

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Oral evidence: COP15: the international biodiversity conference

Tuesday 29 June 2021

9.55 am

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Members present: Baroness Parminter (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; Lord Browne of Ladyton; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Baroness Chalker; Lord Colgrain; Lord Lilley; Baroness Northover; The Lord Bishop of Oxford; Lord Puttnam; Lord Whitty; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 4

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 34 - 45

Witness

I: Minister Yang Xiaoguang, Minister and First Staff Member, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Examination of witness

Minister Yang Xiaoguang.

Q34 **The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into the Convention on Biological Diversity. We have two sessions this morning. The first will explore the People's Republic of China's approach to COP15. I am delighted to say that we are joined by Minister Yang, who is the Minister and First Staff Member of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and two of his colleagues, Xin Lu and Long Jingni. Welcome to you all.

I remind all attendees that a transcript will be taken. Witnesses will have the chance to review it before it is made public. The session is webcast live and made available to view via the parliamentary website. I remind Members to declare all relevant interests when they first speak. Thank you for that.

Minister, I know that you have asked to begin the session by making a short statement. We look forward to hearing from you now.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Baroness Parminter. Lords, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It is a pleasure to join you on this important occasion. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to the Environment and Climate Change Committee for your support for COP15, the importance that you attach to the conference and your willingness to enhance communication and co-operation with China.

China attaches great importance to ecological conservation. We have placed great emphasis on green and sustainable development, because that is the aspiration of the Chinese people. In two days, we will mark the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. A grand celebration will be held to review past achievements and to look into the future. The CPC has led China to achieve extraordinary success in the past 100 years. The most important reason behind this success is that the CPC has always put the people front and centre, and regarded serving the interests of the vast majority of the people as its fundamental goal. This is also a key difference between the CPC and many other political parties in the world.

Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese people have achieved great progress in poverty alleviation in the past 70-plus years. The days when people had barely enough food are gone. Over 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty. This is a contribution of over 70% to the world's poverty reduction efforts. In the meantime, over 400 million people have joined the middle-income group.

After fulfilling basic material needs, the Chinese people aspire to a better life. They hope to live in a more beautiful environment, with blue sky, clear water and clean air. There is no doubt that the CPC and the Chinese Government will work to meet the aspiration of the people. That is why

China is making unprecedented efforts to achieve the environmental protection and ecological conservation goals set for 2035—in our words, to build a beautiful China. President Xi Jinping has said on many occasions that lucid waters and lush mountains are just as precious as mountains of gold and silver, and that we should protect the ecological environment as if we are protecting our eyes and life.

Guided by Xi Jinping's thoughts on ecological progress, we have implemented the new development concept. We are committed to a low-carbon development path that is led by full transition to green economic growth and social progress, that focuses on the development of green and low-carbon energy, and that gives priority to ecological preservation.

Last year, President Xi Jinping announced officially that China will strive to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. This is a major strategic decision that attests to China's audacity to take up the responsibility of building a community with a shared future for mankind. It is also in line with the requirements of sustainable domestic development. We have integrated the goals of peaking emissions and achieving carbon neutrality in our overall plan for ecological conservation, and we are making an action plan for the peaking. These are concrete actions by China to make a greater contribution to global ecological conservation.

Biodiversity is an important basis for the survival and development of mankind. As global population and economic activities continue to increase, the loss of biodiversity poses a grave challenge. This calls for the international community to adopt unprecedented ambitions and actions, to come together to explore the path of harmonious co-existence between man and nature, and to build a community with a shared future for man and all life on earth.

China has continued to step up the preservation of biodiversity. We have actively engaged in regional and international co-operation in that respect, and have made clear requirements and comprehensive arrangements for the preservation of biodiversity in the 14th five-year plan. We have rolled out major projects for the preservation of biodiversity and ecological conservation and restoration. These projects are aimed at the comprehensive protection and restoration of mountains, waters, forests, farmlands, lakes and grassland, as well as the prevention of desertification.

We have taken vigorous and effective measures to protect the ecological protection red-line area, which covers no less than 25% of China's total land territory, and we have encouraged the public to take the initiative and to participate in the preservation of biodiversity. When New China was founded 72 years ago, less than 9% of China's land area was covered by forest. Today, forest coverage is 23%. The restoration of the forest means the effective protection of a large number of species.

