

Summary of the Climate Ambition Summit 2020: 12 December 2020

On the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the United Nations, United Kingdom, and France, in partnership with Chile and Italy, co-convened a high-level event to mobilize government and non-governmental leaders to demonstrate their commitment to the Paris Agreement and the multilateral process. The summit was the third in a series of high-level events intended to support the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in delivering higher ambition by providing a high-level platform for new pledges.

Similar to UN Secretary-General António Guterres's 2019 Climate Action Summit, only countries and stakeholders making new and ambitious announcements were given a speaking slot. Unlike previous climate summits, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the event to take place in a virtual format, largely through pre-recorded statements interspersed with brief thematic videos on climate ambition, adaptation, energy, finance, and agriculture, among others.

The 111 speakers included Heads of State and Government as well as non-governmental actors representing youth, subnational governments, business, Indigenous peoples, and civil society. Statements coalesced around four themes: new and enhanced Paris Agreement medium-term plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs); long-term low greenhouse gas (GHG) emission development strategies, as requested by the Paris Agreement, and mid-century net zero carbon dioxide and GHG emissions targets; adaptation plans and strategies; and climate finance.

A total of 75 leaders announced new commitments, some of which had already been communicated in recent months or days, or indicated ongoing work. These included 45 relating to NDCs, 24 relating to net zero emissions commitments, and 20 relating to adaptation and resilience plans. Major announcements included:

- China's NDC-related commitment to lower its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) by over 65% by 2030, from 2005 levels;
- The European Union's NDC-related pledge to reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% from 1990 levels by 2030;
- The UK's NDC-related target of reducing GHG emissions at least 68% below 1990 levels by 2030;
- Various announcements of higher NDC targets by developing countries;
- Net zero-related pledges by developed and developing countries, and subnational and non-state actors including Argentina, Barbados, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership

Group, Fiji, Finland, Japan, Malawi, Maldives, Nauru, Nepal, Republic of Korea, and Sweden;

- Announcements on adaptation plans by Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Marshall Islands, Suriname, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay, and Vanuatu, among others;
- Climate finance pledges, including from the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, Finland, Luxembourg, and Monaco, and international financial institutions, including and the European Investment Bank and World Bank.
- The Net Zero Asset Managers Initiative, committed to supporting net-zero GHG emissions by 2050 by aligning investments accordingly, which initially covers USD 9 trillion of assets;
- A total of 72 new cities and local authorities from the UK, Denmark, China, and Belgium joining the Cities Race to Zero, part of the global Race to Zero campaign aimed at mobilizing non-state and subnational actors around net zero initiatives and green and just recoveries ahead of the 26th session of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP 26); and
- Mitigation-related pledges from companies from the manufacturing, industry, aviation, transport, technology, and fashion industries.

Speakers highlighted nature-based solutions, phasing down coal and support for fossil fuels, and scaling up renewable energy. Leaders also highlighted green recovery plans, namely combining climate action with job creation to recover from the pandemic, and the need for further support to developing countries for climate action. Youth, Indigenous peoples, and other civil society speakers called for action, including higher ambition on mitigation, adaptation, and finance, and for their inclusion in decision making and implementation of climate action.

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Closing the event, COP 26 President-designate Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, UK, lauded the announcements and progress made on ambition in this regard. He observed, however, that what counts in the end is the gap remaining between current pledges and what is needed to put the world on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C below pre-industrial levels. Sharma suggested ambition in this regard remains insufficient and noted that if the Paris Agreement represented “the dawn of an age of hope for our planet,” now was “the time for increased ambition and action.”

The 2020 Climate Ambition Summit convened on Saturday, 12 December 2020, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm EST (GMT-5).

A Brief History of UN Climate Summits

Climate Summit 2014: In September 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invited global leaders and participants from business, finance, civil society, and local communities to convene a year later for the UN Climate Summit. The Summit, while not part of the official negotiating process under the UNFCCC, aimed to mobilize political will to reach a global climate agreement at the Paris Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in December 2015 and galvanize action on the ground across all sectors.

The Summit, held on 23 September 2014, brought together 100 Heads of State and Government, along with ministers and leaders from international organizations, business, finance, civil society, and local communities. The event saw various national action and ambition announcements, as well as multilateral and multi-stakeholder action announcements in eight thematic areas, including finance, energy, resilience, and cities. Major initiatives, coalitions, and commitments launched included: the New York Declaration on Forests, containing commitments to halve the loss of natural forests by 2020 and strive to end it by 2030; pledges totaling USD 2.3 billion to the Green Climate Fund (GCF); the Global Alliance of Climate-Smart Agriculture; an insurance industry-led climate risk investment framework; and the Compact of Mayors.

Paris Climate Change Conference: In December 2015, parties to the UNFCCC adopted the Paris Agreement, which includes the goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. It also aims to increase parties’ ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and make financial flows consistent with a pathway towards low GHG emissions and climate resilient development. The Agreement, which entered into force in 2016, is implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

Under the Paris Agreement, each party shall communicate, at five-year intervals, successively more ambitious NDCs. The Paris Outcome (Decision 1/CP.21) requested parties whose NDCs contain a time frame up to 2025 to communicate a new NDC by 2020 and parties with an NDC time frame up to 2030 to communicate or update their contributions. Countries’ NDC updates are informed by the Global Stocktake, which takes stock of collective ambition every five years starting from 2023. Each party is also required to adopt and implement adaptation plans, and developing countries are entitled to finance and other forms of support, mobilized by developed countries, to implement their NDCs.

