

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Environmental diplomacy, HC 196

Tuesday 18 May 2021

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Henry Smith; Graham Stringer; Claudia Webbe.

Treasury Committee Member present: Harriett Baldwin.

Scottish Affairs Committee Member present: Deidre Brock.

Environmental Audit Committee Member present: Barry Gardiner.

International Development Committee Member present: Chris Law.

Science and Technology Committee Member present: Mark Logan.

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee Member present: Alexander Stafford.

Questions 100-149

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, COP26 President-Designate, Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, COP26 Unit at Cabinet Office, Ros Eales, Chief Operating Officer, COP26 Unit at Cabinet Office, and Dr John Murton, UK COP26 Envoy.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Peter Hill, Ros Eales and John Murton.

Q100 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are lucky to have with us this afternoon the COP President-Designate, the right hon. Alok Sharma. Alok, welcome to the Foreign Affairs Committee. As you know, these sessions and your work cross so many Departments and areas of interest that we have guests today from the following Committees: BEIS, Environmental Audit, Treasury, International Development, Science and Technology, and Scottish Affairs. That was not in any order except the order they happened to appear on my piece of paper. Don't think there was a priority; there was certainly not. All Committees in this House are equal.

That said, I'm lucky enough to chair this one, so I am going to start, because I can. First, welcome, Alok, and it is very nice to see Peter Hill, as well. Thank you for joining us. The Government have set four headline objectives for the UK's COP presidency. How do intend to measure success against those objectives?

Alok Sharma: Chair, thank you. We have also got John Murton and, I hope, Ros Eales from the COP Unit, who are on our side. Our overarching aim is to keep within reach of the 1.5° target that came out of the Paris agreement.

In terms of the four areas that you mentioned, the first is mitigation. We are encouraging all countries to come forward with net zero commitments, as well as near-term emission reduction targets for 2030 that put them on the pathway to net zero by the middle of the century. On that measure, if you look to when it was announced that we had the presidency of COP26, less than 30% of the global economy was covered by a net zero target. That is now 70%. We obviously want to encourage all countries to come forward with net zero commitments.

In terms of the near-term emission reduction targets, all the G7 now have a 2030 reduction target, which puts that on a pathway to net zero by 2050. So there has been progress, but there is obviously still a long way to go. We need all the big economies, in particular, to come forward. In terms of adaptation, we are looking for countries to come forward with their adaptation plans and communications.

Finance is the third goal for us. There are two elements to that, including donor countries delivering on the \$100 billion that was agreed in previous years to support developing countries. Colleagues will know that the last report put out by the OECD said that we were just under \$80 billion in 2018. We are encouraging all donors to come forward and make good on that commitment and, of course, ensuring that we get more private finance flowing, as well.



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Finally, there is closing off the outstanding elements of the Paris rulebook to make the Paris agreement operational.

Those are the four things we are trying to achieve. I have set out some of the progress we have made. Obviously, we will continue to push and work with all countries and Governments around the world to ensure that they come forward with the commitments that we are looking for.

Q101 **Chair:** Clearly, you are sharing the presidency with the Italian Government. I have been in communication with my opposite number, and I am sure you are in close touch with yours. It is quite clear to me that the Italians are pushing forward innovative ideas and are seeking to influence in rather interesting ways the way that we look at these targets. What have you learned from them, what areas of co-operation have you found successful, and how have you divided the workload, or at least sought to co-operate?

Alok Sharma: We have a very good working relationship with the Italian Government. Obviously, there was a change in Government, but the officials have continued to work very closely. I was, some days ago, in Rome, and I met my opposite number, Mr Cingolani. I also met the Transport Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Finance Minister and the Economic Minister as well. I think the fact that, in a day's visit, I was able to meet so many colleagues shows the close working that we have.

Obviously, the Italians also have the presidency of the G20, and we have the G7, so there is an opportunity for us to work closely on some of that shared agenda. I have said this before, and I want to repeat it: what we want to see is the green thread of climate action running through all the international events that take place during this year between now and COP. That obviously includes the G7 and the G20 as well.

In terms of how we are sharing out the work, obviously, pre-COP, the youth event is something that our Italian friends are focusing on. We are focusing on COP26 in Glasgow itself. There is a working group; I might invite Peter Hill to talk a little bit about how that is working. That meets on a monthly basis at official level and goes systematically through issues around negotiations, diplomacy, and the interlinking between the G7 and G20 priorities. There is a lot of close working going on. Chair, would you allow Peter Hill to come in on this point?

Q102 **Chair:** I certainly will. We are very interested in exactly how the process is working, so perhaps, Peter, I will ask you about the mechanics of it as well. I know that that will not interest every Committee, but it does interest us—the process of the negotiation and the mechanics of the diplomacy that is allowing them to feed in.

Peter Hill: The regular meeting that we have with the Italians, as the COP President said, is meant to cover the full waterfront, including the countries that we are prioritising lobbying, what our asks of them are, who is doing what, and who is best placed to do what with whom. Obviously, we have different strengths in different parts of the world. We obviously feel that we are strong across the board, but everyone has a contribution



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to make. We are also discussing how we handle the G7 and the G20, recognising that they are different fora with different memberships. Nevertheless, the overall objective is the same, which is to get the world to net zero on a credible path, so we are discussing with our Italian colleagues how we do that.

We are also having a very close partnership with them on how we handle the negotiations. Obviously, we have a presidency role, which is to be even-handed and objective and to involve everybody, but it is well known that we are handling this negotiation in partnership and in collaboration with our Italian colleagues. That is an intrinsic, very detailed, week-by-week, month-by-month conversation with our Italian colleagues. It is an extremely productive working relationship.

Q103 Chair: One of the things that we have heard about in previous sessions is the level of effort that the French put in for their own Paris summit a few years ago, and the enormous amount of energy and effort that was needed very early on. Clearly, we are starting from a very different baseline. Covid has really put us back a long way. How are you finding that you are able to feed in not just to closer partners like Italy, with which we have so many links so often, but some of the other partners that are going to need support in this—the least developed nations or, indeed, the nations with which we have slightly more fractious relationships?

Alok Sharma: As you know, Chair, I went full time to this role at the beginning of the year. That has meant that, even in the covid environment that we have, I have been able to do some travel. I have been across, I think, just about every continent so far, and I will continue to travel. I think that there is a real benefit in those face-to-face discussions.

Overall, I think I have engaged with about 115 Governments at ministerial level, either virtually or physically, and the network has also been mobilised. Of course, there is a lot that I am personally doing, and that Peter Hill and the COP Unit are doing. We also have the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and others all engaged in this process. As you know, we have six climate envoys as well, covering different parts of the world, and there is a wider diplomatic network that we can plug into from the Foreign Office.

There is a lot of engagement. You are right that covid has made things more challenging, but even with that we are engaging. You talked about negotiations, for example. We are going to have the SB sessions coming up in June. What I have also said very clearly is that I want to have in July a physical meeting with a representative group of Ministers to try to take forward politically some of the key outstanding issues that need political involvement, rather than just leaving it to negotiators. There is a lot going on. There is a lot more to do, but I assure you that as a team we are working 24/7 on this.

Q104 Chair: You are bringing up an important point, which is that of course—let's be frank—you are not going to agree the deal in Glasgow. You are



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going to have done 99% of the work before you walk into the room. How are you using the time now to make sure that you are going to have that commitment in terms of leveraging not only your own capabilities but also junior Ministers, and how are you finding work with another major stakeholder, who has clearly become very dominant since he was appointed, Secretary Kerry?

Alok Sharma: Let's take the US first. I am delighted that we have an Administration in the US that is entirely focused on climate action, as, in fact, our Government are, both domestically and internationally. I spoke to Secretary Kerry before he was announced in his role, and we have continued to have a good working relationship with him and his team, with a regular dialogue. He was in fact here with his team on Sunday, so we had a detailed session, but of course there are other colleagues around the world that we are working with closely as well on this shared agenda.

In terms of the work that is going on—the hard miles that we need to put in between now and Glasgow—I think that you are absolutely right. We need to make a lot of progress, and a key element of that is going to be in terms of the negotiations. As I said, we have a timeline of events that are taking place. What is also vital is that we have physical meetings. You will know that at the meetings in June what the bureau has agreed is that we will have discussions but not formal negotiations. I think it is very much the case that very many parties do not want to have formal negotiations unless we are able to meet physically. That is why it is important that we plan for physical meetings as well ahead of Glasgow itself.

Chair: We will come to some of the changes in the process that covid will bring, and how perhaps some of the environmental travel industry, if you will excuse the expression, may be changed to an environmental Zoom industry. We will be very interested to hear your views.

There are several people coming at different elements of this, so I am going to go now to Alex Stafford of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

Q105 **Alexander Stafford:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, President Sharma. Looking at the NDCs that have already been made around the world, do you expect COP26 to be successful in keeping the rise in global temperatures to well below 2° C? Is that what we expect or are we already thinking that that is not going to happen?

