

REPORT ON UN COP24

December 2-15, 2018

By Bill Somplatsky-Jarman

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations convened the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) in Katowice, Poland, on December 2, 2018. This is the annual meeting of the signatory nations to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

This report will highlight COP24's main decisions and accomplishments as well as agents items that were deferred for future COP's or other international gatherings. Also covered will be observations gleaned in Side Events and presentations by national delegations and civil society organizations. The role played by faith-based organizations will be highlighted as this will inform future programmatic work. Finally, the engagement of the U.S. government will be described as this will impact advocacy efforts moving forward.

I was privileged to be accredited by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and also participated actively in various faith-based activities as part of the Climate Change Steering Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC). I also participated on two panels sponsored by the We Are Still In coalition, a U.S. organization to promote active implementation of the Paris Agreement of 2015.

SUMMARY ON COP24

RULE BOOK: The primary task for COP24 was completion of the "rule book" to operationalize the Paris Agreement reached in 2015. The Paris Agreement set goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and committing to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

This would include submission of nationally determined contributions (NDC's), setting common time frames and work programs, ramping up financial support for adaptation, increasing technology sharing, and reaching agreement on implementation, compliance and transparency. The Paris Agreement settled on five year increments for submitting new NDC's. Thus, the run up to 2020 is critical as the current NDC's, if fully implemented, only will limit temperatures to 3-5 degrees Celsius. So the global stocktake and new NCD's must represent significantly increased ambition. In addition, there will be requirements on transparency for disclosing how countries will reach their commitments, and empowering compliance mechanisms.

The rule book's adoption was a necessary step for the process to move forward. Only a few countries were prepared to commit to the required ambition at COP24, but the seriousness of the situation led to agreement that additional discussions by world leaders are a priority for 2019. The UN Secretary-General will facilitate such discussions leading up to the September 2019 UN climate summit in New York.

EMISSIONS TRADING: Brazil blocked any agreement on emissions trading so the last element of the Rule Book needing attention will be kicked to COP25. This is important as the Paris Agreement had sought to correct a major flaw. Previously, developed countries could finance

mitigation actions in developing countries (reforestation projects, for example), and receive credit for the reductions. Developing countries could also count the reductions. This results in double counting that skews the overall results.

FINANCE: The positive news is that financing for adaption and the Green Climate Fund increased. However, the issue of Loss and Damage was not addressed as hoped. Loss and Damage concerns payment to developing countries that have experienced significant losses due to climate change for which they lack financial resources to address. While faith-based organizations have supported Loss and Damage compensation, the COP only “strongly urged” developed countries to contribute \$100 billion by 2020 when a new goal will be set.

In addition, on the positive sign, the Katowice Package added processes for allowing developing country input on assessing finance information and its sufficiency moving forward.

NON-STATE STAKEHOLDERS: The Paris Agreement had referred to “other parties” (sub-national governments, research organizations, civil society, corporations and investors) as important participants in fulfilling country reduction commitments, but did not include precise definitions and procedures. This builds on the Global Climate Action Agenda launched at COP21 aimed at encouraging civil society mobilization and action.

Many developing countries view non-state stakeholders as vital to ramping up ambition, holding developed countries to a 1.5 degree Celsius target, and insuring that equity is included in future COP decisions.

In that regard, there were several contributions by U.S. non-state stakeholders at COP24. These included:

- 1) Governor John Hickenlooper of Colorado announced the creation of a Green Bank to marshall public and private funds to promote renewable energy projects in the state.
- 2) NY State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli announced adding US \$3 billion to their fund for investing in the transition to a low-carbon economy. This brings NY’s commitment to US \$10 billion.
- 3) 415 investors managing over US \$32 trillion called on world governments to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, accelerate private sector investment into the low carbon transition, and commit to improve climate-related financial reporting.
- 4) A representative of the Minneapolis Science Museum described how science museum across the United States are involved in education and advocacy on climate change.
- 5) Research institutes presented their substantive work in providing information on climate science and social transformation necessary for the transition to a low carbon future.
- 6) The issue of climate-forced displacement viewed through a human rights and justice lens was highlighted more frequently, especially at a side event co-sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Refugees International and Tuvalu Overview. The side event included a presentation by the Alaska Institute for Justice on relocation of native communities situated along the coastline.
- 7) There were compelling speeches calling for increased ambition. These included Sir David Attenborough, a British biologist and natural science promoter, who drew upon submissions by social media from people around the world, and Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old Swedish student, who held daily press conferences, about the urgency of action. As she said, “We

cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis." In her personal life, she will not fly anywhere. She plans to visit the U.S. this summer traveling by ship.

