

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Climate diplomacy, HC 1465

Tuesday 4 November 2025

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Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Alex Ballinger; Phil Brickell; Dan Carden; Richard Foord; Uma Kumaran; Abtisam Mohamed; Sir John Whittingdale.

Questions 1-42

Witnesses

[I](#): Professor Corinne Le Quéré CBE, Professor of Climate Change Science, University of East Anglia, and Member, UK Climate Change Committee; and Clement Metivier, Senior International Advocacy Adviser, World Wide Fund for Nature.

[II](#): Peter Hill CB CVO, Chief Executive Officer, COP26, and Co-founder, NorthStar Advisory; and Professor Charlotte Watts CMG, Executive Director of Solutions, Wellcome.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Corinne Le Quéré and Clement Metivier.

Chair: Just before COP30, which will take place in Belém, Brazil, the Committee is taking evidence on the issue of climate diplomacy. We have invited expert witnesses on two panels to share with us their views on what the UK's priorities should be for this COP, and how Ministers can get the most out of the conference. We will start with the first panel. Could you give us your names and a few sentences about yourselves?

Professor Le Quéré: My name is Corinne Le Quéré. I am a Royal Society professor of climate change science at the University of East Anglia. I have also been a member of the UK Climate Change Committee since 2016, and I was the founding president of the French equivalent—the High Council on Climate—until last year. I am a former author of IPCC reports that establish the state of climate science, and it may be relevant that I have attended several COPs—six in total—as a climate science expert.

Clement Metivier: Good morning and thank you for having me. I am Clement Metivier and I work at WWF-UK. I work in the international advocacy team, which is the team that leads on our engagement with UN processes, including the climate change negotiations process. I have attended all COPs except one since Paris, so this is the ninth one for me. I have also been working on the biodiversity negotiations—the equivalent of the climate negotiations but on the nature side of things. It is great to be here today.

Chair: It is very nice to have you. Just to confirm, you work at WWF—the World Wide Fund for Nature?

Clement Metivier: Yes.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you. Professor Le Quéré, what are the major priorities for the UK delegation at COP30 and how are they going to achieve those goals?

Professor Le Quéré: The major priorities are to support the whole process, and to provide certainty to the direction of travel and credibility to the process itself. The UK is supporting the Brazilian presidency in its management of COP, and its priorities for COP are to move the global climate action agenda, which means not only engaging countries in the formal UN process that will be discussed at COP, but engaging sectoral coalitions and non-state actors in the same thing.

The climate action agenda needs to detail the path forward for implementing action. That is on the implementation side. This will include a road map for mobilising finance, particularly from the private sector. The Brazilian presidency is making a push for protecting forests with its tropical forest forever fund, which is going to be launched and needs detail on its implementation. The UK is supporting that process based on its credibility at home, particularly its credibility from successfully decreasing

its emissions while growing its economy over the last decades, particularly in the years since it put in place its Climate Change Act.

- Q2 **Chair:** That brings me to my next question. During COP, the politicians on this Committee might be standing on a doorstep with a member of the public asking us, “Well, what is Britain doing in COP?” Britain always says it is a leader in fighting climate change, but in what way can Britain show that it has a leadership role in Belém?

Professor Le Quéré: The UK has every right to claim that it has been leading fast on actions on the ground. The UK has cut its emissions of greenhouse gases by more than half since 1990—very few other countries have done that. The UK also established the Climate Change Act in 2008, which frankly is a masterpiece of legislation because it established a framework to make sustained progress in tackling climate change over the long term, with a goal—now set at 2050—to achieve net zero in territorial emissions, and successive carbon budgets established for five years at a time.

The Climate Change Act has helped to mobilise private actors in particular to line up the industry and the economy of the UK. Many other countries have replicated the Climate Change Act, in more or less strong flavours, so the UK can really help in the international process by claiming that credibility, by demonstrating to others that it is possible to tackle climate change while pursuing other economic goals, and by showing how the UK has done that through its legislative process.

- Q3 **Chair:** A number of UK parliamentarians are going to COP. What role can parliamentarians play?

Professor Le Quéré: It is—

Chair: Sorry, I am going to ask Clement first, but if you have anything to add afterwards, please do.

Clement Metivier: Parliamentarians have a very important role to play in working with officials on the ground—with the UK Government team—to lay out what the priorities might be. I will try to give you a few. First, it is important to remember that this is the first climate COP to be hosted in the Amazon. Parliamentarians have a role to play, in that COP in the Amazon, in elevating the issue of deforestation and the linkages between nature and climate. That is something that will resonate with the country of Brazil and with many of the delegations and communities that will be present at COP. The UK should be working with Brazil, for example, and other countries to ensure a landmark agreement on phasing out deforestation and conversion at COP. There is a role for MPs to play in terms of pushing those issues.

COP is also an opportunity for stakeholders to come together. There will be MPs from a range of other countries, so it is also an opportunity for you and others to connect on what is happening on the ground with climate change and how the UK can support those countries and communities that are impacted by climate change in many different places. That connection,

and the fact that a lot of the stakeholders will be in the same place, working on the same issues, are really important.

One last thing is that civil society is always keen to reach out to the UK Government, and MPs can also play a key role between the Government and civil society organisations—not just those in the UK, but those from other countries. When it comes to COP, the UK is not just any country: the UK has a lot of credibility and has an important role to play in that process. MPs can play an intermediary role between stakeholders and the Government.

Q4 **Chair:** Do you have any additional points to make? If you do, then please make them, but I want to keep it tight, because we have a lot of questions to get through.

Professor Le Quéré: Very briefly, maintaining a peaceful process and helping other countries to engage in meaningful action is really important—questioning what others are doing and helping to elevate the commitments and the implementation plans.

Q5 **Uma Kumaran:** Apologies, I have a long disclosure to make: prior to being elected, I was the director of diplomatic and international relations for C40 Cities, one of the world's largest climate organisations, working with civil society. I have previously attended COP with C40 Cities; I am attending COP on Sunday—I am going to Belém—and I have previously attended biodiversity COP. You will not find an MP on the Back Benches who is pushing this issue more than me, and I absolutely agree that there is a role for politicians to play, working with civil society. But we are the Foreign Affairs Committee, so I am keen to know how you think the delivery of domestic climate and nature targets and policies aligns with foreign policy advocacy and the UK's international credibility on climate leadership.