Alok Sharma: The commitment that was made at Paris was, exactly as you say, to well below 2°, closer to 1.5°. As I said to the Chair at the start of the session, our overarching hope is that we can do enough to keep 1.5° within reach. If you look at the NDCs, at the time of Paris I think there were various estimates of what that would mean in terms of global temperature rises. Some were over 3°—a range of 2.7° to 3.7°, I think. You will also have seen more recent estimates of where we are based on the more recent NDC and net zero commitments that have been made. I think that some current estimates suggest 2.4°.



What I think is important is that we keep pushing all countries. A year ago we were in a quite different place. In a year, we have got to a point where we have had the big economies—Japan, South Korea, obviously the US, but also China—coming forward with net zero commitments and carbon neutrality commitments. We have seen, as I said, half the world economy, covered by the G7, coming forward with NDCs that are aligned with net zero by the middle of the century. So what I would say is that we have another five and a half months to run and we are continuing to press all countries. But, of course, it is the case that the G20 countries are going to be particularly important in this, as the biggest emitters, and China, of course, is the biggest emitter right now, so what China does matters as well.

Q106 **Alexander Stafford:** Thank you for that, and I appreciate that you are pushing to get more, but I must say that your words don't give me much comfort—words like "hope", "within reach" and "2.4". There is clearly a lot more pushing that can be done. What is the realistic aim for closing the gap between Paris and the current NDCs in time for COP26? You mentioned five and a half months. It isn't a long period of time.

Alok Sharma: I am sorry if you feel we are not pushing that. I would just take you to where we were a year ago and look at the progress that has been made. We are in a challenging environment, with covid as well. Obviously, we will continue to press. We are working with like-minded partners around the world. If you have a look at some of the campaigns that we have running as part of our COP26 agenda, it is about transition to clean energy. You know there is a big push on getting countries to set out their plans to phase out domestic coal and to set out the ending of international coal financing. I was in Seoul some weeks ago, and obviously we subsequently had formal confirmation at the Earth Day summit that South Korea have said they are ending international coal financing. That is very positive.

We are going to continue to work with partners around the world to come forward with commitments. As I said, there is five and a half months to go. There is a lot to do, but please don't think that we are sitting back and letting this happen. We are working extremely hard to make sure that we get these further commitments.

Chair: Alex, do you want to come back again?

Alexander Stafford: No, I think we have got the answer, thank you.

Q107 **Henry Smith:** Thank you for joining us, President-Designate Sharma. I am following on from Mr Stafford's question with regard to the ambition—the target—of reducing the increase in global temperature. What action is the UK Government taking to bring this closer to 1.5° C, and in particular, which countries are you targeting and planning to target? For example, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland and Vietnam have all submitted NDCs that either offer no increase in ambition and are easily met with current policies, or are less ambitious than their first NDCs. Do you see this as a failure of UK policy in this relation, and

what can be done in the five and a half months you have referred to before COP26?

Alok Sharma: You have mentioned a number of countries; I will try to pick up on some of those. I mentioned China earlier. China is the biggest emitter, and what China does matters, but actually this applies to all the G20. Keeping 1.5 within reach, or 1.5 alive, as some countries refer to it, isn't just a slogan; this genuinely means that we are talking about the lives and livelihoods of very many millions of people around the world in developing countries, in climate-vulnerable countries, who have largely not been responsible for the situation that they find themselves in. I think it's also about ensuring that countries do understand that it is on all of us to make sure that we come forward with commitments.

In the case of China, it is positive that they have set out that they want to be carbon neutral before 2060, that they want CO₂ to peak before 2030 and that they want to strictly limit and phase out coal. Those overarching commitments are of course welcome, but it is really important that China, and indeed every country, sets out the detailed policies that will lead to those long-term commitments that are being made.

We saw a number of countries come forward and make commitments at the Earth Day summit. In the case of China, President Xi talked about being committed to multilateralism and putting that into action, working with all parties to enhance biodiversity and to support positive outcomes at COP26. However, we need the Chinese system to deliver on President Xi's commitments with more urgency. Certainly, with fewer than six months to go until COP, and with four months to go until the Kunming conference, I would welcome more detailed engagement from the Chinese system.

In terms of some of the other countries that you mentioned, Australia is obviously the only developed economy that does not currently have a net zero target. Prime Minister Morrison has spoken about reaching net zero as soon as possible, preferably by 2050, but obviously we want to see that commitment come forward. Which were the other countries that you mentioned?

Henry Smith: Mexico, Singapore, Switzerland.

Alok Sharma: Mexico is another country that came forward at the Earth Day summit. We want to see them coming forward with more ambition. Interestingly, Brazil came forward at the Earth Day summit and said that they would get to net zero by 2050; I think the previous year was 2060. Again, we want to see revised NDCs from countries that are making these more ambitious longer-term commitments that are compatible with those commitments. That, frankly, is a message that we are delivering to all countries, particularly those in the G20, that have not yet come forward with the level of ambition that we want to see.

Q108 **Henry Smith:** One country that is not in the G20 and is certainly not in the G7 is Russia. What action is being taken in respect of that country?



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Alok Sharma: Again, there is obviously a dialogue with the Russians, and I hope for further engagement with Russia in due course. I invite either Peter Hill or John Murton to come in and talk a little bit about Russia, or indeed any of the other countries that Mr Smith mentioned.

John Murton: If I may pick up on a couple of the countries that were mentioned, a number of countries, including Switzerland, conveyed unchanged NDCs to the UNFCCC, not because that is the limit of their ambition, but because the filing deadline was at the end of the year last year. They submitted those NDCs with the intention to revise them in due course as they were able to meet their more ambitious climate goals. So, for a couple of those countries, it was more a technical submission than the full extent of their ambition.

In respect of Russia, it is obviously a major emitter—circa 4% of global emissions—and one that we need to work very closely with. We have been in touch with the President’s climate adviser on a number of issues. We know that the Russian Administration is beginning to think quite seriously about climate change on account of some of the incidents that you will have seen in Siberia, with some of the melting of the permafrost and the damage that that can do to infrastructure. They are beginning to think about this more critically through the lens of how to protect the resilience of their infrastructure in the face of climate change, so there are grounds for discussion with Russia going forward.

Q109 **Henry Smith:** You touched on China earlier in response to another question. You mentioned that they have a commitment to slow coal use by 2030, but that commitment does not include placing limits on coal growth in the next five years or an actual date for a complete coal phase-out. Does that suggest that the energy overhaul needed for China to meet its Paris climate commitments is still a long way off?

Alok Sharma: Again, I will invite John Murton in if he wants to comment on the specific issue of coal, but, as I said in response to an earlier question, these overarching statements are welcome. Like you, Mr Smith, we are looking for the more detailed policies and commitments near term. Coal is one of the key policy areas that we are focused on as part of our energy transition work in COP, encouraging countries to set out bids to phase out domestic coal, and also international financing of coal projects in other parts of the world, and obviously that applies to China as well, as one of the biggest users of coal. John, do you want to come in specifically on coal and power plants?

John Murton: Obviously, phasing out coal is inherent in the carbon neutrality target of 2060, but it needs to happen before then. That is very clear. There is a slight circumstance in China, where there is considerable construction of new plant going on, but the overall utilisation rate of that coal plant in China is falling, so coal energy use should peak in China well ahead of 2030 by our analysis. As that utilisation rate falls, the levelised cost of electricity from coal in China will rise at the same time as the levelised cost of electricity from new renewables in China continues to fall and undercuts that of coal. That effect should accelerate the uptake of



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renewables and the reduction in coal. I would point you to the fact that China is the biggest investor in renewables around the world at the moment. While they are the largest coal user around the world, they are also the largest investor in renewables, so they are both part of the problem and an essential part of the solution.

Alok Sharma: If I may, I will make a wider point on coal. The reality is that renewables prices have been coming down significantly. If you look at solar on a 10-year view, the price is 80% lower. In terms of wind, it is around 50% lower. There is also an issue for investors around the world. What you don't want to do is to invest in a sector such as coal, where you could potentially end up with stranded assets. There are two virtues in investing in renewables. One is the fact that it is cheaper than coal in most parts of the world now, and there are various projections that show that in the next few years it will be cheaper across the world. Secondly, it is green technology and you don't have emissions coming from it.

Q110 **Claudia Webbe:** It is great to be able to put these questions to you, Alok Sharma, and your colleagues. The US summit in April resulted in several countries announcing updated climate targets. So that we are absolutely clear, what role did the UK play in preparations for the summit?

