestation.

I have one final thing on this point. We have this commitment to halt and reverse deforestation, which is great, but countries are not necessarily explicit about the big systems that have to be shifted for that to happen.

When I think about COP, that is why I think about the three Fs: forest, food and finance. This is about mobilising or transforming the food system and the finance system to be able to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. We want to see that framing visible at COP so that every time we talk about deforestation, we see what it means for food systems and what it means in terms of finance being scaled up for forests and being shifted away from activities that harm ecosystems and forests.

Rachel Solomon Williams: That was a very comprehensive answer. I will just build on it around the supply chain side and forest risk commodities. Many businesses are located in many markets around the world. They have multi-dimensional supply chains and also multi-dimensional customers. The more that those approaches to forest risk commodities can be aligned among different jurisdictions, the easier it is for these things to be implemented by businesses. The example we see is that the UK and EU have diverged slightly in what they are proposing, which is enormously unhelpful. The more that they can be aligned, the faster we can move.

Q45 **Alison Griffiths:** Tom Evans, was there anything you wanted to add on that subject? No? Thank you.

The next question is specifically to WWF and Aldersgate. How important is it that the EU and the UK move swiftly to implement their respective forest risk commodities legislation, and what challenges does it present?

Rachel Solomon Williams: Building on what I said, it is very important. It has been on the table for a number of years now. I know that the technical details are complicated because of the long list of possible commodities that might be included, each of which have their own stakeholders and markets. Making sure that that list is developed in the right way and that all the possible unintended consequences are considered is important. But it has been a long time. It is possible that the UK Government are waiting to see what the EU will finally do, because they have been delayed as well. That is just not acceptable any more. We want to see both of those move forward as quickly as possible.

Clement Metivier: Yes, I very much agree. There has been a lot of uncertainty for businesses in terms of legislation in the UK and the EU being delayed. Businesses do want certainty. There is also a realisation that voluntary commitments on deforestation are not enough, so there is a need for regulation. Actually, many businesses in the UK are calling for regulation and for stronger policy signals from the Government. For example, the Retail Soy Group and the supermarkets are signatories to the WWF Basket. Aldi, Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Waitrose are all calling for Government action on deforestation. So there is definitely appetite from the private sector to see some movement.

Once again, COP30 does offer a great opportunity for the UK Government to make an announcement. We know that the Prime Minister will be

there, and we see that as a potential win that the UK could put on the table at this Amazon COP in Belém.

Q46 **Alison Griffiths:** I have a final question to all of you. I will go to Tom Evans on it first, so that you do not get a surprise. To what extent is the Tropical Forest Forever Facility a game changer as an innovative financial instrument to support forests?

Tom Evans: Again, it is not a priority area of the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, but I echo what has been said about the importance of this innovation for unlocking a scale of finance to address the problem of tropical forests and their conservation. Given the amount of political capital, and ultimately financial capital, that is being rallied around this, it is a top priority for COP30. As has been said, the UK does need to respond ambitiously to that.

Alison Griffiths: Thank you. Clement, I know you have particular views on this, so I will let you close. Rachel Solomon Williams, is there anything you would like to add?

Rachel Solomon Williams: I will defer to WWF on this.

Clement Metivier: TFFF is definitely quite an innovative and bold instrument. The idea is to mobilise in total $125 billion to keep forests standing, with $25 billion coming from Governments, typically, and $100 billion coming from private investors.

What is important about TFFF is that it is not an aid fund; it is an investment vehicle. Sponsor Governments would act as investors and would provide capital, and that would be repaid over time. That makes it an attractive proposal for donor Governments. The facility would also pay tropical forest countries directly, with a proportion also dedicated to indigenous peoples and local communities, who are the stewards of biodiversity and tropical forest. That is very important. That would create a very durable incentive to keep forests standing. So it is a really new and innovative proposal.

We know that Brazil is very much on board. Brazil has already put money on the table—they announced that in New York a few weeks ago. We think that it will definitely be a key initiative at COP30, and we think that the UK Government should announce an investment into TFFF at COP30.

Alison Griffiths: Rachel, is there anything you would like to add?

Rachel Solomon Williams: No, thank you.

Q47 **Chris Hinchliff:** I have a follow-up for Rachel and Clement. You have both spoken positively about supply chain action to reduce deforestation through domestic forest risk commodities legislation. I think you were here earlier to hear the comments of His Excellency, the Brazilian Ambassador, who expressed considerable scepticism about that legislation. How do you respond to his comments, if you were here to

hear them, and what can be done to mitigate that scepticism from countries like Brazil?