Clement Metivier: To start, climate change and nature loss pose huge risks to the UK's security agenda. On the other side, we know that a stable and resilient environment underpins our food, our water and our energy security. A stable environment also protects critical supply chains from extreme weather events, and in the end also helps to prevent conflict and population displacement.

I refer back to the remarks of the former Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, at Kew Gardens in September 2024. He made a very strong case for the UK to place action on climate change and nature loss at the centre of foreign policy. He expressed, for example, that tackling climate change was "central to the UK's national interest", and that providing support to those affected by climate change impacts was fundamentally aligned with "delivering security for British citizens". I could not agree more with those statements.

It is vital for the UK to strengthen its support to the countries and communities that are most affected by climate change. That is something that will bring a huge return on investment and ensure security in the UK. It will also demonstrate the UK's standing in the world and its credibility as

a climate leader. It is key to rebuild trust with the global south; last year, at COP29, that trust was very much impacted by what happened around finance.

Obviously, that also strengthens global stability and security, and at the end of the day it also limits the negative impacts from climate change on UK citizens. Those effects are already being felt, for example through increased food prices. We know that food inflation at the moment is very much driven by climate change, and just a few commodities are responsible for that food inflation, so there is a key role there to be played to ensure stable supply chains in the UK and globally.

Q6 Alex Ballinger: I am really glad that you raised the interaction between climate and security; that is an area that the public do not always think about. They look at the climate negotiations and they generally agree with keeping the world below that 2° target, but they do not realise the knock-on effects that climate change might have for the UK if it gets worse. Could you say a little more about how meeting our climate goals helps the security of the UK and migration, and perhaps a little about health security?

Clement Metivier: We know that if climate change and biodiversity loss continue and are not addressed, that will have devastating impacts on communities and children. The consequences are far and wide. It is about not just the environment but a loss of livelihoods, diseases spreading and millions of people being displaced. The response has to be very strong. I go back to the point about aid and the support being provided to countries and communities in the global south. Investing in climate resilience and climate adaptation is an investment in global and national security. That is also key, as I said, to rebuilding trust with those partners in the global south.

Q7 Alex Ballinger: How is it an investment in global security? How does investing in preventing climate change improve security in the world?

Clement Metivier: Tropical forests, for example, are critical because they host 80% of wildlife that lives on land and they provide livelihoods for 1.6 billion people. We know that deforestation is continuing and is not being addressed. Putting finance into the protection and conservation of tropical forests will guarantee the livelihood of those 1.6 billion people. But beyond that, a lot of the commodities that are traded and consumed in many countries, including the UK, depend on those tropical forests. Basically, ecosystem health is super critical for the food being produced—for resilient and secure food systems. That is why investing in the protection of tropical forests is critical to supply chains and to preventing things like forced migration. It is definitely something that should be prioritised in foreign policy.

Professor Le Quéré: I will add a few points on energy security. Decarbonising is the fastest and best way to reduce our dependence on energy imports. International energy markets, with the price of gas, also

set the price of energy very broadly, so there is also increased security if we can disconnect from this international market more and more.

Then, there is the issue of human health, with some regions coming under so much heat stress from the growing climate that it threatens habitability and work outside in parts of tropical regions in particular, with incredible need for adaptation. One pathway to adaptation is migration; usually, that occurs within countries, and increases the vulnerability of people. But there is also a risk of international migration.

Finally, climate change has a very large impact on the water cycle. That impact becomes increasingly intense at a higher level, and that threatens food security and food production. In cases where there is a combination of conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, which produced a lot of food for other regions, we have seen that there can be a compounded effect of security threats and climate threats that can lead to security imbalances and a lack of stability in some regions of the world. Certainly, tackling climate change reduces the risks of that.

In parallel, there is also a growing tension because developing countries suffer more. They have benefited in the past, but there is a feeling that climate change has been created by others, mostly the global north, and it is the global south that suffers. Helping to create global coalitions and conversations that reduce the threat and support the spirit of just transitions internationally is another way to reduce the security threats.

Q8 Uma Kumaran: All parties to the UNFCCC should have submitted new NDCs—nationally determined contributions—by February this year. The UK submitted ours in November 2024, but over 60 countries have still yet to submit theirs. Do you think that that shows a lack of ambition globally? For the non-climate dorks watching and in the room, can you tell people what NDCs are?

Professor Le Quéré: Nationally determined contributions are part of the Paris agreement process. Every five years, countries are invited to say what they will contribute to tackling climate change globally. Countries decide what their contribution will be, but they have to argue it within the general objective to limit climate change well below 2°C and as close as possible to 1.5°C. Every five years, countries should submit their nationally determined contribution. As you clearly say, countries should have submitted theirs by now, but the fact that so many have not does not necessarily indicate a lack of ambition; on the contrary, we are getting into the implementation of NDCs at the moment, and countries are taking their objectives more seriously than ever.

Part of the process is that countries look at what their contributions could be. That makes it difficult elaborating contributions at the national level. We see at the European level, for example, how the 27 countries have to agree, and there is a tripartite discussion between the commissions and the representatives. The fact that they have those discussions, and that they have elaborated how they will do their trajectory, means that when

they set their target, it will be credible, because it comes with an implementation plan behind it.

Countries have typically been late in delivering on processes. Processes are the legal aspect of the Paris agreement, so they are extremely important. Some countries, such as China, have not delivered their NDCs, but they have made commitments and have announced, for the first time, a reduction in their emissions for 2035, which is a huge step forward. We are expecting that more will come, especially this week with the leaders' summit.

- Q9 **Abtisam Mohamed:** I would like to ask about the presence and influence of fossil fuel lobbyists. At COP29, for example, there were many more delegates from fossil fuel organisations than there were from countries who were representing themselves. How can we ensure that there is progress at COP30 when there are polluters responsible inside the negotiating rooms?

Professor Le Quéré: Thanks for raising this issue. This is a big issue, because on the one hand, you want to have companies—including fossil fuel companies—that can develop essential solutions for the future such as carbon capture and storage. You want to have the private sector there to have a voice and have opportunities for discussion. On the other hand, you want to really protect the process so that decision makers decide in the end and not the private sector.