In Paris, parties also agreed on the need to mobilize stronger and more ambitious climate action by all parties and non-party stakeholders, including businesses, investors, civil society, and subnational and regional governments, to achieve the Paris Agreement’s goals.

Climate Action Summit 2019: In 2018, with the UN Environment Programme’s (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report indicating that implementing countries’ NDCs would still lead to a global temperature rise of more than 3°C, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced plans to hold the 2019 Climate Action Summit to boost ambition and rapidly accelerate action to implement the Paris Agreement and inform the Chile-Madrid Climate Change Conference (COP 25) in December 2019. Governments and others conducted preparations under nine thematic coalitions established by the Secretary-General, which convened at a preparatory meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 30 June and 1 July 2019.

Sixty-five Heads of State and Government attended the 23 September 2019 summit, in addition to leaders of sub-national governments and the private sector. Participants made commitments and announcements in areas including: climate finance; national emission reduction plans, including for climate neutrality; renewable energy targets; strengthened adaptation efforts; and phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies.

Report of the Summit

Zeinab Badawi, TV and radio journalist, presented the virtual Summit from London, UK. She noted that 2020 has brought an important lesson on the need to respond jointly to meet common global challenges, and said the summit was convened in the spirit of putting collective weight behind the Paris Agreement goals.

Lamenting that the global community is still not on track to limit global warming below 1.5°C, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a global coalition for climate neutrality by mid-century to materialize in 2021 and urged leaders to declare a state of climate emergency until this has been achieved. He also stressed the need for a 45% cut in global emissions from 2010 levels by 2030 and for global finance to be aligned with the Paris Agreement’s goals.

Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, highlighted his country’s target to reduce GHG emissions at least 68% below 1990 levels by 2030, and increasing its climate financing to GBP 11.6 billion pounds (USD 15.5 billion) for the period 2021-2026 to support green technologies and decarbonization. He further highlighted the UK’s Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, which he said aims to “turn the UK into the Saudi Arabia of wind power.”

Archana Soreng, Indigenous youth representative, stressed that countries need to engage in participatory climate action without undermining the rights of Indigenous groups, prioritize the health of nature, and make youth an integral part of decision making and implementation of climate action.

Highlighting the European Union’s (EU) goal to reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030, French President Emmanuel Macron stressed the need for a “coherent and responsible” mobilization for climate action. He noted, among others: France’s commitment to end subsidies to new fossil fuel exploration in the next five years; forthcoming climate legislation based on a citizens’ climate committee; and

maintaining France's commitment of USD 1.5 billion to the GCF, while raising the share of adaptation funding to a third of its total commitment.

Mary Kinyua, Fairtrade International, stressed the need to help farmers absorb the cost of shifting to more sustainable agriculture methods, and urged parties to take steps to support businesses in decarbonizing their supply chains.

President of Chile Sebastián Piñera underlined the commitments in his country's new NDC, submitted earlier in 2020, including forest protection, electrifying public transportation, and reaching net zero GHG emissions by 2050.

Prime Minister of Italy Giuseppe Conte stressed the role of international climate finance in strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable. He committed to a contribution of EUR 30 million to the Adaptation Fund.

Emphasizing "this is the decade of action," Selina Neirok Leem, climate activist from the Marshall Islands, called for removing "artificial barriers" to the equitable allocation of funds to vulnerable communities.

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China intends to lower its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by over 65% from 2005 levels by 2030. Additionally, he announced that, by 2030, China intends to increase: the share of non-fossil fuel energy in primary energy consumption to around 25%; forest stock volumes by six billion cubic meters from 2005 levels; and total wind and solar generation capacity to over 1.2 billion kilowatts.

Charles Michel, President of the European Council, announced that the EU intends to reduce its GHG emissions by at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. He noted that, as part of a "complete paradigm shift," the EU will mobilize EUR 108 billion over the next few years as part of a European Green Deal.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, described the EU's 55% GHG emission reduction target as Europe's "calling card." She said the EU wants to work with all those who agree on the need to price carbon, noting the EU is ready for more ambitious commitments with like-minded countries and is supporting developing countries to decouple their emissions and economic growth.

Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, noted the devastating impacts that a record hurricane season and COVID-19 have had on funding previously reserved for climate mitigation. She announced Barbados' new NDC and the aim to become "fossil fuel free by 2030 at best and carbon neutral at worst."

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said his country will update its NDC by the end of 2020, with an aim to reduce emissions by 32% by 2030, which carries an implementation cost of USD 18 million for mitigation and USD 44 million for adaptation. He pointed out that Kenya is the first African country working to develop a long-term strategy on climate change.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, described India's solar capacity growth, highlighting that its renewable energy capacity is the fourth largest in the world. He said India has set a more ambitious target than its previous one, attempting to achieve 450 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

President of Colombia Iván Duque Márquez announced a new NDC commitment to reduce GHG emissions by 51% compared to a 2010 business-as-usual scenario by 2030. To achieve this, Márquez said Colombia will work across all sectors and encourage citizens to reduce their own emission footprints.

Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, outlined his country's commitments, including: planting 10 billion trees in the next three years; increasing the number of protected national parks from 30 to 45; increasing the share of renewable energy to 60% by 2030; and transitioning 30% of Pakistan's vehicle fleet to electric vehicles.

His Holiness Pope Francis noted the Vatican's commitment to net zero emissions before 2050. He also highlighted the Global Compact on Education, which seeks to promote "holistic education on the environment" in Catholic schools and universities.

Hoesung Lee, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), underlined that limiting global warming is urgent and current commitments will not suffice to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. He stressed that immediate climate action is compatible with social and economic development.

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, announced a new climate action plan that will strive to reduce emissions by a range of 32-40% by 2030 below 2005 levels, and a national carbon price of CAD 170 (USD 110) per tonne by 2030.

Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, President of Maldives, reminded participants that small island developing states (SIDS) require financial and technical assistance to meet their goals, announcing his country could reach net zero emissions by 2030 with international support.

Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, highlighted the Climate Vulnerable Forum's Midnight Survival Deadline initiative, which urges all countries to present new NDCs by the end of 2020. She noted that Bangladesh is finalizing its National Adaptation Plan and will spend USD 3 billion per year for adaptation measures.

Yoshihide Suga, Prime Minister of Japan, said his country has adopted a target of net zero GHG emissions by 2050 and would aim to submit an NDC with an updated 2030 target by COP 26, and noted his country's contribution of USD 3 billion to the GCF.

Alberto Fernández, President of Argentina, announced that his country's new NDC will present "a further emission reduction of 25.7%" from its 2016 NDC. He committed to developing a long-term emissions strategy to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of Bhutan, stressed that although Bhutan is already carbon negative, "it will not become complacent in the fight against climate change." He highlighted the recent Thimphu Ambition Summit, which took place in Bhutan earlier in December 2020, and noted that 19 least developed countries (LDCs) are preparing to submit new and updated NDCs by the end of 2020.

Emphasizing that "when the United States federal government stepped back, we stepped up," Gretchen Whitmer, Governor of Michigan, said the state of Michigan has set a target of carbon neutrality by 2050. She underscored that transforming and electrifying the US automobile industry will be vital to meeting this target.

Charlie Baker, Governor of Massachusetts, announced his state will soon release a roadmap to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050. He highlighted two recent offshore wind projects that set record-low price points in the United States.

Sanna Marin, Prime Minister of Finland, underscored Finland's commitment to becoming the "world's first climate neutral welfare society" by 2035. Highlighting Finland's record contribution to climate finance last year, she committed to continued scaling up of financial commitments.

Stressing Ethiopia's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2030, Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, said that climate considerations have been fully mainstreamed into the national 10-year development plan. He also highlighted the Green Legacy initiative, under which Ethiopia aims to plant 20 billion seedlings in four years and has already planted nine billion.

President of the Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in underscored his country's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. He called on world leaders to participate in the second Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 Summit in 2021 to develop concrete public-private partnerships.

Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of Gabon, announced the GCF has endorsed its largest readiness programme to date, which will bring together 25 African countries. Highlighting Gabon's sustainable forest management, he said their net carbon dioxide absorption has increased by 20%.

John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize, said his country will finalize its Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) strategy, which will aim to facilitate the absorption of an additional 16 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. He said Belize will expand renewable energy uptake by 85% by 2030 and nearly double its protected areas.

Noting "ambitious goals need ambitious contributions," German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany will seek to phase out nuclear and coal-fired power generation. She announced that Germany will commit an additional EUR 500 million to climate finance and intends to launch an "international post-2020 climate finance scheme" before COP 26. She also announced that Germany, the World Bank, and other partners will launch the Green Recovery Initiative to direct USD 160 billion in economic assistance towards climate mitigation.

Various members of Race to Resilience, a new coalition of actors outside national governments, spoke about the initiative. Zakiatu Sesay, Chairperson, Community Disaster Management Committee, announced the launch of Race to Resilience through which the UNFCCC High-Level Climate Champions aim to catalyze action from non-state actors to help make four billion people from vulnerable groups and communities more climate resilient by 2030. Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone, noted how her city is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, stressing the need for a post-COVID recovery focused on the resilience of cities. She announced a campaign to plant one million trees by 2021. Alison Martin, CEO of Zurich Insurance, presented on how the Zurich Flood Alliance is supporting increased climate resilience in communities and pledged to triple its funding by 2025, expanding its assistance to an additional 200 communities.

Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, affirmed his country's continued commitment to reducing emissions by 30% by 2030 compared to business-as-usual, and to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050 by concentrating on the waste sector, building a circular economy, and promoting renewable energy and electric vehicles. He also stated that Fiji plans to plant 30 million trees by 2025 and is passing a "ground-breaking" climate change bill.

Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, drew attention to Jamaica's enhanced NDC, which contains targets on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and the protection of forests and other natural assets. He said Jamaica intends to update its climate change policy framework and complete a long-term adaptation plan.

President of Peru Francisco Sagasti Hochhausler reaffirmed Peru's commitment to climate action, stressing the crucial role of science and technology. He said Peru will increase its ambition to reduce emissions from 30% to 40% by 2030, compared to business-as-usual, to be reflected in an updated NDC.

Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister of Denmark, highlighted her country's recently adopted legally-binding target to reduce emissions by 70% below 1990 levels by 2030. She noted the country's plans to triple its offshore wind energy capacity and increase green development assistance.