The COP15, to be held in Kunming in October this year, is themed "Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth".

China will strive to bring all parties together to take a historic step in the direction of reversing the trend of loss of biodiversity and to bring global governance on biodiversity to a new stage.

We must remain committed to practical co-operation and shoulder our responsibilities. Parties to COP15 should work to conclude a comprehensive, balanced, ambitious and pragmatic post-2020 global biodiversity framework. We should make balanced efforts to pursue the three objectives of the CBD: the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components and a fair sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. We can draw lessons from the Aichi targets and set science-based and reasonable objectives and targets. Together, we can provide new impetus for global governance on biodiversity.

We must give priority to ecological conservation and remain committed to green development. Under the principle of respecting and protecting nature and following its laws, we should support nature-based solutions and promote all-round conservation and restoration of the ecological system.

We must step up actions and enhance global governance on environmental protection. The international community should, under the principle of multilateralism, and bearing in mind the common interests of all mankind, step up our efforts and contribute more ideas and strength to the preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

It is also important to follow the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Developed countries are encouraged to provide concrete support to developing ones in funds, technology and capacity building. China looks forward to working together with all parties, including the UK, to build consensus and ensure positive outcomes at COP15 through an open, transparent and signatories-driven process.

We hope that through our work we can deliver the vision of a community with a shared future for man and all life on earth, and serve the common interests of all. Closer communication, practical co-operation, mutual trust and mutual learning on preserving biodiversity and tackling climate change will not only promote environmental protection and sustainable development in each country, but contribute to global governance on environmental protection.

The year 2021 is an important year for global governance on environmental protection because of COP15 and COP26, which China and the UK will host respectively. China supports COP26 in achieving positive outcomes. President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Boris Johnson have reached important agreements on closer co-ordination and mutual support between our two countries on hosting COP15 and COP26. The relevant authorities on our two sides have maintained communication on this, and a joint working group has been set up at working level.

Going forward, our two sides should make vigorous efforts to deliver on the agreements between our leaders and to enhance co-ordination and co-operation so as to achieve positive outcomes, to create a synergy between our two conferences, to take China-UK co-operation on climate change response and environmental governance to a new level, and to enable our two countries to take the lead in global environmental governance and green development.

The city of Kunming is known for its history, culture, pleasant weather and picturesque scenery. In his speech at the UN summit on biodiversity in September last year, President Xi Jinping extended a warm welcome to all parties, inviting them to come to Kunming, the beautiful city of eternal spring, in October 2021, where we would discuss and draw up plans together to protect global biodiversity and turn our planet into a beautiful homeland for all creatures to live in harmony.

I appreciate your care and support for COP15. I hope that more British parliamentarians and people from all sectors will contribute to the success of COP15 and COP26 and to deeper China-UK co-operation and global co-operation on environmental protection. Let us work together to write a new chapter on ecological conservation and build a community with a shared future for all life on earth.

With that, I will stop temporarily. Thank you for your patience. I would like to hear your comments and take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Yang. It was particularly inspiring to hear your articulation of President Xi Jinping's comment that achieving environmental protection is as important as protecting our eyes and our life. One of the things that we have been hearing in our sessions to date is how important it is to have political leadership. His articulating the aspirations of your country's people is just the sort of leadership that we need to see translated into action.

You said that COP15 will need unprecedented ambition and actions if we are to achieve that shared future for man and all life. That is what we will now explore in our questions. Lord Cameron will ask the first question for us.

Q35 Lord Cameron of Dillington: Good morning, Minister. Thank you very much for coming to talk to us. It was very interesting to hear your opening remarks. I should declare my interests. I am a farmer and landowner. I am also the chair of a research station called the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. We do quite a bit of work in China with your universities.

If the Kunming convention is to be a success, we have to persuade a lot of people across the world that this matters. That will involve everyone from farmers and landowners to businesses, Governments, local governments and even schools and universities. How is the Chinese presidency working towards its goals for COP15? How are you raising awareness about COP15, both in China and further afield?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Lord Cameron. Over the past years, China and the secretariat of the convention have worked closely and overcome many difficulties to actively promote the preparation of the conference. We are actively promoting the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh to Kunming action agenda for nature, and have fulfilled the host Government agreement consultation. Much progress has been made in preparing for COP15.