At the moment, there are no rules at the UNFCCC for accreditation or for what the credibility of the accreditation process should be. I think that that is a gap that could be filled. There could be a more stringent process so that there is an equilibrium between the private sector and the decision makers, and, at the end, the process is enhanced by the presence of the private sector but there is no interference.

- Q10 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Do you think that there should be a conflict of interest process similar to the tobacco industry?

Professor Le Quéré: That could be one way to do it, indeed.

Clement Metivier: I know many civil society organisations are pushing for that, so I think it definitely should be considered by the UNFCCC.

- Q11 **Abtisam Mohamed:** How do you think the UK could play a stronger role in that aspect?

Clement Metivier: I think the UK should very much walk the talk at home on the transition away from fossil fuels, which is something that was agreed by our countries at COP28. I think that, for example, the current Government's commitment to no new oil and gas fields is very important. I know that the decision will be taken in the coming few weeks on the Rosebank oilfield, for example, and saying no to that oilfield is a very important signal that would show that the UK is committing to transition away from fossil fuels, which was agreed two years ago in Dubai. It would actually demonstrate that it is delivering domestically on what was agreed globally a couple of years ago.

Q12 **Abtisam Mohamed:** With the US disengaging now from the international climate agenda, how do you think this presents an opportunity for the UK to have a more significant leadership role?

Professor Le Quéré: It is really unfortunate that the US has decided to disengage to that level and sometimes even interfere with the process, but that does leave room for others. In fact, it is necessary for others to step in. The UK and Europe have typically taken leadership roles in climate actions at the world level. We are also seeing openings elsewhere. For example, China has invested a staggering 10% of its GDP in 2024 in low-carbon technology, mostly batteries and electric vehicles.

China, together with its massive investment in appropriate, low-carbon technology and its new objective for reducing emissions for the first time, could in fact be a contender to take leadership internationally. We will have to see what position it takes in Brazil. Of course, on the land sector, Brazil is taking the leadership. It has taken major actions to enforce deforestation regulation in Brazil with positive results on the ground.

It is really important that we come out of this COP with a really clear signal that the economies of tomorrow are electrified, low-carbon economies that push new markets. That will drive the private sector to make major investments, which we can and need to do today. That will push innovation in a range of things such as making batteries last longer and charge faster, hydrogen, carbon capture and storage and green finance, which the UK could play a really important role in with positive influence for the economy.

Chair: John, do you want to pick up on any of that?

Q13 **Sir John Whittingdale:** I would only ask a more general question. On the back of Abtisam raising the US withdrawal, what do you hope will realistically come out of COP by the end of it? What are the achievable goals that you feel we should really aim to obtain?

Professor Le Quéré: For me, a successful COP would be one with a strong commitment at the end for continuing action. Even that is a challenge today, given the fragmentation that is pushed by the US at the moment. If we also have a global climate action agenda that is clear for all the actors and a road map to finance, mobilising finance from the private sector in particular, that will be a very positive step forward.

This forest forever fund that Brazil wants to push will really enable a land transition, at the same time as we are making an energy transition towards electricity. Just those would send a really important signal because we have seen that countries are already moving to make their economies greener. I mentioned China, but that is also the case in Europe at the moment, with the really incredible decrease in costs that we have seen with electricity, renewable energy, batteries and electric heat.

I should also mention the case of India, which is very interesting because it is an emerging economy. It is investing massively. It has had 12% growth in renewable energy in the past five years, investing massively in



solar power, but its growing energy demand is so big that the renewable deployment is not enough to feed it. Ensuring that the supply chains build up rapidly and deliver is going to help to make global action more meaningful, and drive down costs because of the feedback loops between implementation and cost.

- Q14 **Sir John Whittingdale:** The media have suggested that this COP is really the last chance to achieve change that will keep us within the target of a 1.5° rise. Is that your view too, and is what you have described enough?

Professor Le Quéré: Yes—we are nearly there; we have had 1.5° warming for one year, so within a decade or a few years we will overstep this target for sure. What is important is to limit climate change and keep it as low as possible. If we overshoot the target, we can put in place implementations to remove carbon from the atmosphere, which is possible now, but if we overshoot the target by more than 2°, returning is going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. For 1.5° at this stage, an overshoot is inevitable, but if we maintain the climate at as low a level as possible, we can stabilise and potentially reverse that a bit later this century.

- Q15 **Dan Carden:** I refer to my registered interest of having previously attended a COP. Where does artificial intelligence fit into the current discussions? My understanding, which is limited, is that a high consumption of energy is required for artificial intelligence, but I am also interested in any benefits that can come.

Professor Le Quéré: Absolutely. Artificial intelligence is moving extremely rapidly and has a very big energy demand. To feed this energy demand, we have a low-carbon solution: it can be fed with renewable energy and nuclear power, if that is constrained by Governments that make the energy demand fit within, for example, in the UK, our carbon budget. There are solutions that should be implemented. The responsibility for energy demand should be on the industry itself.

More interestingly, there are opportunities to use artificial intelligence to reduce energy demand—for example, by having more intelligent buildings that manage heat and electricity much better. In industry, the same applies. The potential is huge. According to the International Energy Agency, the potential for reducing energy demand and associated emissions is three times as large as the energy demand itself; however, at the moment there is no guideline for how this is going to be delivered. It is completely left to the market. Channelling this potential and making sure that it delivers could be a role for Governments.

- Q16 **Dan Carden:** Many countries around the world are suffering from water shortages—people have to turn off water supplies for a day a week, or different components of that. Where does water supply fit into the current debates?

Professor Le Quéré: At the moment, the water need of energy is not well managed and often not even declared. The deployment of energy for

AI needs to be better integrated in the current energy demand planification for the future. I do not have a lot to add about water.

Q17 Fleur Anderson: I, too, reference my registered interests: my visit to COP28, and my visit last week to Copenhagen to study green heating systems, which is very relevant to the answer that you just gave—I saw what can be done.

I will ask a question about finance regulation, but first I will ask Clement a question about aid cuts. On the UK's planned reduction of overseas aid spending to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, what are you seeing already of those cuts to some of the projects that you were just talking about regarding adaptation, resilience and conflict reduction? What are you already seeing on the ground, how will it affect the UK's ability to meet international climate finance commitments, and how will it affect our credibility and influence in international climate negotiations? So what is actually happening on the ground from what you are seeing, how does it affect our own ability to meet the targets, and how does it affect our credibility?