Clement Metivier: I guess the way I see things on supply chains is that at the end of the day it is all about a bit of a package. I see that package as having two elements: the regulation element and the financial support element. COP30 is an opportunity to make progress on that package. TFFF would be the financial incentive on one side, and then on the other side would be the EUDR—the EU deforestation regulation—and the UK due diligence legislation. Altogether that makes quite a compelling case for action on supply chains. But, obviously, if you take only the regulation or only the finance, something might be missing at the end. I would very much consider those things as a package.

Rachel Solomon Williams: I agree with that. I guess no one has come up with a better idea, and we absolutely need to take action on these issues as quickly as possible. Something that has made it easier in recent years is digital information and the transfer of digital data. It used to be the case that if you were trying to track supply chains, for any of these different commodities, working out where your original product had come from was almost impossible. These days you can add digital stamps to different products and see how they travel through a supply chain. Managing these systems has become a lot easier than it used to be. That should give us confidence that it is possible. We do not really have an alternative.

Q48 **Blake Stephenson:** I will ask some questions about the finance road map. All witnesses this afternoon have highlighted the importance of unlocking private finance. I might ask all of you to comment if you want to, but how can COP30 help mobilise private finance? Would you like to start, Rachel?

Rachel Solomon Williams: I was having a conversation with one of our finance sector members before this session. They said that they were not sure that "unlocking" is a very helpful phrase because, at the moment, investment will flow to where the returns are. We need investment to flow to where the problem is, and that is not necessarily where the returns are at the moment. There is a lot less investor confidence in global south markets, untested technologies and that kind of thing.

We need a change in how we think about financing to redirect those flows, almost. It is not that there is money sitting there trying to get to those projects at the moment; there is insufficient confidence that they will return on that investment. Using public finance as a seed and as a leverage is a fantastic starting point and is absolutely necessary. But working with global south countries to help them develop financial tools and understand how investment works at a much deeper level will also be vital, as will making sure that they have capacity.

One previous witness mentioned London as a financial centre. We can offer that expertise in how to structure financial and investment

instruments in cases like this. By bringing all that expertise to COP, we can offer it to the complete stakeholder landscape around financing. It is not straightforward, and it is not as simple as opening the door and here it goes.

Blake Stephenson: Interesting. I do not know if our other stakeholders have any comments. Maybe Tom?

Tom Evans: Not so much on the private finance side.

Q49 **Blake Stephenson:** While you are online, I was quite interested in the things that you were talking about earlier in answer to Sarah Gibson's questions about the levies—"polluter pays", premium flyers—and perhaps introducing taxes on oil and gas to fund just transition. Would you mind unpacking that a little more for us and describing what analysis you have done about how much can be raised? Critically for our constituents, if the Government were to raise those, what would the impact be on the UK economy?

Tom Evans: There are different options on the table, as you have outlined, and the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force has looked into that. The premium flyers coalition is probably the most mature proposal that is being developed by a group of countries. That is because, first, the UK already has levies on aviation, in the form of air passenger duty, which raises about £4 billion a year in Government revenue. Roughly £1 billion of that is coming from levies on premium flyers. Potentially, increasing the existing system, or introducing a rate on first-class tickets, could raise additional revenue. There are assumptions around what the rate would be and how much of that revenue would be allocated internationally, but either way we are talking about hundreds of millions that could be potentially unlocked from this option.

The benefit of this option is also that, because you focus solely on premium flyers, it has a minimal negative economic impact on the economy and on the sector, because the vast majority of people fly economy. Most people do not even fly and, if they do, it is perhaps once a year. So this is firmly targeted on those who can afford it, so it really does minimise the economic impacts.

For some of the other options, we have done some analysis on the global scale of financing that could be unlocked. For instance, even in a coalition of the willing format, a levy on the extraction of oil could raise as much as $85 billion a year by 2035, with a levy rate increasing over time. Similarly, if a financial transactions tax—which the UK has—was adopted across major financial markets, with a levy at the same rate as the UK, of 0.5%, you could raise about $105 billion a year. The scale of the finance can be quite significant. Of course, part of that could then be retained domestically and serve benefits domestically, as well as there being an allocation internationally.

Q50 **Blake Stephenson:** Interesting. From a COP30 perspective, do you want

the UK Government to go into COP30 looking to achieve these things?