The first priority on our side is that our national leaders have promoted COP15 many times. For example, in 2019 President Xi Jinping and French President Macron issued the Beijing Call for Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Change between China and France. Last year, when President Xi attended the UN biodiversity summit, he made an important speech. He also invited the relevant parties to go to Kunming to talk about the conservation of biodiversity.

We are preparing actively for the high-level meeting. We have drafted the plan of the high-level meeting and the Kunming declaration, which will be published at the high-level meeting, as well as other deliverables such as host country measures. Meanwhile, we have planned and organised a variety of side events, including the ecological civilisation forum. There are nine other side events: for example, the science-policy forum, the world environment and legal assembly, the business and biodiversity forum, the urban biodiversity summit, the nature and cultural diversity summit, and other pre-meeting events. Through these events, people are getting more and more aware of the importance of COP15 and the importance of the conservation of biodiversity.

We have also published our position paper, *Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth: China in Action*. We have organised an online round table, consisting of 17 Ministers, and published a series of reports and readings from such round tables. We held a themed press conference on biodiversity. We organised a series of events commemorating International Day for Biodiversity, on 22 May, and World Environment Day, on 5 June. We have done a lot of publicity for the Chinese public, as well as for the world, on the protection of biodiversity.

On 29 April, our website as the hosting country for COP15 kicked off. The Chinese Government always attach importance to biological civilisation and the preservation of biodiversity. We value its importance to sustainable development. As our President points out, biodiversity is the very foundation of sustainable development, as well as its target and method. China has included the construction of ecological civilisation in its constitution. We are actively merging the practice of protecting biodiversity and developing economic and social progress. Our thought is to build an economic and ecological system characterised by emphasising protection as well as green development.

We have tried our best to improve protection and supervision capability. We have made very strict rules forbidding change to spatial planning and strengthened our supervision of the utilisation of wild animals and plants, to raise awareness of and participation in the cause of biodiversity by all

of society, so that we can create an atmosphere in which the whole of society is engaged in the conservation of biodiversity.

China will take the opportunity of hosting COP15 to work together with international society to promote the conservation of biodiversity. We will ensure that COP15 is a successful and important meeting that could be a milestone.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Yang. We now move to Baroness Chalker's questions.

Q36 **Baroness Chalker of Wallasey:** Minister Yang, I was very interested to hear what you said. It is 41 years since I made the first of many visits to China. I know that you have come a long way in that time. I am also a former chairman of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. In that respect, I am most interested in how the COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting your preparations for the conference. You seem to be saying that it will definitely go ahead in October, but we would be very glad to know what the preparations are that will keep people safe at the conference, which we hope to attend.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Baroness Chalker. It is true that COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on all our lives. Nobody forecast this COVID before 2020. The direct impact on COP15 is that it has been delayed twice, until this October. Our initial planning had to be postponed. So far, we have confidence in organising the event in October, but COVID-19 still has many uncertainties and may have a further effect on COP15.

Another important factor is that it was to be an offline event, but we are taking into consideration COVID-19 and the changing variants of the virus. Globally, there are still countries fighting COVID-19, and there will be different national situations for them in attending the conference, so we have had to change it to an online event, mixed with an offline event, inviting only a small number of people. Of course, we hope that it will be an offline event where people can meet face to face, but we have to follow closely the COVID-19 situation around the world and ensure the safety of our citizens, as well as the safety of COP15.

Another impact is on the logistical support for COP15. For example, it has changed twice. We have had to adjust many of our programmes in Kunming city, and currently we do not have an accurate number of participants. Quarantine rules might change at the time, so there are still a lot of uncertainties ahead. That will affect preparation work for COP15.

In spite of that, we have worked very hard to promote the preparation work for COP15. Currently, we can say that the preparatory work is going smoothly and has made positive progress. We are going to make back-up plans for the COP15 convention in relation to the requirements of the COVID-19 rules, and for preparation work, to ensure the safety of all venues. We watch the COVID-19 situation around the world closely and

have constant exchanges with the secretariat of the convention. We have confidence that we will ensure that COP15 will be held this October.