Clement Metivier: It does have a huge impact on the ground, and obviously it is not just about the UK—other countries have been slashing aid over the past few months. You have mentioned the impacts on communities and children, with loss of livelihoods, people being displaced and diseases spreading. It is important that the current situation is a temporary one, and that foreign aid is put back to 0.7% of GNI as quickly as possible when the fiscal environment allows it.

Foreign aid is an investment in global and national security; it is not just about the climate or nature. We can see in the climate negotiation process that countries are losing trust in the UK and in other traditional donor countries. That was very visible last year at COP29 where there were discussions on a new climate finance goal. There was basically a big lack of trust between countries, which led to a very difficult negotiation. That mistrust is still present not only in the climate negotiation process but in other processes.

Before I finish, I should mention that there are ways for the UK to rebuild trust and credibility in terms of aid and financial support more broadly for countries and communities in the global south. One is the international climate finance budget. The current one is coming to an end in March 2026, so very soon. The UK has an opportunity to put forward a new, ambitious international climate finance budget that will address all the issues that we mentioned. It is also important for that budget to prioritise nature, which is the case for the current one. One third of the current budget is dedicated to nature and we think it is critical for that to continue.

The other thing, which is one of the big expectations for COP30, is the tropical forest forever facility that Corinne mentioned. That is a bold and innovative instrument that the Brazilians have led—they have announced a commitment of \$1 billion. Indonesia also announced a commitment. We think it is critical for the UK to come forward at the leaders' summit, which



starts on Thursday, where we expect the TFFF to be launched. It is critical for the UK to announce a financial commitment. It would not be like traditional aid. It would very much be an investment. TFFF is not an aid fund; it is an investment vehicle that will pay returns over time. We think that it is critical, it makes fiscal sense and it protects tropical forests, which are critical for supply chains and for the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people in the world.

Q18 Fleur Anderson: In the first part of the question, you listed some places where projects are being cut. Climate and nature is meant to be one of the priorities being kept, even though other parts are being reduced. Is that what you are seeing on the ground or do you think projects are being cut?

Clement Metivier: It is hard to say from my perspective because I do not directly work with communities and countries, but from what I know, yes, it is having an impact already. As I said, it is more about the general context where it is not just the UK cutting aid—other countries are also doing it. Rather than a scaling-up of finance for adaptation and for communities, we are seeing Governments place limits. Private finance is not replacing the finance that we are losing from the Government side, so it is a worrying situation.

Professor Le Quéré: I might add that, in addition to the level, there is a big expectation that financing adaptation will be very important for developing countries. The push—normally from the global north, including the UK—has been support for mitigation, so reducing emissions or low-carbon development. The UK has supported adaptation, but I want to stress that the expectation is increasing on that level, particularly as we are overshooting the 1.5° target and so the impacts will grow with the level of warming.

Fleur Anderson: Can I ask one more question?

Chair: Just a short one, because I want to move on.

Q19 Fleur Anderson: Clement, is the UK's governance of the finance sector on climate and nature and the mandatory transition plans more important than aid?

Clement Metivier: I think it is a package. Aid, public finance, is critical, including for rebuilding trust with partners in the global south. However, at the end of the day what we need to do is to shift from billions to trillions, because that is what the transition is about. It is about shifting the whole economy and financial flows towards low-carbon, climate-resilient, nature-positive activities. Regulation plays a key role in making sure that financial institutions and companies are shifting towards this transition that we want to achieve. You have, for example, this issue of transition plans that include nature and climate. We think that the UK should make these transition plans mandatory for companies and financial institutions, to make sure that they are prioritising that transition.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming in. We do appreciate it. That is the end of our questions to you. It was really interesting. If there is

anything else you think we should know, please do write to us and we will add that to your evidence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Peter Hill and Professor Charlotte Watts.

Chair: Can I ask the members of the second panel to introduce themselves?

Professor Watts: Good morning. My name is Charlotte Watts. I am the executive director of the solutions portfolio at the Wellcome Trust, which includes our investments in climate and health.

Peter Hill: I am Peter Hill. I am the former CEO of COP26 and am now a visiting professor at the London School of Economics, among other things.

Chair: Thank you.

Q20 **Sir John Whittingdale:** Mr Hill, I will start with you. You have had a lot of experience in preparing for COPs. What do you believe should be the UK's key diplomatic priorities for the forthcoming COPs?

Peter Hill: I think we need a clear statement from COP that the show is still on the road, and that needs to be backed up by some evidence. The Brazilians face a very similar position to the one we faced in 2021 in that the NDCs do not add up; there is not enough money, either generally or on adaptation. Their position is harder as the political context is worse, more fragmented, so they have a harder job, but the issues are similar. So you need a clear statement that the show is on the road.

We need to say something about the gap between where the NDCs are and where the Paris targets are. The COP will need to address that issue and the gap in the finance. We have some targets for the overall number and adaptation finance. It will need to say something about what we are going to do collectively to address the gaps.

It will need to say something about some of the issues in the so-called global stocktake 2028¹, specifically the real economy issues of tripling renewables, energy efficiency and phasing out fossil fuels, which cannot be ducked. If they can get their arms around some of the very many strands of activity of the private sector and give them some structure that would be a good thing. Obviously they have some plans on nature financing with the TFFF. I am sure they will want to get something out of that both nationally and for everybody.

So it is a political statement, backed up by some evidence that we are committed to addressing the shortfalls that there undoubtedly are, with a level of realism that this COP is not going to solve all the problems of climate change. No COP ever has, no COP ever will, and some of the

¹ Note by witness: When saying "global stocktake 2028" I misspoke. I meant to say "global stocktake COP28".

expectations of COPs are probably a little beyond what they can realistically deliver.

- Q21 Sir John Whittingdale:** That is a very helpful summary of all the challenges that this COP faces. On the UK's specific contribution, I think that before previous COP meetings the Government made a statement setting out their view of the UK's priorities. Would you expect the UK to make a similar statement this time? What work is going on to bring together all the various inputs from different Government Departments?