K. P. Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal, said his country will submit an enhanced NDC by the end of 2020, and develop both a National Adaptation Plan and a climate finance roadmap by 2021. He highlighted his country's priorities, including renewable energy and low-carbon infrastructure, and an aim to extend Nepal's protected natural areas from 23% to 30% by 2030.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, announced that Israel will no longer burn coal by 2025 and will produce a third of its electricity through solar power by 2030.

Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, noted Apple's recent announcement that its corporate emissions were now carbon neutral, as well as its plans to achieve carbon neutrality for its entire supply chain by 2030.

Calling on countries to simplify access to climate funding, Bob Loughman Weiber, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, noted his country's current target to transition to 100% renewable electricity use by 2030. He noted that Vanuatu's revised NDC, to be submitted in December 2020, will include quantified targets on adaptation.

Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, drew attention to components of Singapore's long-term emissions reduction strategy, including aims to quadruple solar production by 2025 and phase out internal combustion vehicles by 2040, as well as a USD 2 billion green investment programme.

Noting his country's goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2045 and negative emissions thereafter, Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden, said that Sweden will cease export credit guarantees for coal production, and end export credits for fossil fuel prospecting and extraction by 2022. He noted pledges of EUR 30 million to the Climate Investment Funds, and EUR 100 million to the LDC Fund and the Adaptation Fund over 2019-2022.

Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, shared his country's revised NDC, which includes a goal to reduce GHG emissions by 38% by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual baseline. He noted the need to increase energy efficiency and use nature-based solutions, among others, to build net zero economies.

Lionel Aingimea, President of Nauru, announced that Nauru's revised NDC sets out a path to net zero GHG emissions by 2050 and said Nauru intends to reach "50% renewable energy by 2030."

Speaking on behalf of C40 Cities, Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles, announced 70 cities have joined the Race to Zero campaign led by the UNFCCC High-Level Climate Champions for Climate Action. Joy Belmonte, Mayor of Quezon City, highlighted a programme to install solar panels in various schools and health facilities in the city.

Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, President of Malawi, announced Malawi intends to move towards carbon neutrality by 2050. He said the country will further restore 4.5 million hectares of

degraded forests by 2030, introduce a carbon levy on fuel, and phase out diesel power generators on the national grid within a year.

Announcing that Spain has approved a long-term decarbonization strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of Spain, underscored the main pillars of the strategy: achieving 97% renewable energy production, and consuming 50% less energy through efficiency and conservation measures.

Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati, emphasized that Kiribati's revised NDC will incorporate new sector-related actions and new GHGs. He highlighted the country's recent Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Act as foundational to cross-sectoral action.

President of Niger Mahamadou Issoufou announced Niger intends to scale up emissions reductions from 3.5% to 5% by 2030 compared to business-as-usual, focusing on climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, and reforestation.

Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, explained his country's revised NDC supports a long-term, low-carbon development strategy. He announced Grenada will develop the region's first climate-smart city.

Thongloun Sisoulith, Prime Minister of Lao People's Democratic Republic, announced his country will reduce GHG emissions 34% from a 2020 baseline scenario by 2030 and aim to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Jamshyd N. Godrej, Chairman of Godrej and Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd., outlined the manufacturing company's commitment to: enhancing renewable energy demand; net zero buildings; the Global Alliance for Energy Productivity; and science-based targets. He also noted a commitment to "smart" energy use through joining initiatives such as the Climate Group's EP100 and Business Ambition for 1.5°C.

Mahendra Singhi, CEO of Dalmia Cement, highlighted how his company is committed to making the cement industry clean, profitable, and sustainable.

Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway, stressed that, while COVID-19 has demanded global attention this year, the promises made in Paris five years ago have not changed. She announced Norway will aim to cut its GHG emissions by at least 50% below 1990 levels by 2030 with reinforcing domestic policies to achieve this.

President of Suriname Chandrikapersad Santokhi emphasized his country's vulnerability to rising sea levels while reminding the audience that Suriname was the second country to submit an updated NDC in 2019. He stressed the need for additional financing for vulnerable countries, stressing that "leaving no one behind" is now more crucial than ever.

Alfonso Browne, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, drew attention to SIDS' particular challenges in relation to both climate change and global pandemics. He called upon the US and China to lead global efforts to mitigate these crises, stating "the survival of the SIDS depends on this."

President of Costa Rica Carlos Alvarado Quesada highlighted the country's aims to be "a global laboratory of good environmental practices" and show the world that ending fossil fuel dependence is possible. He shared that Costa Rica's updated NDC focuses on adaptive capacity and resilience, and contains an enhanced net zero emissions target by 2050.

Sebastian Kurz, Chancellor of Austria, stated that economic growth and green transition must go hand in hand and Austria will contribute by focusing on innovation and digitalization. Kurz announced an increase in Austria's contribution to the GCF from EUR 30 million to EUR 130 million.

Speaking on behalf of the recently launched Net Zero Asset Managers Initiative, Stephanie Pfeifer, CEO of the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change, shared that the initiative has mobilized trillions of dollars of asset management funding and noted how every founding member has committed to its 2050 net zero target in line with the findings and science put forward in the IPCC reports. David Blood, Generation Investment Management, urged all asset managers to play their part by working towards achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Jean Hynes, Wellington Management, explained how the initiative's members are studying the impacts of climate change on companies, economies, and society, and are focused on bridging the gap between climate science and finance. Michelle Scrimgeour, Legal & General Investment Management, noted that members of the initiative are already channeling capital towards low-carbon solutions and working with clients to analyze climate risks and solutions.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland, noted Iceland's intent to increase its initial pledge to reduce emissions from 40% to 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. She further stated that Iceland will strive to remove carbon from the atmosphere as part of its efforts to achieve carbon neutrality before 2040.