Alok Sharma: We work closely, not just in terms of the summit, with the US and other partners to encourage action from all countries. I will take you back to December, when we hosted the climate ambition summit, marking the five-year anniversary of Paris. It was with the UN and France, in partnership with Italy and Chile. At that point we had 75 world leaders coming forward and making commitments to take climate action. In that last year, in 2020, we saw these net zero commitments coming from major economies. We saw the EU set out its NDC, and the UK set out its NDC as well.

Obviously, what we have continued to do, through the diplomatic network and Ministers, is work to encourage other countries to come forward with ambition. And if you look at the major commitments that were made, obviously the US came forward with an ambitious NDC. Frankly, from the moment that we had a new Administration, we were speaking to the US, talking about the fact that we obviously wanted to see an ambitious NDC from them, and I am very grateful for what they have come forward with.

Japan also came forward with an ambitious NDC of 46%, but, very importantly, Prime Minister Suga talked about an ambition of 50%. I was in Tokyo some days before the Earth Day summit, and I made the case for 50%, both to the Government—obviously—and very publicly. So I am very pleased that came out.

You saw the commitment that came from South Korea in terms of international coal financing. Again, I and other colleagues have made a number of trips in the last six months. I have been twice to South Korea, and on the last visit we were getting an indication that they were moving in that direction when it comes to international coal financing. I am very pleased that they made that commitment.



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So we have worked with our partners in the US. There is no doubt that the US coming back to the table has had a material impact—a positive material impact—in terms of driving forward action on climate.

Q111 Claudia Webbe: We are hearing quite a lot of talk, if I can put it that way, but seeing very little action. We are still not moving far enough or fast enough. Many countries, including the US, of course, have come forward with updated nationally determined contributions, but as yet they have not put forward clear plans about how they will meet their climate goals. That is a challenge for the UK presidency. So what is the UK presidency doing to ensure that countries have credible plans in place to deliver on emissions reduction targets?

Alok Sharma: All countries setting out these commitments will be thinking very carefully about how they deliver them. Clearly, one of the things that we are urging countries to do is to come forward with long-term strategies. The UK itself will be setting out its own long-term net zero strategy ahead of COP26, and there is work going ahead on that to show the trajectory of how we get to net zero. So this is something that all countries will be thinking about. A number of them have come forward. Obviously, we are encouraging everyone to come forward with that long-term strategy.

Q112 Claudia Webbe: I want to push you a bit harder on something more radical and revolutionary than just the words. I just wonder if there is any further action being taken to push on these credible plans so that we can actually get to emissions reduction targets.

Alok Sharma: Sorry, I should have explained that we have our four overall goals that we are trying to achieve out of COP26, but underpinning them, of course, are a number of campaigns that aim to interact with the real-world economy, if I can put it like that.

One is on energy transition, so it is about getting countries to set out concrete policies, such as the phase-out of domestic coal or ending overseas coal financing.

Secondly, we have a Zero Emission Vehicle Transition Council as well, where we have Governments around the world, representing a significant amount of the auto sector, being represented. And I will say again that we are pushing countries to come forward with phase-out dates for petrol and diesel, and on the move to zero-emission vehicles. As you will know, the UK itself set out that we will end the sale of new petrol and diesel from 2030. There is also work going on regarding sustainable forestry. So there are a range of individual policy areas that we are pushing forward on and encouraging other countries to adopt as well.

I can tell you, from the discussions I have with other countries, that they are fully aware that one thing is to set out a longer-term, mid-century commitment, and the other is to demonstrate how you are going to reach your near-term goals. That is why, from a UK perspective, last year the Prime Minister set out his 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution. If you look at each of the elements of that, it moves us forward in terms of



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cutting emissions and expanding the economy and growing the jobs market at the same time.

Peter Hill: Chair, might I just underline one point that the COP President made? The targets are important, but they have to be underpinned by credible policies and credible action. If you are going to keep 1.5° alive, the next 10 years are critical. For the next 10 years, the key areas where we have to make progress are power, transport and probably forests. That is why those, as the COP President said, are the key areas for our campaigns. Those are areas where we have to make progress in the next 10 years. It is about the energy transition, as he said, as well as zero-emission vehicles and land use. The next 10 years are absolutely critical to reaching those 2050 targets. That has really driven the prioritisation of the real-economy areas that we are focusing on in our presidency.

Q113 **Claudia Webbe:** I am glad you have focused our attention on that in a very real way, because it sets out a very clear set of priorities, in terms of the countries that the UK should target during its presidency. We should ensure that those countries have credible plans. The actions of the countries of the global north are particularly important because of the impact they are having on countries and particular communities in the global south. We only have to look at the indigenous communities in Brazil, for example, to understand the impact.

How important is it for the UK to lead by example in setting a credible and realistic climate action plan? You talk about what the Prime Minister announced in terms of the 10-point action plan, but in reality the sum total of the UK's actions with the global north countries is still only wavering around the 2.5° target, as opposed to getting to 1.5°. There is a need to be more ambitious and more radical in our approach. How are we going to lead that agenda?

Alok Sharma: If we talk about the UK's leadership position on climate, we are the country that has decarbonised our economy fastest of all the G20 countries since the year 2000. We were, of course, the first major economy to legislate for net zero by 2050. You are right: during 2020, when I was having conversations with countries and asking for ambitious NDCs from them, they very politely asked when the UK was going to set out its own position.

The Prime Minister did that at the end of last year with an NDC of at least 68% by 2030 on 1990 levels. Of course, he subsequently set out carbon budget 6, with a 78% reduction by 2030 on 1990 levels. That is world leading, and I can tell you from the conversations that I have around the world that people respect the fact that the UK has shown leadership in this area. Of course, it is very important that we take all countries with us, and we will continue to do that.

I agree with you that the current temperature protections of 2.4° or 2.5°—there are various estimates out there—show that some progress has been made in terms of the recent commitments that have been put out there, but we need to be doing a lot more. I go back to this point: every country



needs to do more, but particularly the biggest economies and the biggest emitters.

Q114 **Claudia Webbe:** What other diplomatic levers—maybe this is one for your team—have the international engagement team found to be the most effective in encouraging other countries to take action?

Alok Sharma: I will invite John or Peter to come in. I would just say that, from my point of view, the engagement through the Zero Emission Vehicle Transition Council at a ministerial level has been very good, and it is the same with the Energy Transition Council. Those are an opportunity for Ministers around the world to come together and discuss in very practical terms how to deliver a transition to green energy and zero-emission vehicles. The challenges that we face in some of these areas are very similar and very shared. That is why having that dialogue is so important. I do not know whether Peter or John want to talk more widely about the diplomatic effort.

John Murton: Yes, I am happy to. Obviously, we have a large network of embassies around the world, and in many of them there are energy and environment attachés. Every ambassador around the world has as one of their objectives to push on energy, the environment and climate change ahead of COP26. It is regularly identified as one of our key priorities, as it was in the integrated review.

I have personally, on my travels around the world, found that looking at the economic case for climate action has been really compelling, particularly in many fast-emerging economies. As the COP President-Designate said, the cost of renewables has been falling very rapidly, probably faster than many policy makers around the world have realised, such that they are cheaper now than fossil fuels, which not everyone understood perhaps even just a couple of years ago. We have been able to point to countries and say, “Look, if you’re paying 10, 11 or 12 US cents per kWh for your electricity, which is derived primarily from oil, gas or coal, how will you compete with a country like India that is putting on 450 GW of solar energy by 2030 and is currently delivering it at 3.5 cents per kWh, or with the United Arab Emirates, which is putting on solar at 1.5 cents per kWh? How will your energy-intensive industries compete on that basis?”

That has given policy makers real pause for thought. If I point you to the work, for example, that our embassy is doing in Indonesia, we have been working with the Planning Ministry, BAPPENAS, and have been modelling different growth pathways for the Indonesian economy—a high-carbon, a medium-carbon and a low-carbon growth pathway. What we have been able to do with the Indonesian Government is demonstrate to them, in an analysis that they now accept and have bought into, that the lowest-carbon growth pathway for that economy also yields the highest economic growth. We are beginning to make clear the case that if we want to grow our economies, we need to green them rather than invest in fossil fuels.

Claudia Webbe: Thank you. That ends my set of questions. I am sure



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that Alok will be aware that the world is watching.

[Henry Smith took the Chair]

Chair: Thank you very much, Claudia. I have taken over the Chair because Tom has had to take part in the Queen's Speech debate in the Chamber.

Q115 **Graham Stringer:** The integrated review commits to making tackling climate change and biodiversity loss the No. 1 international priority. I understand that, although I do not accept that it is what will happen in practice. About four and a half or five years ago, the UN surveyed nearly 10 million people in developing countries and asked them what their priorities were out of 16 potential policy areas. Top came education. Bottom by some distance came climate change. So why should the UK put climate change at the top of the agenda when the UN has surveyed people in some of the poorest countries and that is not their priority?

Alok Sharma: I think this is perhaps for John Murton, from a Foreign Office perspective, but if you look at various opinion polls and so on that have happened more recently, I think you will see that climate, and particularly a clean environment, has been rising up the agenda very fast.