Q37 **Baroness Chalker of Wallasey:** Thank you, Minister Yang. You clearly have an online conference mixed with a small presence. We hope that you will be able to allow the few people who go to Kunming to see and to mix with people of that city, because their views are most important to all the rest of us. Will that be possible?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: It is absolutely our aspiration, too, to attract more people to visit Kunming. Kunming is ready for visitors.

The most important thing is the evolution of COVID-19 and whether some countries have successfully controlled the situation. Through our efforts, which have been unprecedented in China, we have successfully controlled COVID-19. For many days, there has been zero increase in infections. Domestically transmitted disease in China has been stopped. This achievement is very precious.

The Government put people's lives and health first, so we have to be cautious. If you are invited by the secretariat and the Chinese Government to Kunming, quarantine rules have to be followed to ensure that everybody is safe. There are still four months to go. We are watching closely the changing situation with COVID-19. We hope that everything will be better. In Britain, for example, we know the success of the vaccination process, but in recent days there have been high numbers of new infections. We have to be cautious and see what happens in the next few months.

Baroness Chalker of Wallasey: Thank you very much.

Q38 **Lord Colgrain:** Good morning, Minister Yang. We are very grateful that you and your colleagues are joining us this morning. What do you see as the most important considerations for the targets in the post-2020 framework?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Lord Colgrain. We have called on all parties to work closely around the three main objectives of the targets of the convention and its 2050 vision. We are jointly making an ambitious, practical and balanced framework. Ambitious, practical and balanced are the three key words that we would like to promote. We call for all parties to think in a holistic and systematic way to achieve transformative change and to reverse the trend of the loss of biodiversity globally.

We have lessons from the past. For example, the 20 Aichi targets have left a legacy for the making of the post-2020 framework. We should inherit the successful elements of the Aichi targets. We should also bear in mind the lessons and the shortcomings of those targets, so that we realise that, while we can have ambitious targets, we cannot just emphasise the numerical—the numbers; we should emphasise that improving protective results, strengthening the enforcement mechanism, capacity building and financial support are also very important factors.

Q39 **Lord Colgrain:** You talk about ambitious, practical and balanced. Clearly, one of the concerns for us is that none of the Aichi targets was met, so it is reasonable for us to have confidence that you will be more successful in that regard.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: You mean that China will be more successful.

Lord Colgrain: Indeed so, yes.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: The most important thing for us is our guiding principle of biological conservation. It is important that we put biodiversity conservation into our policies and make people aware of the importance of preserving nature. Meanwhile, as we establish our national targets, we are trying to be practical as well as ambitious. We have included biodiversity conservation in our 14th five-year plan and in our 2035 blueprint.

At each level—at the national level, provincial level and municipal level—we have financial support for that, because the Government attach great importance to green development as well as to the conservation of biodiversity. The most important thing for us is to try to find a balance between the ambition and the capability to achieve our targets. That is the key issue.

It is also important for developing countries to have enough access to financial support. That is the key to the success of their efforts, as well as being key to the achievement of the post-2020 framework for biodiversity conservation.

Lord Colgrain: Thank you very much.

Q40 **The Chair:** Perhaps, Minister Yang, I could press you a little on that. In the run-up to Kunming, a number of global leaders have signed up to the 30by30 target of protecting 30% of global land and global oceans by 2030. Does China support that approach as a target that might be translated into something meaningful at Kunming?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: By the 30%, do you mean marine, land, and airspace?

The Chair: It applies to marine and land. My understanding is that you may have some concerns over the global seas approach.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: As I said just now, we fully support the preservation of our nature, because the habitat of wild species is very important to us. Meanwhile, I think that the targets for the national conditions in each country are a very good proposal, and we are willing to communicate with the British side and other sides to promote the relative discussions, negotiations, et cetera. We also know that, because of the difference in national conditions and each country's capability and levels of protection, we should put forward action targets that are achievable, and with safeguard mechanisms.

The other issue concerns UNCLOS—the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Under these treaties, there is a negotiation process for the setting up of marine protection zones. There are different processes, and they should be co-ordinated in a better way.

In general, we could have ambitious targets, but we should be practical and ensure that they can be guiding principles, as well as being easy to enforce. We wish to work with the British side and other countries to commonly promote practical, scientific and achievable protective zone targets.

The Chair: Thank you.

Q41 **Lord Browne of Ladyton:** Good morning, Minister Yang, and thank you. My question is complementary to Lord Colgrain's question, I think. At least twice when you were answering it, you anticipated some of the issues that I am interested in.