Barham Salih, President of Iraq, announced that his country's parliament voted to accede to the Paris Agreement in September 2020, and will begin developing its NDC. He said Iraq will support renewable energy, environmentally friendly technologies, and those vulnerable to climate and economic change.

President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo noted his country's revised NDC will include new sectors, such as transportation, waste, and atmospheric pollutants. He cited enhanced forest management policies, including stabilizing forest cover at 63.5% over the previous target of 50%.

President of Slovakia Zuzana Čaputová announced her country will: reduce its GHG emissions by 55% below 1990 levels by 2030; decarbonize its electricity supply by 2030; and cease producing coal by 2030. She pointed to an additional contribution of USD 2 million to the GCF.

Allen Chastanet, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, called for climate finance to help SIDS "realistically deliver" on their NDCs. He noted that Saint Lucia has aligned its NDC implementation with national and sectoral adaptation procedures, and expressed hope for a resolution on issues regarding transparency and Article 6 (cooperative approaches) under the Paris Agreement.

Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia, announced an updated NDC, to be submitted by the end of 2020, which will include a GHG reduction target of 18% by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual baseline.

Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank, announced a goal to direct 50% of the bank's investments toward the climate and environment sector by 2025, and the mobilization of USD 1.2 trillion in finance in this field by 2030.

David Malpass, President of the World Bank Group, pointed to the World Bank's mobilization of USD 160 billion for a "green, inclusive, resilient" COVID-19 recovery. He announced a target for 35% of the bank's financing to have climate co-benefits, on average, over the next five years.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund, stressed that addressing climate change can have positive effects for economic growth and pointed out the need to disclose climate-related financial risks.

Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, announced the launch of an Adaptation Action Agenda at the forthcoming Climate Adaptation Summit, which the Netherlands will host in January 2021. He highlighted that the Dutch financial sector intends to bring its entire portfolio, totaling assets worth an estimated USD 3 trillion, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Calling it a "plan for collective survival," David Kabua, President of the Marshall Islands, announced his country will deliver a new National Adaptation Plan in 2021. He encouraged countries, especially major emitters, to sign the High Ambition Coalition's Statement on Resilient Recovery.

Noting that Honduras continues to suffer from the impacts of recent hurricanes, President of Honduras Juan Orlando Hernández highlighted a national reconstruction plan developed in collaboration with different societal sectors and international partners. He called for "rapid action without red tape" from the GCF.

Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor of Myanmar, announced that Myanmar intends to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by increasing the share of renewable energy to 39% and reducing net emissions from the forestry sector by 25%. She also announced Myanmar intends to contribute to green recovery by expanding carbon sinks, protecting 590,000 hectares of reserved forest, and managing an additional 250,000 hectares of plantations.

Stressing that Ireland's intention to reach a climate-neutral economy by 2050 is enshrined in national legislation, Micheál Martin, Taoiseach of Ireland, noted that his country's Climate Action bill introduces legal requirements for an economy-wide carbon budget and establishes an emissions ceiling for each sector. He emphasized that Ireland prioritizes supporting adaptation in LDCs and SIDS, saying "we must reach the furthest behind first."

Highlighting Ecuador's National Climate Change Adaptation Plan, President of Ecuador Lenin Moreno Garcés said it promotes information exchange and the integration of adaptation in planning and action at all levels of government.

Christiana Figueres, former UNFCCC Executive Secretary, declared the next ten years as "the most decisive decade in the history of humankind." She noted the importance of commitments from companies and governments, and urged all stakeholders to demonstrate "ingenuity, courage, and determination" in facing the challenge of climate change.

Noting climate change-induced drought, wildfires, and floods faced by his country, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky stated Ukraine is working to redefine its NDC to include an aim to reduce GHG emissions between 36-42% below 1990 levels by 2030. He also said Ukraine is committed to aligning its climate policy with the European Green Deal to ensure complementarity of efforts.

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev described his landlocked country as especially vulnerable to climate change

and still reliant on fossil fuels. He said Kazakhstan will aim to become carbon neutral by 2060 and intends to develop a long-term low-emission development strategy and plant two billion trees in the next five years.

President of Panama Laurentino Cortizo Cohen explained how his nation is promoting carbon neutrality by 2050 by coupling national recovery strategies and climate action, and encouraging citizens to reduce their individual carbon footprints. He called for the establishment of an "Alliance of the Americas for Climate Transparency" to mobilize on climate action, transparency, and the sharing of climate data.

President of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez explained that Cuba is involving all economic sectors and society in mitigation and adaptation action. He shared his country's updated NDC, highlighting 13 adaptation goals and five mitigation targets, including a 24% renewable electricity by 2030 target and a target to reduce fossil fuels used in road vehicles by 50% and increase forested areas by 33% by 2030.