From my perspective, we are at an interesting point, where you have Governments, business and civil society speaking with the same voice when it comes to the need for climate action. The issue is twofold: to ensure that we clean up the environment and safeguard livelihoods, and to have green growth. In the UK, we have shown over a 30-year period that we have managed to grow our economy by over 70% and cut emissions by more than 40%. So green growth is absolutely possible. I can tell you about all the engagement that I have with countries around the world, and this is precisely the policy that very many of them want to follow. I have just come back from visiting a number of countries in the EU. You look at the recovery plans that they are putting in place, and a significant chunk of that money is going towards green projects.

So this is the biggest challenge facing humanity. Frankly, the next 10 years will be vital in setting the agenda for the planet when it comes to climate change.

John Murton: May I come in to augment something you said? Let me take the experience from my previous role, where I was our ambassador in the DRC, which is one of the poorest and most war-torn countries on earth. In that country, few people would name climate change as one of their priorities. However, they do name things like lighting, power and education as priorities, as you suggest. We can meet those needs either through coal power, and add to the problem of emissions and climate change, or we can do it through green energy.

When Harriett Baldwin was a Minister, I was able to welcome her to Congo, and we showed her hydroelectric power schemes that have been funded by CDC and others, which have helped to bring employment to war-torn communities in eastern DRC. Through bringing lighting into



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villages, they have also been able to furnish girls with education, enabling them to study at night in schools in a safe way, which they were not able to previously.

So it is quite possible to reconcile action to tackle climate change with advancing the agendas of education, conflict reduction and other things, such as economic growth, which are really important to rural communities in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Alok Sharma: You are seeing countries coming forward with plans to increase the level of renewables. They want to do green growth in developing countries, but it is also a case of what support they will get from developed countries to ensure that they can deliver on those commitments. That is also a key part, which is why, going back the start of this discussion, we were talking about finance being so important, both in terms of public finance and ensuring that we can get a lot more private finance. Basically, it will need trillions of dollars to ensure that we have the right level and volume of green infrastructure around the world.

Q116 **Graham Stringer:** Obviously, it is possible to find examples where renewables will work or are subsidised to such an extent that they make sense. But look at China, where they are building a coal-fired power station every 10 days or so. Two thirds of the new energy power stations in Africa are coal powered. India, which has been mentioned, has closed down its nuclear industry. At the same time, we are subsidising energy and putting the cost of energy up to some of the poorest people in this country. The question I am getting to is this. Out there in the world, China and other countries are reducing the costs of their energy. We are increasing the cost of our energy, at a time when we see China as a threat to global stability. How does that make sense?

Alok Sharma: I am not sure I entirely follow, Mr Stringer. You started by saying that we are subsidising renewables around the world. Actually, renewables are cheaper now in the majority of countries around the world. The issue is how to support private sector investment into renewables around the world, and how to ensure the revenue mechanisms are available to enable the private sector to invest. In the UK, for instance, how is it that in less than 20 years we have built the biggest offshore wind sector in the world? The reason is the contracts for difference auction process, which has allowed the private sector to invest. So we need to support these countries to ensure that there are revenue mechanisms and the private sector can invest. It is cheaper to invest in renewables than in coal, for instance, in the vast majority of countries around the world.

Q117 **Graham Stringer:** I don't know if you have read the paper that Dieter Helm did as advice to the Government on the cost of contracts for difference and the whole cost of the renewables mess in this country. Have you read that paper?

Alok Sharma: No, I haven't read that paper.

Q118 **Graham Stringer:** I advise you to read it because it contradicts that completely. He is a Government adviser, and it is a Government-procured



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paper, which has been debated on the Floor of the House. It explains in some detail how much extra your constituents in Reading and my constituents in Manchester and Salford are paying because of the way we have gone about this. But the big point I was making in terms of international politics is that, while we have put up the price of energy, paid for in people's bills and sometimes directly by the Treasury, China is reducing its costs of energy, making its economy more competitive, when we see it as a threat to international order.

Alok Sharma: When I was at Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, I was responsible for the energy White Paper, which came out at the end of last year. That shows what has happened in terms of energy prices and what we are doing for those in need of financial support as part of the system, and how we want to see that transition to clean energy. I am happy to have a separate discussion on this. We are veering on to—

Graham Stringer: It is a bit unfair asking about a report you have not read, but it was relevant.

Chair: Graham, thank you. Do you have any other points you want to make at this time?

Q119 **Graham Stringer:** There is just one point along similar lines, if I may. By the end of this year, we will have had 26 of these conferences, yet the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere steadily increases. You keep pointing to progress here and commitment there, but carbon dioxide is increasing. Why have those 25 previous conferences failed, and how will this conference be different?

Alok Sharma: I think people look at Paris as a success, because that was the point at which the world agreed a framework of how we were going to tackle climate change, and those commitments were made. The urgency of the situation has meant that there is an increasing focus on this area.

In answer to earlier questions, I said that there is a range of commitments that countries have come forward with, which are more ambitious than previously. But we need every country to come forward with more ambition. I want us to get to the point where we can say that we have kept that 1.5° temperature rise within reach. That is what we are trying to do over the remaining five and half months to COP26.

Graham Stringer: May I ask one simple final question?

Chair: Very quickly, Graham.

Q120 **Graham Stringer:** You are a qualified accountant. This is an area of both complicated politics and complicated science. Are you familiar with the science? Do you really understand it?

Alok Sharma: Yes, I think I do understand the science. On the point you raised about the science, that is what underpins all of this. I remember when you, Mr Stringer, were Chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee. I had the opportunity to sit on that Committee as well. Yes,



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science does underpin what we are talking about in terms of why we need to take the action.

Chair: Thank you very much. We now go to Barry Gardiner from the Environmental Audit Committee.

Q121 **Barry Gardiner:** Chair, thank you very much. May I just add something into the very interesting discussion between Graham and the COP President-Designate? I am delighted to see you there, Alok, and may I thank you for the way in which your office has engaged with parliamentarians over the past months? That has been really helpful to many of us trying to find out what is happening. Of course, the paper that Graham referred to from Dieter Helm was actually a 2017 paper, and it was using figures that now look very sadly outdated. If Graham has read Dieter Helm's 2020 paper, he will know that it concludes by saying: "The new normal will take a while to sink in. But when it does, the profound structural break with the past in oil markets will reveal itself." So I think even Dieter Helm has changed his position somewhat.

I want to pick up on something that the Government have said. You have said that you will "reinforce and amplify awareness and action on the linkages between" the two COPs—COP15 and COP26. We understand, or we certainly should understand—I know you do—that they are mutually interdependent. That is why I want to move away from the style of questioning that you have experienced so far, which has been, "How do we get these guys to do what we think they ought to be doing?", to a much more Parisian view. The former was the old Copenhagen view—top down and telling people what they ought to do. The Parisian view has been much more bottom up. So I wanted to ask you what offers the UK Government are making to China to help to ensure the success of COP15 in Kunming on biodiversity, because it seems to me that that is the way to engage in what is a difficult diplomatic climate and to engender their support for COP26.

Alok Sharma: Thank you for that, Mr Gardiner, and thank you very much for your kind comments about my office. We are trying to engage as well as we can with colleagues; I know there is a huge amount of interest in COP26.

You are absolutely right that climate change and biodiversity ultimately are linked. They are two sides of the same coin, if I can put it like that. We have been having a dialogue with our colleagues in China. I have spoken to the Environment Minister; I have spoken to Xie Zhenhua, the climate envoy. At official level, we have had engagement at negotiator level. But obviously we would like to have even further engagement on these issues. Ultimately, there is mutual benefit in doing so. Of course we want Kunming to be a success, and we want COP26 to be a success as well, so I am very keen for us to work more closely on that shared agenda, but obviously we need to ensure that all parties are coming forward and doing that more urgent engagement. I don't know whether Peter Hill wants to come in on this point—on Kunming and engagement.



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Peter Hill: We have offered and established with the Chinese a joint working group on the two COPs. I think that if that were able to meet more often, that would be fantastic and would strengthen our joint efforts.

We are making a priority, as you will know, of finance for nature, through both our COP work and our CBD work, because, in a way, this is one pool of money trying to service one set of problems. I won't talk about it as two sides of the same coin, but if one thinks about sustainable land use and forestry, where climate finance can make a real difference, that is very important both for the CBD COP and the biodiversity targets, and for our COP and the role that nature-based solutions can play in bringing down carbon emissions and in adapting to nature.