Peter Hill: On the former, I am guessing that that will be the Prime Minister's statement to the COP, rather than anything in advance. We have a good story to tell of exemplary leadership on emissions. We have a solid story in terms of what we did at COP26 and how we followed it up. Our climate diplomacy is one of the strong points of British diplomacy, and it is important that the UK continues to invest in that.

On finance, we have a good story to tell until April next year, when this international climate finance comes to its natural conclusion. It would be great if the UK was able to say something about what comes next—I say that more in hope than in expectation. This COP is going to have to say something about what is going to happen on adaptation finance, and I hope that the UK can be positive about that and not a backmarker. We were instrumental in putting that on the table at COP26, so I hope that we find a way to be positive about the need to take it beyond 2025, which is when the current commitment runs out.

- Q22 Sir John Whittingdale:** Is it your experience that all the Departments of State are fully committed to contributing to this, and is proper work going on right across Whitehall?

Peter Hill: Yes, absolutely. This is one area of Government policy where things generally work quite well, particularly between the energy and climate Department and the Foreign Office. They work extremely well together. Inevitably there are some differences of view, usually over financing issues, to be worked out in the weeks running up to COPs, and I am sure that those are live as we go in. I hope they are either resolved or close to being resolved, but those are perfectly reasonable discussions to be having in government.

The UK has done reasonably well at maintaining capacity in this issue since COP26. Whether the centre of Government is quite as staffed and has as much expertise on these issues as it should is an open question. Since I left Government, I do not have visibility of that, but it is very important that you have a strong Cabinet Office and strong No. 10 that understand and are gripping these issues. It is not that Departments, left to their own devices, will not do the right thing, but strong political direction is important.

- Q23 Fleur Anderson:** There is a climate crisis and a debt crisis. Are they brought together at all? Or do they happen separately and are only brought together in country budgets, when people say, "We would like to do all this adaptation financing, but we can't because we have the debt

crisis"? Do you see COP30 as somewhere where those conversations could come together to address some of the finance issues you were talking about?

Peter Hill: They will certainly have the discussion. They will not be decision-making fora on those issues, which generally get thrashed out in the IMF, World Bank and others. On finance, the reality is that what COPs can do is set some broad targets. The real doing will be in the G20, G7, IMF and World Bank, but COP can provide a platform for those discussions, and that is important.

I strongly expect that at least the developing countries will want those issues to be considered. I do not know whether they will get on to the formal agenda. I imagine that there will, as usual, be a discussion about what is on the formal agenda; the last COP struggled to get the formal agenda adopted precisely because of those differences. I am sure there will be a discussion about them.

As you say, the stretched balance sheets of many developing countries are absolutely an obstacle to spending on adaptation, given the difficulties of crowding in private finance. Things may have changed, but we have been trying for at least five years to find a way of addressing these issues, and we are still not there. Yes, I expect the COP to address it, but really, I would look to G20, IMF and World Bank meetings as the forums where progress is likely to be seen.

Q24 **Chair:** It is good to hear that Government Departments work well on this issue—perhaps better on this one than on many others—but our job as the Foreign Affairs Committee is to hold the Foreign Office to account. What distinctive role does the Foreign Office have in this agenda? Will you have a stab at that, Professor Watts?

Professor Watts: In my introduction, I talked about my role at Wellcome, but six months ago I was the chief scientific adviser at the FCDO.

Chair: That is why we asked you.

Professor Watts: That's a matter for the record. As a scientist coming into the FCDO, to see the power of the diplomatic engine when it has a priority it is trying to move forward is phenomenal. Peter has been reflecting the conversations across Whitehall, but in the run-up to COP another set of conversations will be taking place in missions around the world about how we can start to build momentum, where the points of tension are and where we can encourage more movement. I was the chief scientist, so I know there are also technical conversations and the work of UNFCCC to determine the reality of the science, what it is telling us about the urgency, and—depending on the agreement we get on reduction of emissions—what practical challenges we will face. Those are the sort of things that will be feeding into the lines that diplomats will use behind the scenes in trying to ensure that COP is effective and impactful in the challenging context.



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For me, the power of the FCDO is its capability. Since the merger, you have the diplomatic skills and art, which is hugely impressive, but you also have deep development expertise, as well as climate scientists and climate advisers with the technical expertise you need to shape the thinking and strategic approaches taken behind the scenes, in the rooms and in the corridor conversations at COP.

- Q25 **Chair:** May I ask a political sort of question? Do we normally expect a ministerial statement in advance of COP saying what our ambitions are and what we expect to do? Is there normally a statement to Parliament, and who makes it?

Professor Watts: It's a good question.

Peter Hill: I don't know. In the run-up to COP26, we gave a lot of statements. I don't think there was one on 27 or 28—I am sure one can check the record. I can see how a Government might be a bit cautious about exactly what they want in terms of negotiated outcomes, because they are one player—albeit an important one—among many. If it were me, I would be a little cautious about giving a definitive statement before I went into a quite unpredictable negotiation.

Professor Watts: To add to Sir John's question about our priorities as we go into COP, I think we need some statements, but also it is really important that we get behind the agenda the Brazilians are promoting. For us, it is the Belém health action plan, which is a call and a road map to health systems having plans for how to adapt to the impacts of climate change. All countries are facing those impacts, and this is not a "nice to have". The impacts are real and they include health impacts, and it is urgent that systems recognise that and start to think about the climate crisis as a health crisis, where if you do not take action it will cost the public purse more, but if you do take action there are opportunities. There is a diplomatic element of recognising how hard it is to lead a COP—we have done it and know how hard it is—but it is important that we get behind the Brazil-led initiatives. I know that, diplomatically, there has been a lot of work behind the scenes—a lot of work on the science side and the health agenda where the UK is liaising with the Brazilian teams to increase the likelihood of their being successful in some of the priority agendas.

- Q26 **Chair:** How does the UK balance climate diplomacy with its other strategic interests? How do we balance it with trade, national security, irregular migration and so on? How do we do all those things? How does that work?

Peter Hill: It is a fair question. I suppose I would see it less in terms of balancing than how it is part of the overall promotion and protection of the UK's national interests, which is the core business of the Foreign Office. Climate and transition-related issues are now core to international affairs, and they will only become more important. They are geopolitical issues and they need to be treated as such in terms of both the impacts, which you heard about from the previous panel, whether that is conflict, access to resources or the movement of people, and the transition itself, which is

now clearly a geopolitical tussle between the United States and China over the future of the energy system.