Luis Lacalle Pou, President of Uruguay, highlighted how his country seeks to reduce the intensity of its GHG emissions by 50% by 2025 from 1990 levels and move towards carbon neutrality by 2050. He said this will be accomplished with a mindset of leaving no one behind and ensuring social equity. He also noted that Uruguay intends to submit two National Adaptation Plans, on coastal adaptation, and cities and infrastructure, to the UNFCCC by 2021.

Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister of Mauritius, announced that his country aims to achieve the status of a low-emission economy, be carbon neutral by 2070, and earmark USD 50 million for various adaptation and mitigation projects between mid-2020 and mid-2021. He further shared plans to rehabilitate eroded beaches by 2024 and produce 40% of electricity from renewable sources.

Renato Franklin, CEO of Movida Rent-a-Car, noted his company's vision to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 through implementing a three-pronged climate change strategy based on: mitigation by renewable fuels and electric cars; compensation by planting one million trees; and adaptation by 2030.

Luis Gallego, CEO of International Airlines Group, highlighted how his airline group was the first to commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, making this commitment with the involvement of 13 airlines of the Oneworld Alliance, which represents 20% of global aviation. This group, Gallego noted, has committed USD 400 million to sustainable aviation fuels over the next 20 years.

Emphasizing his country's relatively minor contribution to global GHG emissions, President of Montenegro Milo Đukanović announced an updated NDC that includes an emissions reduction target of 35% by 2030 below 1990 levels. He indicated this target could be increased to 39% over the coming years.

President of Guatemala Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei Falla discussed his country's updated climate goals, including financial coverage of climate risks, reducing emissions, and adapting agriculture to climate impacts. He stressed the need to transform economies at all levels.

Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, presented new national legislation committing to a GHG emissions reduction of 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. He announced Luxembourg would contribute an additional EUR 200 million over five years in climate finance.

Outlining the need to mainstream climate adaptation across government sectors, President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa highlighted climate finance-supported national projects, including a biogas plant. He called on developed countries to contribute more to climate finance.

Noting the importance of adaptation planning, Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, announced a commitment to reduce GHG emissions by 33.3% compared to 1990 in Serbia's revised NDC. He pledged that, by 2050, Serbia will be a "low-carbon society with a competitive economy."

Xavier Espot Zamora, Prime Minister of Andorra, noted his country has submitted a second NDC and shared work on a long-term carbon neutrality strategy. He also announced his government will propose a carbon price of EUR 30 per tonne to the Andorran parliament.

Joshua Amponsem, Founder of the Green Africa Youth Organization, called on leaders to deliver ambitious targets and stressed the need for adaptation finance to reach grassroots levels and build resilience.

Emphasizing the importance of circularity in the fashion industry, Omer Ahmed, CEO of Artistic Milliners, announced his company intends to integrate repurposed materials and chemicals into every product it produces.

António Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, announced new commitments under Portugal's revised NDC, including: ending coal-fired electricity generation in 2021; allocating 85% of funds under its national investment programme to sustainable infrastructure and climate action; initiating work on a national roadmap for adaptation; and contributing an additional EUR 20 million in climate finance over the next decade.

President of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani highlighted Afghanistan's potential to produce 300,000 megawatts of clean energy annually and noted multiple hydropower stations currently under construction.

HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco announced his country intends to reduce its net GHG emissions by 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. Additionally, he announced an increase in Monaco's climate funding allocation in a "regular fashion" in coming years.

Khaltmaagiin Battulga, President of Mongolia, announced his country intends to further increase its commitment in its updated NDC, submitted in October 2020, from a GHG emission reduction of 22.7% to 27.2% by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual scenario.

President of Armenia Armen Sargsyan announced Armenia intends, by 2030, to increase the share of solar energy to 15% and the share of overall zero-emission power generation to "55% in its total energy production." He proposed that a "debt-for-climate swap" approach could enable countries to leverage additional finance to climate action.

Speaking for UN organizations, Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, alerted that there is a 24% chance of global warming reaching 1.5°C above the pre-industrial era in the next five years. Citing findings from the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2020 Emissions Gap Report, Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, underlined that investing in green recovery from the pandemic has the potential to cut 25% from predicted 2030 GHG emissions. She additionally announced that the UN system is on track to meet its goal of carbon neutrality by the end of 2020. Achim Steiner, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, highlighted

the launch of the UNDP's Climate Promise, stressing it will help governments to "insert the DNA of green economy and recovery into all stimulus processes."

Laurent Fabius, former COP 21 President, observed that the world has changed since 2015, highlighting increased participation and calls from civil society and youth as signs of "winds changing towards a more favorable direction for climate action." Fabius called for more private and public funding, particularly for Africa, and reminded that, unlike for COVID-19, "there is no vaccine for the planet" and, therefore, amplified actions are needed.

Carolina Schmidt, COP 25 President and Minister of Environment of Chile, underscored that all stakeholders will have to work together to make COP 26 a success and not allow the pandemic to deter action. COP 26, she said, must be a "COP of ambition" with all parties increasing ambition in mitigation, adaptation, and finance efforts. She highlighted the Chile-driven Climate Ambition Alliance as the first such effort that unites countries and thousands of other partners in recognizing that a carbon neutral world is critical for a sustainable world.

Nisreen Elsaim, Chair of the UN Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, explained the group's ultimate goal is to save the planet and humanity for future generations. Observing that the current situation is not a reflection of "the world we want," Elsaim affirmed "staying below 1.5°C is our only hope" and "young people will rewrite history."