So there is both a practical, logistical offer and a financial offer. We are not only putting up finance ourselves, but persuading others to come forward with finance; and practically, we are seeking to engage the Chinese in the sustainable supply chains work you may be familiar with. We are engaging a number of developing countries on how we ensure due diligence in supply chains, and China has an enormous role to play in that. We are making slow progress, but none the less progress, in engaging China in that debate. They have made significant progress domestically on timber, and we think that there is scope for further progress on other forestry products in supply chains. There is a set of offers there, which we are engaged with the Chinese on, and we are very open to strengthening and deepening that dialogue.

Q122 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you, and thank you, Alok. It is helpful that you focused on nature-based solutions, which is one of the things that the UK has brought to the whole UNFCCC debate and is highlighting at COP26. Various organisations have suggested that we could offer to the Chinese that we work through an agreed set of principles on nature-based solutions, to maximise the benefits for both climate and biodiversity and looking where there may be trade-offs. You mentioned earlier, Alok—or perhaps it was John—the hydro schemes that have been put in place in Congo. Yet you will know that for each hydro scheme that is put in place, there is often a very damaging and corresponding loss of biodiversity. These things are not all on one side or the other. There needs to be some framework within which the trade-offs and conflicts are understood, metricated and weighed off against each other. Is that something you could look at to achieve with the Chinese at COP15, in order to try to secure success for them, but also for COP26?

Alok Sharma: I would generally welcome even closer engagement with our colleagues in Beijing on a whole range of issues linking Kunming with Glasgow. As Peter said, we have some engagement; we would like deeper engagement.

Q123 **Barry Gardiner:** Let me put to you an area that would be much more difficult to have engagement on. Peter talked about land systems, and that makes us think of land titles, tenure rights and different systems of inclusive ownership or governance models, which are so critical when looking at forestry, not only in reducing emissions from deforestation but



in afforestation and land-use change. That goes right to the heart of the rights of indigenous peoples. We have positive diplomatic engagement with China on many issues, but human rights and in particular indigenous rights are a real stopper to that engagement. I wonder how you might be able to use the issues that we have worked through for years at the CBD—on reduced emissions from deforestation, or at access and benefit sharing under the CBD—as a way of engaging with China on the very difficult human rights issues, which we cannot back off from, but perhaps could begin to present in a different way, as an important means of achieving China’s objectives for COP15, and for COP26.

Alok Sharma: Climate change and biodiversity loss are one area internationally that we should have full multilateral engagement on. Climate change does not respect borders, and that is one area we should be able to work on. We in our COP26 presidency are a neutral broker in this process, and therefore I am keen to engage with all countries.

On the issue of indigenous peoples, as you know—and I think this is the first time this has happened in a COP process—we have set up a civil society and youth advisory group and that of course includes representation from indigenous peoples. When this was set up, quite rightly, those engaged on it asked if this was something that was just going to be a talking shop, or would there be something coming out of this. I said that we want to use this as a way of elevating the voices of the most marginalised and people who are not heard in other forums.

I gave an example of the work we have done on the climate and development ministerial, which addresses this issue of access to finance, and how to ensure, getting the input from civil society, that the finance available gets to the right projects in a timely manner. On 31 March we brought together 50 governments, along with multilateral agencies, and the input from some of the discussions we had there came from the civil society advisory group, and there is follow-on work that we are doing.

I am very keen to make sure that COP26 is the most inclusive ever and we want to ensure that we have all voices engaged. On the wider point of how we engage with individual countries, I agree with you. On biodiversity and climate change, we should be able to discuss these issues openly because there is a mutual benefit in doing so.

Q124 **Barry Gardiner:** COP President-Designate, you have been extremely adept at avoiding the key thrust of my question. It is difficult—I accept that—and your position is difficult, so perhaps I might implore you to pass me over to John or Peter, who might be able to engage more on the specifics of what I am saying. It is about using the need to engage indigenous peoples, which we found over and over again at the convention on biological diversity is absolutely vital if we are to achieve progress, whether on reduced emissions from deforestation, land use rights, access and benefit sharing. It is vital to engage indigenous people and respect their human rights. We need to be using that to address the human rights concerns that we have in China. I do not know if John, as the envoy—



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Chair: If we can get a response from officials, and then we will need to move on. I know you are down for a few more questions later, Barry.

Peter Hill: I can give a very short answer. Obviously, I am not totally competent to talk about the CBD COP. On sustainable agriculture, which is one of the legs of our COP nature campaign and is about opening a dialogue with countries on how you move to sustainable agriculture, intrinsic to that is involving women and indigenous groups. As you say, one has to be sensitive about how you do it, but we are equally aware that you cannot really advance that dialogue without involving those groups in that discussion. I appreciate that is not a full answer, but I hope it is partial answer as to how we are moving this forward in the areas of COP, nature and land use.

Barry Gardiner: Thank you, Peter—a diplomatic answer. I will leave it there for now.

Chair: Thank you. That was a very comprehensive part of the session. I now go to Harriett Baldwin from the Treasury Committee.

Q125 **Harriett Baldwin:** Thank you very much, Henry, and to you President-Designate and your team for coming along to the Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Committee for inviting members from other Committees.

President-Designate, you mentioned in your opening remarks about your third priority being finance. I am sure you will be aware of the work the Treasury Select Committee has done on this. The Economic Secretary has told us that the Green Finance Institute is doing some work on technical advice for the UK Government on the taxonomy of what qualifies as green finance. Could you update us on how that timetable is progressing—whether you are being kept in the loop and whether we are likely to get the report before COP26? Will that technical group be part of what the UK is doing to lead by example in terms of how we can put financing adaptation and resilience right at the heart of the Glasgow summit?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, the Treasury is closely involved and helping us lead off on the finance aims that we have for COP26. The Chancellor and other colleagues are being very supportive. The advisory group that you were referring to was announced last month, I think.

Harriett Baldwin: Yes, in April.

Alok Sharma: Exactly. It is not directly under the COP26 umbrella, if I can put it like that. My understanding is—Peter Hill might have a bit more detail—that they are going to be providing independent advice on how we implement a green taxonomy in the UK. I think they are in the process of setting that up and developing a work plan. My understanding was that the outcome of all this is unlikely to come until next year, so I do not think the intention was to have it before November this year, but I am very happy to write to the Committee and set that out differently, if that is the case. I am happy to raise it with the Treasury.



Q126 Harriett Baldwin: That is helpful. So, within your finance priority, you are focusing on the \$100 billion commitment, rather than trying to get all countries to sign up to a similar approach in terms of what constitutes green finance. Are you also trying to come up with a common approach towards how Governments can use the tax system and the taxation levers that they have to drive international change through green tax systems? Is that part of the work that you are doing under that third priority?

Alok Sharma: Yes. It would be quite useful just to set that out. There are three aims of the finance piece within COP. The first is the public finance piece—quality, quantity and then the \$100 billion. The second is how you mobilise more from the private sector. The third point, which is the one that you are talking about, is how you ensure that every financial decision that is being taken effectively takes into account climate change.

On that issue, as you know, the Chancellor set out that there will be mandatory reporting on the TCFD requirements across the whole economy by 2025. That is one of the things that I and other colleagues talk about when we talk to Governments, of course; we make the point that what we want to see is that this is something that is being adopted across the international community. You are seeing a number of countries, like New Zealand, for instance, following on this agenda.

Then, in terms of the private finance piece, Mark Carney is leading off on that. There is a lot of good work that is going on in terms of getting financial players to make commitments to go to net zero. We have a number of campaigns running. One of them is the Net Zero Asset Managers Alliance, where I think we have about \$37 trillion committed. As a former City supremo yourself, you will know we are talking about almost 40% of assets under management. We are pushing further on that, and we also had the launch at the Earth Day summit of the global Financial Alliance for Net Zero, which is the overarching campaign that ties all this together.

Those are the three things we are doing. I am sorry; there was one other issue you raised. Was it on taxation?

Q127 Harriett Baldwin: Yes, a common approach to incentivising the reduction in burning carbon through the tax system.

Alok Sharma: First, carbon leakage is obviously an issue that is occupying countries around the world—how do you deal with that? Last year, we set out our plans for a UK emissions trading scheme. I think the first auction is taking place tomorrow. We have said that we are open to potentially linking with other ETS schemes internationally and looking at how to expand the scheme to other sectors of the economy.

One of the issues that has come up in previous Select Committees is about carbon market adjustment mechanisms. I have made the point that that is not a mandated issue for COP26, but clearly there is a lot of interest in CBAMs internationally, so we will see where that particular discussion goes.



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Q128 Harriett Baldwin: Thanks. Mark Carney is also doing some work on the climate-related disclosures in annual reports. That is something that he has shown leadership on for many years. Is that going to form part of what we are hoping to get out of the communiqué?

Alok Sharma: Yes. That is TCFD work—the taskforce on climate-related financial disclosures—that we are trying to get other countries to sign up to as well. Obviously, that is a case that we are making to other Governments to do. Generally, the UK is very much leading on this with the commitment that we have made, or that the Chancellor has made, that this is economy-wide by 2025.