The key for the diplomatic service is whether it has the capacity to understand how those things are linked intrinsically. They are not separate agendas. Climate is now going to affect every aspect of foreign policy, and the UK's influence—how it is seen, and its ability to win friends and influence people—will be affected by its ability to address the issues, as well what it does at home. We have done a reasonable job of maintaining that capability, but it needs to be directed clearly, and not simply in the two or three weeks in the run-up to a COP. Most of what happens at a COP is determined well before we end up at the COP conference. It is a question of that being directed from the centre and the top with very clear instructions about what is expected and the priority attached to it within the overall objectives of the mission, including of the ambassador.

Q27 Dan Carden: Peter, how did our role as a COP host change the UK's role in climate diplomacy? What were your key lessons learned?

Peter Hill: Be careful what you take on, I suppose is one of the lessons. *[Laughter.]* It is a good thing to have done, but it is not always good while you are doing it.

The UK still gets asked for its input and advice by every incoming presidency. I am sure that they ask many others, but that legacy is useful—it has been useful with the COP presidencies since. We have a level of credibility within the COP negotiations as a result. If we look at the role that UK diplomats played in COP27, 28 and 29, in some we were absolutely instrumental to the outcomes because of the levels of trust and confidence that people had in us.

Internationally, beyond that, there is still some legacy. Now it is a contested and complicated landscape, but I still think that the UK's legacy buys us people's willingness to listen. Whether they agree with us or not, they recognise our ability and locus to talk about the issues. That has had a lasting impact. We could probably have done more to build on it in the year or two afterwards, but—I don't think I am deluding myself—I think it is still one of the strong elements of the UK reputation and influence in the world.

Professor Watts: For me, the other legacy of the UK hosting was that we could put issues on the agenda. For example, in Glasgow we had a science day. It was the first time that science became an important part of the COP conversations, both about what the science was telling and about the opportunities for innovation to grow economies through the clean energy transition, for example. The other thing that came up from Glasgow was an increased focus on health—initially, discussions about net zero health systems, but that evolved. Similarly on expanding and creating space for conversations about the importance of adaptation. On that issue, the global south was really frustrated with how previous COPs had been highly focused on mitigation and were not really paying attention to the impacts that it was experiencing from the emissions of, basically, rich countries.



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Peter Hill: It is worth remembering that COP26 was the first time we talked about a fossil fuel in a COP text. Before that, sectoral, energy-specific stuff was off the table. Negotiators did not want to go near it. You would not have had discussions about phasing down fossil fuels, or any other energy sources, if you had not had that first breach in the wall at COP26.

Q28 **Dan Carden:** What did you find were the key limitations of your role and the UK role in COP negotiations?

Peter Hill: What are the pieces one needs? You need a committed and credible Government; you need a good story to tell at home, which I think in COP26, we got to. You need a plan; it took us some time to get one, as everybody has a view, so coming to a plan within Government, let alone beyond takes some time. Because this is not governmental—obviously it is a party-led effort, but it is really whole of economy, whole of society—it means that if you want a plan, it needs to be capable of bringing in all the people who want to be part of it. You need an international system that makes that possible.

We originally thought we were hosting COP in 2020, when Donald Trump was in the White House; that was going to be one sort of COP. In the end, we held it at the end of 2021, with a very different American Administration, and suddenly the G7 and G20 were organisations that could contribute. If you look at what happened, many of the core elements of the final COP agreement came through a diplomatic campaign of the G7 leading to the G20 leading to the COP. That was a helpful international context that clearly does not exist today, which is why I think the Brazilians have a harder job than we had.

Q29 **Dan Carden:** How do you view the difficulties we see in multilateralism in every other sphere, and the increasing national interest that countries are moving towards? It strikes me that David Lammy and the UK Government were very clear that this was part of the UK national interest. That seems like a very sensible strategy in terms of our diplomacy with other nations.

Peter Hill: It is increasingly important. If you are a fossil fuel-importing country, this is now a first-order issue for you. If you are a fossil fuel-exporting country, it is also a first-order issue. If you are impacted by climate change, as every country is and the most vulnerable are affected, how your partners engage with you on this issue is a material consideration in your relationship.

In the international system, the United States, in organisations where it is active, will seek to reverse the direction of travel. Where China is active, it will seek to accelerate it, not only for multilateral reasons, but because it needs the transition internationally to go faster not slower, in order to be able to sell a lot of the capacity it is building.

What is the UK's role in that? It is to try to make the middle work. Absolutely we need to engage with China, and we need to manage the United States relationship, but in a number of international organisations the question is now, for want of a better word, whether middle powers are

able to carry some of the weight previously carried by the United States. The answer is going to be different across different organisations.

The WTO and the UN Security Council are clearly struggling. The international financial institutions are in a slightly better place. We will see at this COP what the verdict on the climate architecture is. My guess is that it will come through; it will not be spectacular, but it will be a solid outcome, which will show that most of the world want to carry on the track they are on.

Q30 Richard Foord: I have one question for each of you. First, Peter, you talked about the legacy of COP26 at Glasgow not being fully exploited in the years after November 2021. Could you explain why that was, or why you think that was?

Peter Hill: I think there was just a decline in interest in this issue as other issues crowded in quickly. We had covid, which we were still recovering from when we hosted COP, and then in February 2022 you had Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is understandable that other issues came up the agenda.

For the United Kingdom, this is an important calling card internationally. We probably could have done more to work with the Egyptians in their presidency, and with others, to build on that. I don't think we dropped the ball—of course I am biased, but I think that it was a significant diplomatic outcome for the United Kingdom. Rather as the French managed to do after the Paris agreement in 2015, in a slightly more problematic context, we could have built on it and made it a centrepiece of UK influence in the world. I recognise that the context was difficult; as I say, I don't think we dropped the ball, but making more of it, saying more about it and showing that we were proud of it would have paid dividends.

Q31 Chair: Before you ask another question, Richard, I want to follow up on that. Thinking about the context and the instability of UK politics at the time, presumably that was a factor. Earlier you said that, while you can have Government Departments working well together, what is important is to get an engine from No. 10 and so on. Did the lack of stability within UK politics and all the changes mean that there was not the longer-term focus that there should have been?

