

Prayer points – December 2021



COP 26 – What happened? And what next?

The COP in Glasgow has long been seen as particularly important. Under the terms of the Paris Agreement, it was the first time that countries would need to bring stronger national pledges for emissions cuts. Glasgow was also a crunch meeting for climate finance, with developing countries calling for wealthy countries to meet their overall finance pledges and to increase funding to help poorer countries to adapt and to deal with the loss and damage already being caused by warming. So what did the summit deliver? Carbon Brief [has a full account](#) – but here are some of the key points.

There were some positives. On emissions, 151 countries offered new commitments, including India's first-ever pledge, which would see them reach net zero by 2070. Side agreements saw over 130 countries committing to end deforestation by 2030 (though with some caveats), 109 governments pledging to reduce methane emissions by 30% between 2020 and 2030, pledges on coal, and the formation of a 'Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance'. The 'Glasgow Climate Pact' offered a key win by asking countries to increase ambition next year. It also acknowledged climate science and mentioned - for the first time - the need to switch from fossil fuels, calling for the "phasedown of unabated coal" and "phaseout of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies." That language was watered down – but still sends a clear signal that fossil fuels' days are numbered.

On finance, there was less progress. The Glasgow Climate Pact expressed "deep regret" - that the \$100bn a year climate finance goal has still not been met and urged countries to meet the target. There was a commitment to at least double funding for adaptation, to start a new 'Glasgow Dialogue' on loss and damage, and to work on a process for determining post-2025 climate finance.

But much of the language on finance remained vague, and the Climate Vulnerable Forum's proposal for a 'Loss and Damage Facility' was rejected. Moreover, the new emissions pledges, even if fully implemented, are still not enough to keep warming to 1.5C as two successive IPCC reports have shown is vital. "*We have kept 1.5 within reach, but its pulse is weak*" COP President Alok Sharma [warned](#).

Perhaps, COP26 is best seen, as A Rocha's Andy Atkins [suggested](#), as providing the equivalent of handholds for someone climbing a mountain. It's not the summit – but it gives us something with which to haul ourselves closer to the goal. And we must use these handholds.

The Glasgow Pact's clear expectation that all countries will raise their game next year, and the intense diplomatic pressure likely to fall on those that refuse to play ball, will help. Alok Sharma has also pledged that the UK will work to ensure countries around the world deliver on promises made at the Summit and noted that the UK's work as Summit President was "really only just beginning" as the summit ended.

We pray for the UK during its Presidency, asking God to guide it in showing leadership domestically and internationally. We pray for countries that are spurning the call for increased commitments: may God guide and convince them of the need for urgent action. We pray for countries that made increased commitments, asking God to guide them in implementing their promises. And we pray for climate justice, especially around finance, so that the countries that have contributed the least - and yet are among those most affected by the climate crisis - may get the support they need.

Advent Hope – Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. He will reign, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Voices from Palau

On the 1st of November, Climate Sunday – with which many of us were involved - had a stall in the COP Green Zone, representing the commitments and concerns of dozens of Christian organisations and thousands of churches. The stall beside ours was run by the CRIS [Climate Resilient Island Societies] Alliance. This organisation was recently founded by three environmental advocates in Palau, a nation in the Pacific with 340 islands – all vulnerable to climate impacts - and an [environmental trailblazer](#). We were excited to meet them and to hear their perspectives – and both moved and spurred to action by what they shared.

A youth representative from CRIS explained that much of their work is local, seeking *“to create a climate network between Pacific people, to get people connected and see what we can learn from each other, and how we can implement that on our islands to deal with climate change.”* They were in Glasgow in order to fulfil a second goal - to *“see how we can get our messages across to the bigger nations and negotiators, to connect people who work on the ground to those policy makers for climate change.”*

She added: *“We have this Palauan proverb ... literally translated it means ‘tomorrow is yet to come’ ... I feel like that’s really important because it puts emphasis on us youth ... The reason why we are fighting for climate justice is because our futures are yet to come, and we want to secure that. And we need high-level people to work ... so we can have a more secure future.”*

As the COP progressed, we were able to hear Palau’s representatives speak in the plenary sessions. Their President [spoke bluntly early on](#): *“Large emitters with their insatiable appetite for advancement are continuing to abuse our environment, threatening our very survival... Frankly speaking, there is no dignity to a slow and painful death ... Leaders of the G20, we are drowning... You must act now; we must act together.”* In the final plenary, a delegate stated: *“When we in the Pacific Islands say that we really need to act with a great sense of urgency, it’s because as we are sitting here at this COP, we are getting images and texts from our neighbours that are telling us that their homes are getting flooded as we speak. So there’s a little girl who’s sitting in her room: her belongings have been flooded; her textbooks are wet; she can’t go to school. Her parents are despondent because they haven’t been able to protect their families.”*

She went on to stress that her islands’ experience is a sign: *“These kinds of stories are not unique to Palau. You will hear similar stories from our island neighbours... We haven’t taken enough action since the Paris Agreement and so we’re seeing [climate change](#) happen all over the world. There are severe droughts in Kenya; there’s infrastructure damage in Japan; the subways are flooding in New York. If we don’t act today, we’re going to see some really scary things in the future. The children of the Asia-Pacific region won’t have enough to eat, because the warming waters of the Pacific won’t be able to sustain the sea-life that feeds the world. The children of the Middle East won’t be able to breathe the hot desert air. So I really want to ask us to all come together here, because I don’t want to go home to my three children and say ‘I’m really sorry that I failed you at COP26’...”*

We pray for the people of Palau, and all who face existential threats from climate change. We join them in praying that their message will be heard, and that high-level people will indeed work to give them – and all of us – a more secure future. And we pray for strength to join in pressing for change – and making change ourselves.

Concerns grow over climate change

The latest Ipsos Mori poll finds that *“worry about climate change is the biggest concern for the British public ... recording its highest-ever score”* with 40% of those surveyed saying that climate change, the environment, and pollution are the top issues and are seen as more of a concern than Covid, Brexit, pressures on the NHS or the economy. This concern was true for all ages, genders and political parties.

Concern about climate and the environment has escalated rapidly in recent years, with the number of people who have identified it as a 'top issue' having quadrupled since 2018. These findings indicate a significant change in public opinion, prompted in part no doubt by scientific reports and concerns over weather based disasters around the world. Ben Margolis, director at The Climate Coalition campaign group, said the *“findings paint a clear picture of just how concerned the British public is about climate change”*.

We pray that the British government may take heed of these concerns and really focus on making the challenging measures that are so urgently needed to respond to climate change.