Outlining her vision of a world two decades from now, UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa said nations should have made significant reductions and be on a clear path to carbon neutrality, with the Paris Agreement fully implemented. She defined success for COP 26 as achieving a balance of the expectations, concerns, and needs of a wide array of stakeholders, stressing that climate finance in particular can either "be the key enabler for solutions or it can kill momentum."

Alok Sharma, COP 26 President-designate and Secretary for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, UK, summarized the achievements of the summit, highlighting that 45 NDCs, 24 net zero commitments, and 20 adaptation and resilience plans were announced during the event. Affirming that while progress had been made, more was needed, Sharma called for "the golden thread of climate action to weave through every international gathering" in 2021. He further announced that the UK will double its climate finance contribution to USD 15.5 billion over the next five years.

Presenter Badawi concluded the event by thanking participants for setting out their ambitions and "renewing the drive" to set countries and stakeholders on the road to COP 26, and stressed "we are all in this together, protecting people and our planet."

A Brief Analysis of the Summit

As birthdays go, one could have hoped for better circumstances. Five years ago, governments adopted the Paris Agreement on climate change, and December 2020 was intended to provide its first major test: would governments submit enhanced or new nationally determined contributions (NDCs), more stringent in their emissions reductions, along with more generous pledges on finance? Like so much else in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench into the works. There could be no in-person meeting to celebrate, and negotiate the final aspects of the Paris rulebook. But, at the same time, the global

health concerns that shaped the year reinforce the truth that the health of humanity and of the planet are interwoven.

Instead, a series of virtual events substituted for the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, originally scheduled for December 2020. The virtual Climate Dialogues in late November and early December allowed parties and civil society to exchange views and share new information. Meanwhile, the Climate Ambition Summit provided an opportunity for parties to show progress—and for the incoming COP presidency to demand it. According to the co-conveners, the UN, UK, and France, there would be “no space for general statements,” and announcements were expected to “show genuine progress from existing policies.” Still, with three climate summits in the past six years, some worried about diminishing returns. Would this call from the UN and COP presidencies be enough to bridge the gap between ambition and what is necessary to limit catastrophic global warming according to science?

“We have to ask ourselves two questions,” incoming COP 26 President Alok Sharma said as he closed the event. “At the end of the day, have we made progress? And is it enough?” This brief analysis of the Climate Ambition Summit attempts to answer those questions.

Ambition, If Only in Name

Did the Climate Ambition Summit present meaningful progress? Technically, yes. The convenors requested leaders to come forward with announcements relating to NDCs, long-term net-zero strategies, climate finance commitments, and adaptation plans. Motivated, perhaps, as much by peer pressure as by the demands of science, many countries announced significant upgrades to their medium-term mitigation targets. The EU’s proposal of 55% greenhouse gas emissions reductions, as well as the UK’s and Denmark’s targets of 68% and 70% reductions, respectively, are among the most ambitious in the history of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). China’s pledge to reduce its economy’s carbon intensity by “at least” 65% from 2005 levels by 2030 nudges one of its previous NDC targets higher. Collectively, the summit yielded 45 announcements of new, updated, or revised NDCs. Many of these announcements, however, included already agreed-upon policy. It will therefore take time to untangle previous commitments from new ones and assess their contribution.

Moreover, ambition in developing continues to be conditional on developed countries delivering on their financial promises. Developing countries such as Barbados and the Maldives, which announced ambitious mitigation commitments despite their constraints, reiterated long-standing calls for increased climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building support. In fact, developed countries’ promise in Copenhagen in 2009 to mobilize USD 100 billion in climate finance per year by 2020 will not be met. As a result, it is likely that many developing country commitments will continue to be conditional on those flows reaching their destination. This summit was a reminder that, as UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa noted, climate finance contributions can be the key enabler of ambition—or its breaking point.

Despite an abundance of participants—111 speakers in all—there were some notable absences. Organizers were clear that only those who presented enhanced ambition would be offered a speaking slot, with priority for “transformational commitments.” The absence of Brazil, the Russian Federation, Australia, and

New Zealand, to name only a few, sent a message: commit to serious change, or be left behind on the world stage. Yet some commentators questioned the effectiveness of this tactic even as they recognized that it may be the only trick left in the UN’s toolbox, since those parties will still be present and active at the rescheduled 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow in 2021. “No representatives from the fossil fuel industry were invited to speak, either,” another quipped online, “and they don’t seem that devastated.”

Also absent was the United States, which exited the Paris Agreement in November 2020—only to have its new President-Elect Joe Biden announce the US would rejoin the Agreement when he takes office in January 2021. Although officially absent, American subnational and non-state actors did participate, including two US state governors. At the same time, many major players may still be waiting to see how a Biden administration acts on climate before cementing further international commitments. Some observers saw China’s Climate Ambition Summit commitment, which did not contain an earlier peaking target for emissions that some had anticipated, as a sign that it was “hedging its bets” before the official re-entry of the United States into the Agreement.

What Is Promised and What Is Necessary

If the summit achieved its goal of raising ambition—however incrementally—whether that ambition is sufficient to meet the key objectives of the Paris Agreement is questionable. The World Meteorological Organization estimates a 24% chance of surpassing the threshold of 1.5°C of warming in the next five years. The 2020 UNEP Emissions Gap Report concludes that the world remains on track to exceed 3°C of warming by the end of the century. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that emissions cuts of 40-60% from 2010 levels are needed by 2030 to stay on track to limit warming to the Agreement’s lower threshold of 1.5°C. Most countries who spoke at the summit came nowhere close to this level of ambition.

