

## **Beyond COPs: The long-term struggle for systems change to address climate change**

*Opening Speech by Dorothy Guerrero, Global Justice Now*

The two-week COP26, which produced the Glasgow Climate Pact signed by 197 parties did not, despite flashy announcements, deliver what is needed to keep global average temperature rise within the 1.5°C limit by the end of this century aligned to the Paris Agreement of 2015. It also failed to come up with the promised climate finance to help developing countries that are already suffering severe climate change impacts despite having done least to cause the climate crisis. That climate finance was promised since the COP15 in 2009 here in Copenhagen.

The combined voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with 2030 short-term goals made by parties are insufficient and even if actually implemented could lead to a temperature rise of 2.4°C by the century's end. Parties now need to return at the COP27 negotiations, to be held this year in Egypt, with stronger commitments. Targets will now be reviewed annually instead of every five years.

Since COP1 held in Berlin in 1995, the poorest countries are increasingly forced to use scarce resources to adapt to the climate crisis despite only having very minimum carbon footprints compared with those of the rich world. Developing countries, especially in the continent of Africa are already spending billions of dollars every year to cope with the effects of the climate crisis, which is diverting potential investments from schools and hospitals and driving them into ever deeper poverty.

According to a study by PowerShift Africa titled "Adapt or Die: An analysis of African climate adaptation strategies", African countries will spend an average of 4% of GDP on adapting to climate breakdown. Dealing with extreme weather is costing close to 6% of GDP in Ethiopia alone, equating to a spend of more than \$1 as cost of repairing climate damage for every \$20 of national income. South Sudan, which is the world's second poorest country, hit by floods last year that displaced 850,000 people is to spend \$376m a year on adaptation or about 3.1% of its GDP.

As the year started, news reports globally shifted between Omicron's alarming rise and the devastating super-typhoon Rai in the Philippines. Rai displaced more than half a million people and caused 407 deaths, the costs of damage to infrastructures, homes, agriculture and people's livelihoods are estimated at £339 million.

The Philippines is one of the world's 18 mega biodiverse countries, which contain two-thirds of the Earth's biodiversity and 70-80 percent of world's plants and animal species. That biodiversity is under severe threat, as the Philippines is also amongst the world's most climate vulnerable countries, despite contributing less than 0.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Capitalism can't fix the climate crisis**

The second of the latest four-part Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report released on February 28, as expected, is even more alarming than previously alarming reports. We are quickly getting towards 1.5°C and we're on our way to 3°C or 4°C. It was already outlined in the IPCC 2018 Report that without drastic change, we had roughly twelve years before we reach the 1.5°C redline. That is now eight years in which to rapidly decarbonize the global economy.

At the rate that massive extraction of fossil fuels, material production and now war in Europe are happening, keeping that margin is not just an enormous challenge. It is looking more and more like a losing battle to meet that ever-shrinking window, and with only the current productive system in which we live in. Many already argued that the way to deal with the climate crisis should be to push for non-reformist reforms, to use André Gorz's framing. We do want a better world. To have that better world, we need to transcend capitalism. The earlier that many people understand that capitalism is incompatible with dealing with the climate crisis because of its constant thirst for expansion the better for our common survival.

We need a really radical shift from our current economic order.

## **What are the alternatives?**

Many current climate justice movements, despite having differing orientations, motivations and strategies, have many commonalities in their visions of what a more sustainable, equitable and just alternative world can be:

- Economies, big and small that are oriented towards concrete needs and a good life for all. That requires replacing economic concepts, priorities, and different rules of market exchange.

More than two decades ago, my former organisation, Focus on the Global South under the leadership of Walden Bello, advanced the concept of Deglobalisation. The main argument of Deglobalisation is for our economies to deconstruct from the logic of neoliberal capitalism and reconstruct based on alternative systems with social justice, equality and sustainability at the centre.

We also have ideas of buen vivir/vivir bien. Alternatives from Via Campesina and indigenous communities in Latin America.

- The climate crisis is a social crisis. Systems change discourse start with comprehensive analysis of society, power and politics, taking into account the many different facets of existing inequalities and crises. We need to end the unjust relations between humans and unsustainable relations between humans and nature. The relationship is that of co-dependency so we need systems that will follow that logic.