In addition to targets, in your view what are the key ingredients—the key issues that need to be resolved—to enable the agreement of a post-2020 framework that can be implemented? You have already mentioned funding for developing countries, and you may wish to expand on that, but what are the other issues that need to be resolved?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Lord Browne. As I said just now, the agreement and implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework needs to be protected or ensured by financial support, which is also key to the post-2020 framework. How to meet all countries' financial needs, especially those of developing countries, for the implementation of the framework and how to resolve their financial difficulties is a big challenge that we will face commonly.

Article 20 of the convention has made clear the requirements for the mobilisation of resources. Developed countries still bear the responsibility for providing enough sustainable financial support. This will still be the most important financial resource to ensure the implementation of the convention. It is also the guarantee for developing countries to implement the framework, and can boost confidence for developing countries to join the negotiation process and try to agree on this important framework.

From the Chinese side, we agree that we should expand our channels of financing. Innovative financing, for example, can be an important supplement to Article 20 of the convention. However, this should not dilute the main channel of public funds, and it should not weaken the obligation of developed countries to give financial support. Beside more capital gathering, we should optimise the allocation and management of the capital, and strengthen the supervision and review of the effect of the capital, to further enhance the efficacy of the current capital. We should also encourage all countries to fully mobilise their national resources and improve their nation's awareness of the biodiversity requirements, fully

supporting their implementation of the convention through policy measures.

COVID-19 actually provided an opportunity for all parties to review the relationship between man and nature. All parties should put more emphasis on the implementation of the convention, and they should continue to carry out multilateral co-operation and international assistance, maintaining their investment intensity on biodiversity.

There are some review processes for the planning and reporting mechanisms. We should strengthen the evaluation of the progress on the targets and try to seek out more good experience to find potential solutions to the challenges we are facing and to narrow the gap through implementation, so that each party can do better work on the basis of their promises.

I emphasise again that we should avoid making very ambitious targets without the possibility of their being achieved, as we might repeat the mistake of the implementation of the Aichi targets. The targets for the planning and reporting mechanism especially should be simple and clear, and they should fully play a promoting role in the implementation of the convention.

In that regard, we have the NBSAP, the national-level enforcement tool. Currently, some parties have proposed the concept of national commitments or national contributions, et cetera. The NBSAP can be a national tool for each nation that has promises for their domestic efforts and their relative national targets to achieve global targets. We should avoid the further complication of the enforcement mechanism and strengthening the burden of the implementation of the convention.

There are less than four months to go before COP15. We still have a lot of work to do to try to resolve the differences between all parties, and we need all parties to play the best of their political wisdom so that we can work together and jointly have a positive outcome of COP15. Adhering to multilateralism is very important. The common but differentiated responsibilities are also an important factor in the achievement of the deliverables of COP15. We will actively pursue dialogue between developed countries and developing countries, and strengthen bilateral and multilateral dialogue and co-operation, boost consensus and try to make positive progress.

Q42 Lord Browne of Ladyton: Thank you, Minister. I have one specific supplementary question.

In the briefings that we have received, we have seen the issue of digital sequence information. This refers to the arrangements for sharing benefits from genetic resources in the light of scientific and technological developments in genetics. They are exploited substantially by developed countries, but not to the advantage of developing countries, and that has become an issue. Is it an issue that you are aware of, and are you hopeful that you can make progress in relation to it in anticipation of

COP15?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: This is an excellent question. Let me put it this way. I can answer in a general way. During the negotiation of the post-2020 framework, there was much consensus as well as many differences. Some countries think that they can benefit from the convention more than others, as they think, and some, especially developing countries, are trying to get maximum biological conservation, as well as financial support and other direct benefits, from the framework. We need to try to meet the demands by showing flexibility, and we need to help the least developed countries to have more access to financial support, experience sharing and other mechanisms.

On the detailed questions, I think we need to ensure that every party contributes fairly and equally to the success of the post-2020 framework. It is important to all sides, and we need to think globally, rather than just taking a national approach. There is a lot of work to do.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: Thank you, Minister; very wise observations. I think we all hope that that will be the case.