Q129 Harriett Baldwin: If you had to put a percentage certainty on it, how certain are you that we will be able to announce that \$100 billion at the summit?

Alok Sharma: We are continuing to press on this. This is obviously one of the things that we are talking to G7 partners about. It is one of the top things that I raise when I have conversations with countries around the world as well. The key issue with this is that it is a totemic figure, and it has effectively become a matter of trust for developing countries. I am very clear with donor countries that we need to step up to the plate when it comes to climate finance.

Q130 Harriett Baldwin: Is that 90% certain then?

Alok Sharma: I wish I could give you a percentage. All I can tell you is that we will continue to push as hard as we can with countries around the world. This is something that the Prime Minister is raising with fellow donor countries as well. We are doing the very best that we can, and we will keep going. Of course, it is worth pointing out that at COP26 itself we also have to start the discussion of what comes from 2025 and beyond in terms of climate financing. Of course, that is why it is really important that we get as far as we can in terms of mobilising the \$100 billion.

Q131 Harriett Baldwin: Wearing my chair of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union hat very briefly, we will be there at Glasgow. We will obviously be engaging on the issue of COP26 in all our meetings this year with other parliamentarians, and we stand ready to work with you and your team in terms of that Parliament-to-Parliament engagement. Feel free to ask us to help or involve us in any way that you think would be useful.

Alok Sharma: Great. Thank you very much. I was in Rome recently and the Select Committees there, if they have not already, are reaching out to—

Harriett Baldwin: Yes, we have appointed Alex Sobel, the Labour MP, as the UK's rapporteur with the Italians.

Alok Sharma: There is a lot of interest in this on a parliamentary basis internationally as well, so that is great.

Chair: Thank you very much for raising that important inter-parliamentary



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aspect. Barry, I think you wanted to come back, or have you—

Q132 **Barry Gardiner:** You know me better than to think I would miss it. COP President-Designate, how are you on no sleep?

Alok Sharma: On no sleep?

Barry Gardiner: How long can you go?

Alok Sharma: I don't know where this one is leading.

Chair: We are finishing at 4.30, though.

Q133 **Barry Gardiner:** The reason I ask is because, of course, you will know that in Madrid under the Chilean presidency there was a very protracted negotiation indeed—an unsatisfactory one I have to say—which went on for days with people getting very little sleep. It was around the completion of the rulebook on article 6. Really the difficulty was in setting the rules for a carbon market where there is no double counting, but it was also a failure to resolve the issues that are absolutely critical for many of what would be considered those states that are least polluting but most adversely affected—the small island states and others—around loss and damage.

I wonder what lessons you have taken on board from Madrid and the failure to link those two issues adequately, and how you will seek at COP26 to gain the diplomatic trust of the countries affected by loss and damage, and enable us to resolve the outstanding issues around article 6.

Alok Sharma: The first thing to say is that obviously there were unique circumstances with COP25, with the relocation at very short notice, which I am pretty sure didn't help in terms of the preparations.

What I have been doing is obviously talking to past COP Presidents. In particular, I have spoken to Laurent Fabius and Laurence Tubiana. I was in Paris some weeks ago and we had a discussion around this issue: "How do you build trust?" Exactly as you say, it is absolutely vital in this process.

We had just had the Petersberg dialogue, which was completed, and obviously colleagues from around the world set out their views on some of the key negotiating issues, particularly article 6, as you have raised—loss and damage—and other issues as well.

What I said at Petersberg is that I want us to start that dialogue now in sort of informal groupings as well. I have asked Ministers from Japan and Singapore—Mr Koizumi and Mr Foo—to start to take those informal soundings from interested parties on article 6. We will put together ministerial pairings as well for some of these other key issues and have that informal dialogue, so that when we get to a point where we are able to meet physically and have discussions, they can be a lot more fruitful.

As I said, the plan is that we have a ministerial meeting in July, where we can start to have some of these political discussions. I will ask Peter if he wants to come in on this point about how close, for instance, they got on



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some of these issues at Madrid, but the one thing that is very clear to me is that it is going to require compromise on all these issues, so we cannot have people just coming and restating the positions that they have had over a long time. That is not going to move any of this forward.

If I may, I will invite Peter Hill, who was at Madrid, to speak. Peter, do you want to come in on this point?

Peter Hill: Yes. I might come in on loss and damage as well. I think at Madrid we got reasonably close on article 6; that is my impression. One of the challenges is not to allow that all to dissipate, but to build on it, and we had some good discussions. As the COP President says, there now needs to be a political engagement.

I wouldn't say that we are on the verge of cracking it, and I think that for a number of countries it is part of a bigger picture and part of a bigger discussion, and therefore it may be that we do not crack it before the event itself. But as the COP President says, we have had good technical discussions and now we need political engagement

On loss and damage, you know the issue very well. There is a finance question, which is extremely fraught and on which positions are very entrenched. I think that one of the things that we have tried to do as a presidency is focus on what is meant by loss and damage. So at the Climate and Development Ministerial, we tried to focus on the questions of impact and access to resources.

We are also now working, and you will know this better than me, on operationalising a Santiago Network, which was agreed at the last COP. So we started a process of consultation in April. We are now putting our initial conclusions to parties for consideration about how you operationalise that, i.e. whether it is about knowledge exchange, expertise exchange, technical support or access to finance, how you make a reality of this idea.

That is part of our attempt as the presidency to bring a wider range of discussion to what risks becoming a simplistic and entrenched discussion over loss and damage, because that may not be productive, but without denying that people have very firm views about it. We are trying to find ways of talking about the underlying issues, as well.

Q134 **Barry Gardiner:** I find both those responses really positive. If I were to say two things about them, and perhaps draw you out a little further, the first would be that I think it would be helpful to begin to talk about loss and damage not in a legalistic framework. That is essential, because once you get into guilt and reparations, it becomes, as you say, terribly fraught. I think there are ways of talking about it without going into the legalistic, international law side of it, which actually can be really helpful.

The other point I would make is that you treated these two issues as separate. The whole thrust of my question to you, Alok, is don't: try to treat them as united, because the diplomatic benefit that you will gain from dealing adequately with loss and damage, and the diplomatic support that you will garner from that, will enable you to make the



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progress that you need on article 6. That would be my counsel, at any rate. You have a great opportunity here to nail the rulebook and get this continuing problem sorted, but I do not think you will manage it unless you focus on loss and damage as linked to the question of the rulebook. I don't know if you want to come back on that.

Alok Sharma: Obviously, this is a multidimensional negotiation that we are doing, and clearly, all of this is linked. As someone said to me, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. I take note, if I can put it like that, of the point you have made.

Q135 **Barry Gardiner:** Let me move on to a final point in this section, which comes very much from what Harriett was saying. Again, it is related to finance, but it is also related to movers such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union—which is doing great work on this, and I look forward to hopefully participating with them at COP in the IPU section.

Yesterday, I was speaking with colleagues in the Parliament from South Africa—Members of Parliament in South Africa—and also with Bruce Hewitson, who as you will know is one of the lead authors of the various intergovernmental papers on climate change. They raised the problem that has been created by the cuts in development aid that the UK has put in place. I promise you, I did not raise this with them myself: they raised it. They talked about the GCRF, the climate resilience network knowledge management project that had been axed, and it was very interesting, because up until that point, all the South African Members of Parliament had been talking about issues of water and drought. Resilience was absolutely the critical thing, yet here we have cut a project as a result of the cuts to our aid budget which, to them, seems to be at the heart of their climate challenge.

I just wonder how we can proof our delivery of climate finance against these cuts, because they are doing damage. It is not a question of whether they are doing damage: it was clear to me yesterday, from the feedback that I got from those parliamentarians and colleagues in South Africa, that this was something they thought they had help with, and now that help is gone. I think those cuts are doing real damage and undermining the excellent work that you are trying to do in this area.

Alok Sharma: I will ask whether either of my colleagues want to come in on the specifics of that particular project. Overall, as I have said, we have gone from 0.7% to 0.5%; we are still a world-leading donor. The other thing I would say is that climate finance is being doubled. That is a commitment that was made in 2019 by the Prime Minister, and that is something we are sticking to.

Q136 **Barry Gardiner:** These are DFID programmes that are being cut. I need them climate-proofed, in a sense; that is what I am asking for.

Alok Sharma: I will ask John if he wants to comment on those specific ones. From a COP26 perspective, I am not the person who looks at individual projects, as you will appreciate. The overall statement of the doubling of ICF is welcomed around the world. In terms of this particular project, John, I don't know if you want to comment—



Barry Gardiner: There are a number.

John Murton: I don't know the specific project referred to, but if details are sent, we can follow up.

Q137 **Barry Gardiner:** Very quickly, let's go on to the COP itself and the decision about how it takes place—whether in person, virtually or postponed yet again. I know you cannot give me a definitive answer, so let me ask a slightly different question. What are the Government's priorities for in-person attendees? If there will be a reduced number of people, and difficulty getting people there in person, who is the priority?