While significant, these commitments do not necessarily reflect the urgency of the science. At the November 2020 Climate Dialogues, IPCC scientists were clear: immediate and urgent decarbonization is necessary, and any delay adds to the burden on future generations. Many announcements made in 2020 and at the summit skew towards longer-term decarbonization, with net-zero targets tied to 2050. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted, G20 countries still spend 50% more in their COVID-19 stimulus and rescue packages on sectors linked to fossil fuel production than on low-carbon energy. And of the world’s largest emitters, only a small number have proposed or submitted stronger NDC targets. Although some took the commitments of the summit as evidence that the Paris Agreement’s “ratchet mechanism” is working, it was clear to others it is not working fast enough. Before the summit, activist Greta Thunberg slammed world leaders for setting “distant hypothetical targets,” declaring that “the gap between what we need to do and what needs to be done is widening by the minute.”

Significant uncertainty clouds the climate agenda entering 2021. Some were encouraged that the UK presidency demonstrated a willingness to employ its vast diplomatic network as the incoming COP 26 Presidency to mobilize stakeholders worldwide, including through the non-party stakeholder-oriented Race to Zero campaign, despite the postponement of the COP by a full year and the raging pandemic. But with the UNFCCC’s

mid-year Subsidiary Body meetings yet to be scheduled for 2021, the path to COP 26 is not yet clear. While a number of speakers cited growing optimism about recent scientific advances to combat COVID-19, uneven access to vaccines raises concerns that the long tail of the pandemic could further disadvantage developing countries, including in climate negotiations. Uncertainty also remains around the role of civil society. Some noted that virtual platforms make it difficult to execute the “inclusive multilateralism” that many in the international community continue to call for. The incoming Presidency’s focus on including business, scientific, and civil society groups also raises the question of how these communities will participate in the UNFCCC process, should opportunities for face-to-face interaction remain limited in the months or years to come.

Stitching Together Climate Ambition

The incoming COP Presidency projected determination at the summit’s close. “I want the golden thread of climate action to weave through every international gathering next year,” Sharma said, pointing to upcoming G7 and G20 meetings. But even if the targets and the science are clear and unmoving, whether climate ambition will deliver those targets remains to be seen. Current policies do not hold the world below 1.5°C, or even 2°C, of warming. Most of the today’s targets will be judged when the leaders presenting them are long out of office. The coming year’s recovery from a global pandemic, a shifting world stage, and the juggling of economic priorities with environmental imperatives will dictate whether true transformation will emerge at COP 26 in Glasgow. Will the golden thread weave together humans and the planet once more? Or will the Agreement’s patched-up cloth of goodwill unravel at the seams?

Upcoming Meetings

23rd Standing Committee on Finance Meeting: This meeting will address the fourth Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows, and the first report on the determination of the needs of developing country parties related to implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement. It will also address the preparation of the Forum on Finance for Nature-based Solutions, as well as draft guidance to the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. **dates:** 16-17 December 2020 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://unfccc.int>

Climate Adaptation Summit: This meeting will be hosted by the Netherlands and will invite global leaders to launch a comprehensive Adaptation Action Agenda. It will also set out clear commitments to deliver concrete new endeavors and partnerships to make our world more resilient to the effects of climate change. **dates:** 25-26 January 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://cas2021.com>

IPCC-54: The IPCC is currently in its sixth assessment cycle. Its 54th session and the approval plenary for Working Group I’s contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) is tentatively scheduled. **dates:** 13-18 April 2021 (TBC) **location:** TBC **www:** <https://ipcc.ch/calendar/>

Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) Summit: This Summit will be hosted by the Republic of Korea and P4G and will bring together high-level government officials, CEOs, and civil society leaders to deliberate on how scalable and replicable market-based solutions can advance

an increased ambition on climate action and sustainable development. **dates:** 2021 (TBC) **location:** TBC **www:** <https://p4gpartnerships.org/content/p4g-seoul-summit>

60th Meeting of the GEF Council: The Council is the GEF’s main governing body, and meets twice annually to develop, adopt, and evaluate the operational policies and programmes for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 15-17 June 2021 **location:** TBC **www:** <https://thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-60th-council-meeting>

52nd Sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies: The 52nd sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies will meet in June 2020. **dates:** TBC **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** <https://unfccc.int/event/first-sessional-period-sb-52>

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2021: The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will convene the 2021 session of the HLPF under the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.” Following the first five days, the HLPF’s three-day ministerial segment takes place jointly with ECOSOC’s high-level segment. **dates:** 6-15 July 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>

2021 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 26): The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26), the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 16), and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 3) will convene one year after its originally scheduled dates. **dates:** 1-12 November 2021 **location:** Glasgow, UK **www:** <https://unfccc.int>
For additional meetings, see <https://sdg.iisd.org/>

Glossary

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| COP | Conference of the Parties |
| GHG | Greenhouse gas |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| LDCs | Least developed countries |
| NDC | Nationally determined contribution |
| SIDS | Small island developing states |
| UNEP | UN Environment Programme |
| UNFCCC | UN Framework Convention on Climate Change |