Peter Hill: Yes, that is fair. If you look beyond 2022 into 2023, it became a bit of a contested issue domestically, and that has continued since. It is harder to demonstrate leadership internationally if it is contested domestically. During that period, it was less about it being contested between parties and more about it being contested within the Government. There were some issues we had dealt with in the course of a COP presidency that returned to the fore in 2022 and 2023. That was undoubtedly a factor.

Professor Watts: That history—the early commitments around net zero and the apolitical aspect of some early moves on climate change—is something that has really added to the UK's legitimacy in the international space. As soon as it becomes politically contested domestically, that risks



significantly undermining our ability to influence others and to carry weight. The direction of some conversations now is unfortunate. Our influence is much more from showing, "We know the science, we're behind the science and we have leading experts informing us. The UK has halved its emissions and there is a consistency of commitment behind it." It is that combination that is so powerful when engaging internationally, particularly at these times.

Chair: We are back on the wagon now.

Q32 Richard Foord: Professor Watts, you talked about the important place of science in the UK's contributions to COP. You were the chief scientific adviser first at DFID and then at the FCDO. Could you talk about how you integrated scientific evidence and understanding into the diplomacy?

Professor Watts: There are lots of examples, but essentially under me I have a very strong relationship and partnership with the Met Office, which we work closely with to ensure that Ministers, senior officials and our ambassadors have access to information about climate change and what it means. That enables them to respond to questions about what it might mean in particular geographies and what the impacts might be if we do not support countries to adapt. We supply evidence on what climate change means for development and how we should use our development financing to support countries, for example, to go through the clean energy transition.

Those are the sort of conversations I and climate experts in my teams were having with senior people and chief scientists across Whitehall in the run-up to Glasgow and the COPs. We were discussing that and how, as a collective technical community, we ensure that we draw on the same evidence and feed our analysis of what it means for different Government Departments into their strategies.

You asked me how joined up Whitehall is; on the scientific and technical side, it is very joined-up. That includes things such as setting out the UK's priorities for research to achieve net zero and pushing that we start thinking much more about adaptation and resilience and what that might mean internationally.

The other point for me as chief scientist was that part of the development finance was used to support new innovations. As well as the finance—the ODA—that is used to support our contributions to climate financial commitments, we were also using ODA to support innovation. How do we ensure that we have the right clean energy technologies that are relevant for developing countries? How do we invest with others to support the production of more climate-resilient crops, or crops that need less water, to ensure that we have the tools we will need to ensure that countries can better cope with the impacts of climate change?

The science is not only advice, but the ability for a chief scientist in Government to say, "How do we use the innovations that are possible through advances in science to create new opportunities for countries to

respond better to climate change and to be less vulnerable to the impacts of climate change that we can see happening?”

- Q33 **Fleur Anderson:** Professor Watts, I have some more questions about health. You mentioned the Belém health action plan. What is Wellcome doing to engage on that? Is it lobbying at national level? Is it in developing countries? Is it working with the FCDO? How are you working on that, and what do you hope to see as a result?

Professor Watts: Wellcome works in a lot of ways. A core focus in our climate and health investments is how to generate the rigorous evidence from different geographies that illustrate the impacts of climate change on health.

If you look historically, you see that health has not really featured in a lot of the climate negotiations, but health is the human face of what we are facing. Some of the areas that we focus on are about extreme heat. When you start to unpick what “extreme heat” or “changes in temperature” mean, they are issues that everybody around the world can identify with, for example when you start talking about what they mean around pregnancy and maternal health outcomes, or for our health systems, for example. You can start a different conversation that can help to highlight the urgency of the action. For us, there is a bit of asking, “What is the evidence that, working in partnership, we can generate to shape those agendas?”

In the run-up to Belém, we have been talking to and working quite closely not only with the Brazilian leads, but with scientists, first to ensure that there is the space and the capacity to think about what that road map looks like, and to ensure that there is diverse participation in thinking through that road map. For us, it is very important that voices from low and middle-income countries are part of that conversation, can be at that meeting, and are engaged in propositions that that are being developed, and also that the propositions are evidence-based and use our understanding about the impacts of climate change on health to really shape and highlight the urgency of responding to health as part of future climate finance commitments.

- Q34 **Fleur Anderson:** I agree; health is really important and not talked about enough. Relating that to what you were saying earlier about the power of the missions that we have and the work that the FCDO can do on this, how joined-up do you think the FCDO is in this regard? How strong is their health team? For example, with their water, sanitation and hygiene team, how much attention are they giving to this and then how much are the missions working on this? How much has that been integrated into the FCDO’s climate agenda as well?

Professor Watts: It is interesting—we had the UK launch of the Lancet Countdown last week, which is essentially a summary of where we are and what the situation looks like in terms of progress, or the reversal in progress, on health that we are seeing because of climate change. The lead health adviser from the FCDO was there and was very aware of the



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content and the technical evidence; in conversations with her, it was very clear that this is quite an important conversation and issue for the FCDO. Similarly, the climate scientists who are also engaged in this agenda are trying to think about how they can more actively bring health into the analysis and advice that they are giving.

I am talking about what I understand from the conversations recently, but clearly, like Peter, I am no longer in Government, so I am not sighted on the real specifics there. However, my expectation is that health is being integrated. The power of the FCDO, following the merger, is that they have climate scientists, health scientists and diplomats, so they have a breadth of expertise to draw on. I hope and expect that they will be drawing on that in the way that they think through the agendas that they are going to prioritise.

Q35 Fleur Anderson: How important are water, sanitation and hygiene in this, as one of the places where it joins? Does that come out in conversations enough?

Professor Watts: It is a good question; water and hygiene is a really critical issue. If I think back to when I was at the FCDO, it was one of the issues on which there was a core, small group that had really deep expertise. That group was shaping and advising partner countries and supporting programmes that were using ODA to try to make progress, and to work with others to make progress, on addressing issues of water and sanitation. Quite honestly, I do not know what the situation is following the aid cuts, and following some of the loss in expertise that will have happened as a result of reductions in staff numbers.

Q36 Phil Brickell: Professor Watts, on that point you just mentioned, what are the implications of the UK's planned reduction in overseas aid spending to 0.3% of GNI by 2027 on its international climate finance commitments?