Alok Sharma: The starting point, as I have said on a number of occasions, is that we are planning a physical COP. None of us can predict precisely where we will be with covid in five and a half months. I am encouraged and cautiously optimistic, as we have vaccines rolling out and we know how to do rapid testing, so we are looking at all that.

It is vital that we have a physical COP and that developing countries are able to sit at the same table, opposite the big emitters. That is what I am hearing when I travel around. Nobody wants a delay. As people have pointed out, we have already had one year of delay to COP. It is not as if climate change has abated during that time; in fact, things have got worse. We are planning that.

The key issue is how to do that in a safe way for participants, obviously, but also, very importantly, for the local community in Glasgow and more widely. That is what we are looking at right now. We are looking at all the covid-secure measures that could be used. If I may, since this is a very practical question, I will ask Ros Eales, who is our chief operating officer, to come in on this point, because she is working on this issue around the clock.

Ros Eales: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you, COP President. You are absolutely right that we are working towards a physical COP that is safe and successful. Foremost in our mind is the safety of not just delegates but the local community in Glasgow and wider Scotland. As the COP President mentioned, we are working through and exploring a number of different public health and covid security measures that will enable us to do that. We are working very closely with public health experts and, importantly, the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council, as well as UNFCCC, on what the package of measures will look like, alongside monitoring the pandemic and projections for the pandemic. As you rightly point out, I do not think we are ready yet to communicate exactly what that package of measures will look like, but we are working very hard on that.

It is worth saying that we are exploring our digital and virtual offer. That is something that we would be thinking about anyway, to widen participation—it is important from an inclusion point of view. However, we are hearing very strongly from parties that the physical presence enables them to have a real equal say—a seat around the table. The COP

President's travels have demonstrated the value of that face-to-face interaction. That remains our ambition and aim, and we are working very hard towards that.

Alok Sharma: I would add one thing. Members of the Committee will understand that this is not just a conference; it is a negotiation among 197 parties. With any negotiation, people will want to break off and have side discussions and all the rest of it. That is why it is vital that this is a physical COP.

Q138 **Barry Gardiner:** I could not agree with you more. I am delighted that you are still banging the drum for full physical participation. I have been to nearly every COP since Copenhagen and I know the value of that physical presence. People's body language and reading the rooms are really important. Thank you and your support network.

Chair: Thank you. I am conscious of time and we have three more members who have not yet had an opportunity to ask questions. Claudia Webbe, you briefly wanted to come in on the back of that.

Q139 **Claudia Webbe:** Thank you, Chair. I want to come in quickly on the back of that last question from Barry. Alok, you have indicated that COP26 is one of our last opportunities to achieve 1.5°, and that is so important. However, many have threatened to boycott the conference unless there is a better and equitable distribution of vaccines across the world.

Your challenge is that the UK has not followed the US in seeking to waive the patents to vaccine roll-out. How will we ensure the physical presence, if we have got boycotts, and there is not a fair and equitable distribution of vaccines across the world? Africa is not due to be vaccinated at the current rates until 2023, I think, at the earliest.

Alok Sharma: Let me make a general point, and then a more specific one in relation to COP. Colleagues will know that the UK is providing £548 million towards the COVAX facility. The PM has been clear that we will look to redistribute our excess vaccine doses to developing countries through COVAX and other mechanisms.

Specific to COP, I gave a speech just outside Glasgow on Friday, with six months to go to COP. I made the point that we are exploring every possible covid security measure. Of course, that includes testing, vaccines and other measures to keep COP26 covid free. In due course, we will set out details. Quite rightly, people will want to know how we are going to make this safe. I will set that out, and I am sure there will be an opportunity at future Select Committees for us to be quizzed on all of that.

Chair: Thank you. I am now going over to Chris Law from the Select Committee on International Development.

Q140 **Chris Law:** Thank you, Chair. I will cut straight to the chase. Last time we spoke, Alok, I asked about what attempts had been made for the least developed countries' representatives to be present at COP26. On this occasion, I want to ask about women and girls and their representation. They often suffer the brunt of climate change in



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developing countries, yet they are among the least represented groups at these international climate talks. What is the Government doing to increase the representation of women's and girls' concerns at COP26?

Alok Sharma: Before getting to COP itself, what are we doing to get the voices of women's groups, indigenous groups and young people's groups to be part of this? That has been happening through our COP26 civil society and youth advisory group. I also made the commitment that, on every foreign visit, I will meet civil society and youth groups, and that is what I have been doing as part of my engagement.

There are two co-chairs of that civil society and youth advisory group. They are both female youth activists, one from the global north and one from the global south. That they chair that group, I hope gives people an understanding that we take the issue very seriously.

We also have our Friends of COP26 group. Some of the people we are getting advice from, such as Kate Hampton, Christiana Figueres and Laurence Tubiana, are championing the overall climate message as well as the message on gender. A gender action plan was put forward at COP25 and we will be looking to implement that. My colleague, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, has been leading on that work. We are ensuring that those voices are being heard as part of this process, and we will continue to do that. Peter Hill, do you want to add any more on this in terms of specific programmes that we have where we support female engagement and ensure that women's voices are being heard in the climate debate?

Peter Hill: As you said, COP President, there are the events that we manage, which we try to make sure are inclusive of gender, indigenous people and youth. The COP President has referenced some of those. There was the summit we held in December and the climate and development ministerial in March. There are the policies that we are pursuing. The UK NDC and our adaptation communication both cover gender. Our domestic policies are part of the gender action plan agreed at COP25. Whether it is in the energy sector, in nature, we are trying to lead by example. I hope the G7 will have something to say about gender equality, particularly in the energy transition.

Then there is the support we are giving to partners through our development programmes, our gender-responsive finance and our very specific programmes—for example, we are sponsoring a mentoring programme to support women negotiators, to try and level up the playing field. So at all levels there is a practical approach to try to mainstream support for gender and inclusion in all aspects of the COP work.

Q141 **Chris Law:** Thank you. You were previously the Secretary of State for International Development—I was on the International Development Committee at the time—so you must find yourself in a very difficult position, given the severe cuts that have been announced to UK aid. How will you enhance the space for women and girls in climate adaptation programmes following those severe cuts? Is it not a major strategic mistake, when you are asking for trust as the host, that the least



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developed countries will have the burden of the greatest impact through climate change.

Alok Sharma: On the 0.5%, as the Government have stated, that is a temporary measure. As the economy improves, I very much hope that we will reinstate the 0.7%.

On the issue of adaptation resilience, Peter made reference to some of the campaigns that we are supporting. For instance, REAP, as you know, is one of the partnerships that we are supporting. Also, there is the work that we are doing at local level. I go back to this point about the climate and development ministerial meeting. One of the key issues that came out of that was access to finance. I think 80% of climate-vulnerable people are women across the world, and this is about ensuring that the finance is getting to adaptation projects locally as well. Coming out of the climate development ministerial, we have got a taskforce on access to finance, which we have launched with Fiji and others. I hope there will be some concrete action so that we will be able to show by COP26 some movement on the pilot projects in individual countries.

So we are doing everything we can to ensure that we are providing support. In terms of your question about the 0.5%, as I said, I hope we are able to reinstate it as the economy recovers.

Q142 **Chris Law:** On that note about the economy recovering, the UK is not unique in seeing a downturn in its economy as a result of the pandemic. In fact, all the G7 members have seen that downturn as well. However, the UK is unique in deciding to cut its 0.7% to 0.5%. When are we likely to see that return? Is it likely to be in the coming year, or is it a never-never year?

Alok Sharma: Chris, you will appreciate that I cannot answer that question. It depends what happens to the economy. What I would say in terms of climate finance, which is the bit where I am particularly keen that we get commitments, is that we have made a commitment to a doubling from 2021 to 2025. Not every donor nation has done that. I have been pressing for those commitments to be made beyond 2020 and for countries to come forward with some ambition when it comes to climate action.

Chair: Thank you. We now go to Mark Logan from the Science and Technology Committee.

Q143 **Mark Logan:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, President-Designate. It is good to see you today, along with the team. I have a question on the announcement that was made last week about the dedicated science and innovation day to happen at COP26. How do you plan to work with other countries to implement that and, ultimately, to tackle climate change?

Alok Sharma: I think in a previous Select Committee it was suggested that we have a chief scientific adviser for COP26. I thought that was a very valuable suggestion. Colleagues will now know that Sir Patrick Vallance has kindly agreed to do that, and he has a network of other CSAs

around Government Departments to support him. That was a great suggestion, which I was very pleased to take on board.

On the science and innovation day, for me this is incredibly important. I was very keen, on a personal level, that we have a dedicated day. Science will run throughout the two weeks of COP, but I thought it was important to have the day. For the day, we will focus on three things: highlighting innovation; looking at the science solutions around our four goals; and the linkage with health, which is also important.