SCIENTIFIC AND ECONOMIC STUDIES

UN Environment Program: [**https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2018**](https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2018)

This is the link to the 9th edition of the gap report. The summary of findings includes the conclusion that global emissions increased in 2017 after three years of stagnation (and show no signs of peaking), and that the current commitments in the NDC's are inadequate to close the emissions gap for both the 2 degree and 1.5 degree goals. However, if the NDC's ambitions are not increased by 2030, exceeding the 1.5 degree goal becomes impossible. The potentially significant role of cities and corporations in reducing emissions is noted, but "current impacts are extremely limited and poorly documented." The report noted that 7,000 cities from 245 countries and over 6,000 corporations (out of over 500,000 globally) with US\$36 trillion in revenue, at a minimum, have committed to mitigating their emissions. Innovations in policies and technologies are viewed as crucial to raising ambitions.

World Meteorological Organization: [**https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/climate-change-signals-and-impacts-continue-2018**](https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/climate-change-signals-and-impacts-continue-2018)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: [**http://ipcc.ch/pdf/special-reports/sr15/sr15_spm_final.pdf**](http://ipcc.ch/pdf/special-reports/sr15/sr15_spm_final.pdf)

This report added a sense of urgency to the COP. Proponents of increased ambition, particularly developing countries, cited it frequently, and wanted the COP to "welcome" the report. They viewed this language as a sign of continued commitment to reaching 1.5 degrees. In contrast, the United States, Russia, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia wanted merely to "take note" of the report. In the end, the COP settled on "calling" on all countries to use the report's results. However, this very heated debate may reveal future tensions, especially if the U.S. succeeds in withdrawing from the Paris Agreement.

U.S. Assessment Report: [**https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4**](https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4)

Similarly, the attempt by the current U.S. administration to bury the impact statement was noted at the COP. While most COP observers were positive on the contributions made by the career diplomats from the U.S. as key to the multilateral achievements, the lack of embrace by the political appointees foreshadowed significant problems should Trump be reelected. On the other hand, the sanguine assessment provides civil society with more ammunition for campaigning on increased ambition.

FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENT

Faith-based organizations were very active at the COP. Considerable work by the Global Catholic Climate Coalition, the World Council of Churches and the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) was done over the past year to engage the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. With encouragement from the Vatican, the results were substantial, especially when compared with the previous two COP's held in Poland (Warsaw and Poznan). There was an ecumenical service held in the Cathedral of Christ the King where the

Metropolitan Archbishop of Katowice Wiktor Skwarczynski, and the President of the World Council of Churches Archbishop Anders Wejryd of the Church of Sweden delivered homilies in Polish and English.

The 10,000 Roman Catholic churches in Poland had received prayer cards during their Sunday masses to support successful negotiations. In addition, there was a daily mass in Roman Catholic churches in Katowice.

Following the ecumenical service, members of the WCC delegation and other churches gathered at a nearby Methodist church for dinner and a Ecumenical Talanoa Dialogue of the current state of the negotiations.

Other events included a gathering (COP24 Interfaith Gathering in the Spirit of Talanoa Dialogue and Interfaith Service) on the first Sunday where presentations were made by the Mayor of Katowice on environmental initiatives including the transition from coal, and church ethicists on mobilization for climate action. Participants broke into small groups to discuss aspects of climate action, particularly Just Transition. The key points became the submission to the COP of faith-based perspectives on the issues. This event was sponsored by the World Council of Churches, Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Quakers UN Office, Brahma Kumaris, Islamic Relief, GreenFaith, Religions for Peace, ICE Network CIDSE and the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

Faith groups participated in the people's march for the climate on Saturday, December 8th. On December 7th, faith groups welcomed the Third Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Climate Justice at St. Stephen's Church. One group of pilgrims had walked from Rome, and the other from Bonn via Berlin. In addition, a cyclist from Norway arrived that evening.

There were several meetings of church representatives for updates and discussions about the negotiations. These were coordinated by ACT Alliance leadership. ACT Alliance did a good job of tracking all the aspects of the negotiations.

Texas Impact led by Bee Moorhead had a group present. They included recent college and seminary graduates, and did a great job with social media to publicize the COP and what faith groups were doing to promote climate action.

Lutheran World Federation continued its tradition of bringing young adults from different countries to the COP. Other denominations represented included the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (national and DC staff), the Episcopal Church (including DC staff), Interfaith Power and Light, Friends World Committee for Consultation (UN Office), Maryknoll Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Unitarian Universalists (staff including UN Office), Catholic Relief Services, and Care of Creation, Inc. (an evangelical umbrella group). Also, Macalester College, a PCUSA-related institution, was present. Ms. Jean Lavigne, Professor of Environmental Studies, appears to be the main contact.

Bishop Marc Andrus of the Episcopal Diocese of California and The Rev. William Somplatsky-Jarman participated in the opening panel of the We Are Still In coalition, and Somplatsky-Jarman joined Tom DiNapoli, Comptroller of the State of New York, for the closing panel.

Finally, messages to the COP were given by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN Archbishop Bernadito Auza. The final intervention to the Plenary of the COP was delivered by Rev. Henrik Grape of the World Council of Churches on behalf of faith-based organizations.