Q43 **Lord Whitty:** China is well known for being a big investor and aid donor to a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa and central Asia, many of which have serious problems with their biodiversity threats. Were you suggesting that China and other donor and investor countries should link the transfer of funds that have hitherto been primarily for economic and anti-poverty purposes with conditions, or dimensions, that relate to biodiversity? Would that be one way of ensuring that developing countries benefited in their biodiversity, as well as economically?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you, Lord Whitty. I would say that China is still a developing country. You may disagree, but our definition of China is that China is the biggest developing country in the world. Our total GDP is No. 2 in the world, but our per capita GDP is just a little over \$10,000. That ranks around the 60s in the world, so it is much lower than that of the United States or European countries. We have 1.4 billion Chinese people, so the achievements, if divided by 1.4 billion Chinese people, will be significant. We have a lot of domestic problems to be solved, so according to our definition of a developing country we are still a developing country and, internationally, we shall fulfil our obligations as a developing country.

Having said that, we have fulfilled our international obligations on all responsibilities in a very positive way. In recent years, or even years ago, we have had close co-operation with African countries, Asian countries and Latin American countries in a mutually beneficial way. We provide free loans, beneficial loans and much assistance to developing countries. For us, however, the most important thing, as in our old philosophy, is to teach them how to fish rather than just give them the fish. Through co-operation, African countries and Asian countries can learn how to fish, so that they achieve their own development through their own efforts. That is better than just offering them money.

Currently, about 70 countries participate in the belt and road initiative, and a lot more work closely with it. The most important element for the belt and road initiative is that it is an open platform, and everybody can participate. There are some capital pools to which all countries can contribute, and the least developed countries can make use of the money.

Through bilateral and multilateral channels, we have tried our best to help those developing countries to achieve their national development, as well as other important targets such as the conservation of biodiversity, which we have mentioned. We all realise the importance of biodiversity, which is closely linked to climate change and to many other issues. China is doing a lot, in its own way, through assistance and financial support, as well as the sharing of experience, to help developing countries to achieve their national targets. We will continue to contribute through bilateral means. We normally use our multilateral forum strictly in accordance with developing countries' obligations.

Q44 The Lord Bishop of Oxford: Thank you, Minister, for your evidence. I have particularly appreciated reading and hearing about the philosophy of ecological civilisation and the way it is ingrained in your constitution.

Could I ask you about the connection between COP15 and COP26? Given the many connections between biodiversity and climate change, how is the Chinese presidency promoting that collaboration? You talked in your opening address, very helpfully, about progress towards net zero in China and peak emissions. Could you address in particular the connections between climate adaptation and mitigation, and how you are building the connections between the two COPs?

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: Thank you. As you have rightly said, I mentioned in my opening remarks China-UK co-operation in building synergies between COP15 and COP26. Of course, we want to promote co-operation between China and Britain over those two important occasions. I mentioned some elements, but I have to say that sound and healthy bilateral relations are very important to closer and stronger co-operation between us.

Unfortunately, our current bilateral relationship is not as good as we expect. Both China and the UK are important countries in the world. We are both P5 members and important players. We have world influence. However, we are different in our political systems, in our ideology and in our historical and cultural traditions. In our opinion, that should not prevent us from co-operating. I emphasise that we need to respect each other, try to understand each other and respect each other's major concerns and important core interests, and not interfere in each other's internal affairs.

Currently, China-UK relations have suffered some setbacks because, in our opinion, we have found it unacceptable for British politicians to interfere in our internal affairs. In essence, what kind of system China adopts, what road China should walk and how China governs itself is an

issue to be decided by the Chinese people, not by others. The Chinese people have more say on the political system and social model of their own country.

The Chinese way is now a way that is in accordance with and most suitable to its national conditions, so the Chinese governing party, the Communist Party of China, has won the highest domestic support in the world. According to independent polls, the Chinese governing party and the Chinese Government enjoy a support rate of more than 90% among the Chinese public. Domestically, we have concretely made infrastructure and other building of socialism to provide our people with security, prosperity and happiness. In China, people now have perhaps the best sense of security in the world. They feel very safe in China.