I will ask Peter Hill to say something, because he chairs a steering committee across Government looking at science as part of our COP work. He might want to set out some more detail. Peter, I don't know whether it is worth mentioning Mission Innovation as well.

Peter Hill: Yes. There is both the science and the innovation end, so I should mention the IPCC report, which comes out in August, I think, on the physical impacts of climate, which will be significant. That will need to be recognised at the COP and in the negotiated part of it. I think that will be a significant moment.

We are also mobilising and working with our science colleagues across Government and beyond. The Universities Network and the FCDO Science and Innovation Network are mobilising the scientific community across the world and in the UK.

On the innovation side, as the COP President has said, it is our responsibility to renew Mission Innovation. That is the technology end of science. I think there will be a meeting later this month and in early June to launch that, and a set of new goals and targets. We think that will also be a big moment at COP, to launch a further set of goals and targets for how we will get to, for example, cost-competitive hydrogen or decarbonising the power sector.

We see both the more pure science side and the science-innovation-technology side as critical components of COP. We are co-ordinating across Government and beyond, and internationally, to profile that in the way that I think you would hope.

Q144 **Mark Logan:** Thank you, Peter. I am thinking of that science and innovation day, but if we look to the long term—President-Designate, thinking back to your previous role, and to the Science and Technology Committee focus on ARIA—what role do you see ARIA potentially playing in the long term on climate change and relations between countries?

Alok Sharma: Great question. My view is we should be collaborating on a lot of these areas and technologies, whether that is on issues related to hydrogen, CCUS or whatever emerging technology we are talking about. Lots of countries have strategies and are putting money in. There is absolutely scope for us to collaborate on some of those technologies. That is what Mission Innovation 1 was all about and, as Peter said, we will be setting out more detail on Mission Innovation 2.



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On ARIA, again I think that there is scope for pure research. Let us see how linkages work between the work that ARIA and similar organisations around the world do. I am certainly very excited that we will have ARIA and that there is scope and opportunity for further international collaboration.

Mark Logan: Thank you very much, and thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you. We now go to Deirdre Brock of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Q145 **Deidre Brock:** Thank you, Chair, and thanks, President-Designate, and your colleagues for coming along and being prepared to speak to us today; it is good to hear all your plans.

I would like to hear about the input that the Scottish Government and the UK Government in Scotland office have had into the FCDO's diplomacy plan for COP26. You will be aware, President-Designate, that there was criticism of the way that Scottish Government Ministers and officials were not formally notified of the UK Government's intention to host COP26 in Glasgow, instead having to read about it in the media. Now, that was before your time, and I know that the COP26 Devolved Administrations Ministerial Group has been set up since then and has met twice since last November. However, the details in the communiqués that are issued from the group are tantalisingly scant. The March meeting note just says, "The group discussed UK objectives for COP26 and the G7 climate track, as well as domestic engagement and communications for COP26". What further details can you give us of those discussions? What sort of outcomes do you expect from those meetings?

Alok Sharma: First, I am very pleased to have been able to set that up, and obviously we also have representation from the territorial offices as part of that.

In terms of the joint communiqué, obviously that, and indeed the agenda for these meetings, is agreed across all of us; it is not just me setting out a communiqué or an agenda. The next meeting will be next month. At the last meeting, we discussed a range of things. I updated colleagues on the international engagement that we have been doing, the domestic stakeholder engagement and what our plans were for public communications on COP.

Personally, I am very keen to be open. We want this to be an all-of-UK event; there is no question over that. In fact, when I was in Glasgow, I went to see the leader of Glasgow City Council, and again we had a very good and productive discussion. I would say that we are working well with delivery partners in Scotland, and we will continue to work closely. I think there is a mutual benefit for the whole of the UK in making sure that we have a successful COP, but particularly for Scotland and Glasgow.

Q146 **Deidre Brock:** Indeed. Can you specify some joint endeavours between the UK Government and the Scottish Government? Obviously, Ms Eales outlined discussions that were being had with the Scottish Government



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but also Glasgow City Council around public health measures in the light of the pandemic. What are the joint endeavours that are being worked on currently?

Alok Sharma: The key joint endeavour is ensuring that we have a physical COP that is safe. There is very close working going on with officials in the city council, in the Scottish Government and in the various health groups in Scotland and in England. The key issue is to ensure that we are actually able to have this physical event that we all want and that it is safe.

Obviously, Glasgow City Council will want to promote the work that it is doing in terms of climate action, and I am sure the Scottish Government will have their own plans. But the key issue here is that we have a mutual interest in making sure that we deliver a safe and successful event in Glasgow.

Q147 **Deidre Brock:** Ms Eales, as I said, you outlined those discussions with Scottish Government representatives and Glasgow City Council reps around possible public health issues. Mr Hill, could you outline what discussions you have been involved in with Scottish Government civil servants, and the nature of those discussions, over arrangements for COP?

Alok Sharma: Ros Eales is leading on that, so Ros may want to come in.

Ros Eales: We regularly meet Scottish Government officials and our counterparts, and a range of Scottish delivery partners: Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and so on. We have a monthly delivery board where we discuss operational issues around a physical COP. However, separately to that, obviously we are looking at covid and covid health measures very closely, and we are engaged with both Scottish public health officials and the HMG side as well on that specifically. And we are engaged with Glasgow City Council, given—obviously—the locality of the conference itself.

This is an ongoing process. There is very regular engagement between the delivery team in the COP Unit and Scottish Government counterparts.

Q148 **Deidre Brock:** Okay. That is very much the organising of the conference—the nuts and bolts, if you like, of what is going to happen in those two weeks. Going back to you, President-Designate, as you know, Scotland has a very impressive track record on tackling climate change through legislative commitments and initiatives such as our climate justice fund, and has certainly been very active on the world stage. We also have very abundant renewables resources and a burgeoning renewables sector. Can I ask how Scotland's strengths in those areas are going to be highlighted to the world at COP26?

Alok Sharma: The first thing to say is that on Friday, for my "six months to COP" speech I went up, as you know, to Scotland. I went to Whitelee wind farm and spoke about what Scotland has done in terms of eliminating coal from the electricity mix. I spoke about what is going on in terms of



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onshore/offshore wind as well. In terms of showcasing what is happening in Scotland and across the UK, we have put out an expression of interest for organisations that want to come and display in the green zone. That expression of interest has now closed. We are evaluating it. I think I can say that we have had thousands of organisations coming forward, and we are in the process of sifting through all of that.

The one thing that I am very keen on is that, when we are able to announce who is going to be able to take part and display in the green zone, it is representative of the whole of the United Kingdom. I think that is vitally important. Ros has been looking at all of this. Ros, do you want to say any more about the green zone and the sifting process that is ongoing?

Ros Eales: The green zone is very much a stakeholder-led space. Unlike the blue zone, which is the Scottish event campus, which is largely the official negotiations managed by the UN, the green zone is a wholly HMG-managed space where we will really have the space to showcase innovation across the UK, and action from different stakeholder groups. What we are aiming for in this space is to show and demonstrate not only all parts of the UK but different stakeholder groups as well. This really speaks to our ambition to be inclusive, and speaks to the point around including different stakeholder groups. That is our ambition and our aim. As we are sifting through the thousands of proposals that we have received, that will be very much at the forefront of our minds.

Q149 **Deidre Brock:** All right. In terms of the Scottish Government's involvement in that, was there any formal involvement with Scottish Government officials over the criteria—

Ros Eales: Yes. We have shared the proposals in detail with not just the Scottish Government but all the four nations for their comment and feedback.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I am conscious of time. Therefore, to close, I will hand back to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Tugendhat.

[Tom Tugendhat took the Chair]

Chair: Thank you very much, Henry. I am very grateful. President Sharma—those are words to conjure fear into the heart of No. 10, aren't they?—thank you very much indeed for your time with us and for the expert testimony of your civil servants, for which we are enormously grateful. You highlighted many areas of co-operation and many of the areas in which there is still a lot of work to do. As you know, we will be having regular sessions with not only you but various of your Ministers in the coming months. We would be very grateful, if there are changes in the way that you have answered these questions that come between times, if you would write to the various Committees that are represented.

This is clearly a fast-moving situation. Having been speaking with Piero Fassino, my opposite number in Italy about this, we are co-operating very



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closely though Parliaments. I know that you recognise that. We would be enormously grateful if you would update us as your co-operation changes and your ambitions shift. This is the most important diplomatic event that the UK will conduct this year. It is also the most important climate moment for many years. Striking as it does just after the global shock that has been covid, it is an opening, really, to strike while the iron is hot and to change a lot of the ways in which we have conducted ourselves. We wish you all the best, and I know that you go with the good will of the whole House. Thank you very much for your time.