Tom Evans: The priority for us would be focusing on the premium flyers solidarity coalition and exploring whether the UK could join. The rationale around this is clear. As much as private finance will be important, there is a real and urgent need for new sources of public finance and concessional finance because private markets will not be able to fund everything that we need in developing countries for the transition and, importantly, for things like adaptation, and addressing the impacts of climate change—loss and damage. This concessional finance gap is important, especially in a context where many developing countries are not able to take on more debt and are facing high levels of debt servicing. The revenues from these levies could be well placed to address things like adaptation. Again, the UK working with other countries to make progress on this and unlock those untapped sources of finance could have a transformative impact.

Q51 **Blake Stephenson:** My final question is for Rachel. To come back to private finance for a moment, successful financial products are underpinned by confidence, clarity and certainty around the public policy framework. What additional certainty is required to unlock—I will use that because I cannot think of another one—private finance so that we can meet these climate goals?

Rachel Solomon Williams: A lot of that is at domestic level. Countries vary wildly in the way they approach climate legislation. Many countries now have some framework legislation, following the UK's excellent example, but the implementation varies a great deal. Following the leaders who have put in place clear long-term trajectories and put policies behind those will be absolutely vital in bringing this forward. I know it is difficult, but some global south countries—this is widely discussed—have an opportunity to leapfrog some of the problems that we face in industrialised countries and can go straight to low-carbon solutions immediately, which is a fantastic opportunity as well.

Q52 **Blake Stephenson:** Recognising that all countries are at a different place and in a different space, and recognising the UK as at the leading edge, is there anything further the UK needs to do specifically to improve clarity?

Rachel Solomon Williams: Hang on to the Climate Change Act, but also make sure that the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan sets out what is needed from each sector and how the policy will support that. The current Government understands the need for clarity and is trying to do that in a number of sectors and to unblock some of the barriers. The planning system is talked about very much as something that needs to improve if we want to build out the necessary energy infrastructure.

Keep the narrative consistent and make sure that when Ministers are making statements about different policies, the outcomes are all aligned. That is true across nature as well. Increasingly—this is going down a bit of a rabbit hole—make sure that nature and climate are thought of as one

issue to work on together. Nature provides a lot of climate adaptation benefits. It also offers investment opportunities and mitigation. We could get better in the UK at really integrating that story and being confident about continuing to tell it. That is what will keep investment here.

Blake Stephenson: Clement, I do not know if you want to say some final words on that point before I close my questions.

Clement Metivier: Yes, maybe to build on the integration of climate and nature. There is, for example, the issue of transition planning and the plans that private sector companies and businesses are developing and delivering. There is a need to integrate both climate and nature as part of those plans, and then to have the Government mandating businesses to put those plans in place. We have a lot of great commitments and pledges, but now is the time for delivery and implementation. Having those transition plans would be important, and they should integrate both climate and nature.

Q53 **Chair:** Ms Solomon Williams, I cannot finish without touching on your point about the Climate Change Act, and particularly the current political narrative about its impact on investment confidence. Clearly, it is possible that the next general election will be won by a party that wants to get rid of the Climate Change Act and go further and faster away from the consensus that has previously existed. That is a political choice, but in the current climate, what impact does it have on the UK's ability to attract investment and on people's ability to persuade their shareholders that they should invest in these markets, when things are uncertain moving forward?

Rachel Solomon Williams: First, we are not the only country with this problem. Compared with many other countries in the world, it is still looking pretty good in the UK. We still have the institutional framework that supports investment into the climate transition, and current Ministers have been clear that they want that to continue. By comparison, it is still an attractive proposition.

The concern about what might happen in 2029 and the policy implications of that is significant. If you think about the enormous opportunity for renewables developers, in particular, and about the amount of investment that flows into this country all the time into those technologies, it would be incredibly bad if that were to change significantly, and very significant for our growth opportunities. There would be implications for communities as well and for those who are benefiting from the jobs associated with the green transition. It is a ripple effect all the way through the economy. Investors are looking carefully at that at the moment and are mindful of the political risk. It is that comparison with the rest of the world that saves us from having a significant problem at the moment, but we do need to hold the course as much as possible.

Chair: Mr Evans, Mr Metivier and Ms Solomon Williams, thank you very

much indeed for the evidence you have provided to us today. With that, we will draw this panel, and indeed this session, to a close.