In our foreign policy, our major goal is to promote a community of shared future. That suits our policy, for example, at COP15 and COP26: this world is more interconnected, and everybody should participate and make their contribution, so that we can commonly address the challenges. Today's challenge will not be solved by any single country. That is not possible even for the strongest country in the world. China is never a trouble, but a solution to problems, so we have a strong wish to work with the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries to resolve the problems of this world, but we will never accept unfair attacks or trespassing on our core interests that will affect the depth and width of our relations.

COP15 and COP26 will come one after the other, and there are close links between these two important conferences. We are actively carrying out our leaders' consensus and are trying to extend co-operation in the two conferences, but I know there could be a better way to do that. Unfortunately, our bilateral relations are not good enough for our working people to carry out more practical co-operation.

In the future, we hope that we will continue our co-ordination and carry out some co-operation. Co-operation needs trust between each other. With our bilateral relations becoming better, I will be more confident in carrying out more concrete co-operation between our two sides.

I think that answers your first question. I beg your pardon, but what was the second part of your question?

Q45 The Lord Bishop of Oxford: Thank you for your honesty on that, Minister. The second question was about the connections between COP26 and COP15, particularly in climate mitigation and adaptation. You dealt with net zero in your opening remarks.

Minister Yang Xiaoguang: We are trying our best to achieve our targets on tackling climate change. Climate change attracts more attention than other things in today's world, and we witness the negative effects of climate change. We can feel it every day.

We have set out our plans for carbon peak and carbon neutrality. The carbon peak timeline is before 2030, and carbon neutrality is before

2060. There is a 30-year gap between those two numbers, and they are made very accurately, based on numerical research and our domestic capability.

You mentioned mitigation and adaptation. We have taken a lot of measures to try to resolve the bottleneck affecting our economic development. For a Government, one of the major responsibilities is to develop economy and create employment. That needs the support of energy. Yesterday, one of our top hydro power stations came into use: the Baihetan hydro power station. It is the second largest in China, as well as the second largest in the world; No. 1 is the Three Gorges dam. With our new hydro plant coming into use, it is estimated that, every year, 20 million tonnes of coal will be saved through this hydro power plant alone.

We are the biggest country in the world in using renewable energy. Our investment and installation of renewable energy resources and devices account for one-fourth of the world's green power, hydro power, solar panels, et cetera. China also plays a leading role in the world in new energy vehicles. Our e-vehicles are about half the world's total. From a technological point of view, our work to mitigate and adapt to climate change is to try to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide.

It is also raising people's awareness of anti-pollution. You may know that Beijing now enjoys better days of clean air. In the past, especially five or six years ago, Beijing in winter would be heavily polluted, with PM2.5 figures well above the metres. People were not satisfied, but our solutions, especially our measures on heavy industries and our planting of trees, for example—as I said, 70 years ago, green coverage, afforestation, in China was less than 9%; nowadays it is over 23%, so there are more trees and grasses—will mitigate the negative effect of climate change.

We have done a lot, and people are more aware of the positiveness of combating climate change, as well as preserving biodiversity. In China, the Government and the people have the same goal: to extend our efforts to achieve carbon neutrality and zero emissions, and to try to peak before 2030.

In the world, experience tells us that most developed countries have set their carbon neutrality target around 2050. Take the EU, for example. The EU peaked its carbon dioxide around the 1990s, so it is taking more than 50 years for the European Union countries to achieve carbon neutrality after carbon peak. In China, we use 30 years. That may be the shortest time in the world for a major developing country to achieve that goal. It is not easy, but we will set up a national plan that will apply to every province, every city and every county, and even at village level. It will be very strict, with a supervision system. All the national figures of economic development will be adjusted in accordance with the national plan.

The effect is immense. It will affect everybody's life. In a village, for example, there might have been a factory previously, but, according to the new plan, the factory cannot exist now because its pollution cannot be allowed. We will sacrifice something in exchange for targets to meet the demands of the people as well as the demands of the world.

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Minister, I understand that you need to leave at 10 past 11, so we will not have time for the final question.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you, in what I know is a very busy week for you, as you look forward to celebrating the centenary of the creation of the Communist Party. Thank you for coming, and thank you for your frankness, particularly in stating the impacts of the bilateral relation at the present time, but we hope that China will use all its best efforts to secure a successful outcome in Kunming on behalf of the whole world and the biodiversity on which we all rely, as you rightly say. That is the message that we will be giving our own Secretary of State when we speak to him next week. We thank you and your colleagues.