Professor Watts: I am really concerned. Essentially, we have ambitious ICF commitments. The way they work in the UK is that all of that comes from ODA. We had the ICF targets, and over time, as ODA has gone down or there have been competing demands, an increasing percentage of ODA has been ICF. Those reductions will inevitably impact on the extent to which the UK can contribute, and make significant contributions, to future climate commitments.

I do not know how the numbers are playing out now or what it looks like, but essentially, a cut in ODA is a cut in the resources that you have available to support climate action. It is a cut in the sorts of support that could be funded to help countries to adapt. It is also a cut in the ability to respond to the consequences of climate change or to support clean energy generation. It is a cut in the ability to support new innovations to ensure that there are new ways for low and middle-income countries to take the opportunity of the clean energy transition to grow their economies in a cleaner way.

There is a profound ripple effect because it is all about what the ODA budget is. I do not think we are talking enough about the peeling of the

onion to see which things that funding was ultimately being used for have now been cut, because of that reduction.

- Q37 **Phil Brickell:** I am slightly conscious of time, so I will move on to my next question, which is for Peter Hill. The COP structure has received a lot of criticism for moving too slowly, especially given that UN Secretary-General Guterres said earlier this year that it is “inevitable” that humanity will not meet the Paris agreement’s commitment to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C. What would you say in response to that criticism of the COP structure and the speed at which it can move?

Peter Hill: I feel his pain. There are lots of legitimate questions and criticisms of the COP process—it can be infuriating. However, I think the problems we have are fundamentally about national politics and what is going on in countries. Whenever I hear calls for COP reform, I am a little bit cautious about the answer to a fundamental problem of national politics being to change the processes of an international organisation. Many of the calls for changes to how COPs work are just an expression of frustration that the transition is not going faster, and that there is more backlash to green and clean policies today than there was five years ago.

I am going to say I am quite conservative on this; I do not think we should be spending lots of time worrying about how we fundamentally change the COP process. The era where we had to do big, negotiated outcomes in COP is largely over. It is now important for other things, such as sending political messages backed up by some evidence and bringing people together, particularly actors in the real economy.

COP is also still important for targets, despite the fact that people have gone off targets. Targets matter. Apart from those countries that have carbon budgets, such as the UK, very few countries have a clear pathway of targets to get to their net zero objectives, so I think that COP is still the place that does target-setting at a global level.

- Q38 **Phil Brickell:** You talk about sending political messages, and I was just reflecting on where COP has been held over the last few years: Azerbaijan for COP29, UAE for COP28 and Egypt for COP27. What political message is being sent by those countries hosting COP? I would also welcome your reflections on the longer-term enduring commitment that comes from a country hosting COP.

Peter Hill: It is a presidency-based system, which is its strength and its weakness. The presidency adopts it, invests in it, and gives it energy and direction, but in the end—I would not say you are at its mercy, but the presidency sets a lot of the direction. That has its positives and its negatives. Where you have presidencies for whom emissions reduction is not the highest priority, it will get deprioritised, and so on. That is a reflection of the world, and that is the constellation of countries we have to deal with. I do not see a way around that or a way of getting anyone to vote for changing that.

One of the things that the COPs will need to do is to work out how they will deal with the ever-growing demands about what a COP should



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address. Trade will be a big thing at this COP, health will also be on the agenda, and I am sure that water will go up the agenda. One of the things for the COP community to do is to decide how it will manage as climate spreads its tentacles into ever more areas of international and domestic policies. How does it manage those without becoming unmanageable? I would be a bit cautious about focusing on COP as the problem. For its many shortcomings and its many failings, the issues are fundamentally ones in national Administrations and national politics, rather than in the processes and procedures of COP.

Q39 Chair: While I agree with you that COP can only be as strong as the international community wants it to be, I do not really believe that you do not think there are any changes that could be made to improve COP. I appreciate that you do not want to be a distraction, but as a kind of last thought for those of us who are going to COP, with blue skies, and if you were able to, what would you like to change?

Peter Hill: Whether COP has to happen every year is a fair question. Whether it needs to take three weeks is another; it is two weeks plus the pre-COP period. Another fair question is whether you can rationalise some of the agenda. I think the penumbra—the associated activities—are important, so I would not try to stop those or curtail those, but if you could cull some of the activities based on, “Every presidency we have done this”, plus every subsequent presidency has felt the need to have its own initiative, it would be positive. Many of them are overlapping, with unclear accountability and delivery, so if you could cull them into a smaller number of things that are possible to track and measure—in a soft way, because this is not a hard law organisation—that would also be positive.

Q40 Chair: What do you think, Professor Watts?

Professor Watts: I think Peter has covered a lot of it. A lot of the bringing together of analysis—the sort of technical work that runs up and feeds into monitoring—is really important. What I like about the focus of COP in Brazil is that it is focusing on implementation. The gap between the reality of the commitments and our countries actually going back and doing things and monitoring it—and whether we are seeing progress—is the big question essentially. There is going to be a greater focus on that at this COP. In a way, we know what we need to do in many cases; it is just about whether we are doing it fast enough, what we can learn from others, and how, in those sorts of political environments, you can encourage others to be more ambitious. Even if that is not quite naming and shaming, anything to encourage implementation is really important.

Q41 Chair: While our implementation is far from perfect, for those of us going to COP, we are able to go as representatives of a country that does have a plan.

Professor Watts: I think we have a really strong story to tell on our progress on net zero. We have less of a strong story on adaptation—we still have a way to go with that—but Baroness Brown was reflecting on that at a meeting I was at just recently. What the indicators on adaptation

are, and whether we are doing enough, quickly enough, is still an issue for us.

Q42 **Chair:** And nature conservation?

Professor Watts: And nature. On the net zero commitment—that 50% reduction—following Glasgow, 80% of GDP have now adopted that net zero legislation². I would not underestimate the power of the UK actually doing things and taking them seriously, and how influential that has been internationally.

Chair: Does anybody have any other questions? No. That concludes the second session. Thank you very much.

² Note by witness: When saying “following Glasgow, 80% of GDP have now adopted that net zero legislation” I misspoke. I meant to say “following Glasgow, 80% of global GDP is now covered by net zero commitments.”