- Global justice instead of only discussing political questions in a national context.
- Rejection of the 'green economy:' multiple crises can't be solved through a 'greening' of growth and capitalism; large-scale technological solutions have major, negative side-effects.
- Democratization: instead of delegating the power to shape society to a selected few, most movements strive for an all-encompassing democratization that ensures the participation of all people.
- Systemic change and paradigm shift: instead of hoping that small changes or political reforms will solve society's problems, these movements seek to bring about comprehensive and fundamental changes.
- Working in the here and now: instead of simply making demands, most movements try to effect change in the present, either through alternative projects in which utopias are tested out or in social struggles with concrete goals.

Like the debates on Degrowth, global south countries are wary of the one-size fits all approach, at the same time neoliberal conditions are still prevailing.

They argue about the need for sustainable development in the South while drastic need to start the shift in the North.

Unlike in the US where GND is still being discussed and pushed in Congress, South Korea on the other hand, already put these in policy reality

One major task of Green New Deal politics has been to break down the prevailing neoliberal form of environmental politics that pits workers against the earth, and jobs against the environment. In the global South ownership is an integral factor in that debate. Nationalizing the fossil fuel industry is a major debate as many governments are faced with threats of investment pull out.

If this conversation doesn't put things like nationalization on the table, the terms of the transition are left up to fossil fuel executives, who are more than happy to abandon whole parts of the enterprise if they're no longer profitable.

We also need to ensure that global trade rules on trade agreements like ISDS are not blocking climate actions.

Global south movements have long argued for the payment of climate debt by the rich countries to them by means of Climate Debt Reparations.

## **Beyond COPs**

We need to expose dangerously misleading net-zero, which the UK as COP26 host country encouraged other parties to base their climate ambitions around. Targets from countries now cover 90%. This looks like an important signal, especially with key countries' announcements of accelerated climate action with net zero targets. However, the targets are still not proportional to the responsibilities of big and historic emitters.

Even if, and this is a big if, all net zero commitments targets are fully implemented, the most 'optimistic scenario' would still produce 1.8°C global average temperature rise by 2100, with peak warming of 1.9°C. Corporations and countries are evasively using net zero jargon to delay real, transformative action toward real zero.

Let us not forget that the COP's history is replete with broken promises by rich countries. Changes, delay or undermining of previously agreed goalposts, reinterpreting agreements to suit the global north's vested corporate agenda.

## **Climate Finance**

'Climate finance' refers to money provided in different forms from advanced economies to countries in the global South. From the beginning, basic principle in the UNFCCC is that the climate agreement specified that richer countries, because of their high levels of emissions, would provide funding for poorer and climate-vulnerable countries, as an obligation, to help them with climate change impacts and technology advance for their development transition with low emissions.

At COP26, we once again saw the big failure of rich countries in fulfilling their climate finance commitments. The annual \$100 billion climate finance envisaged to start flowing to developing countries from 2020, as promised in the 2009 COP15 here in Copenhagen, was postponed again until 2023.

In Glasgow, finance ministers and a consortium of investors pledged to 'align' \$130 trillion of private finance assets to net zero. But these will come as loans and investments that will merely facilitate corporate money-making in the guise of climate action. Of the 97 pointers of the Glasgow Pact, 14 were dedicated to "Loss and Damage, the inevitable consequences of human-caused climate change on lives, livelihoods and infrastructure. However, the US and EU shot down the proposal to have a Loss and Damage facility, a formal delivery body for funding demanded by developing countries.

The long-term demands from the global south for climate debt reparations, grant-based finance for adaptation and loss and damage have been routinely watered down or delayed completely by rich nations.

This finance must be at the heart of any just, equitable and effective climate action. The widely covered watering down of a pledge to 'phase out' coal in the Glasgow pact, blamed on the Indian government, represented another sleight of hand by rich countries. Coal, like all fossil fuels, should indeed be phased out as soon as possible as part of a just transition which recognises the common but differentiated responsibilities of global north and global south. But the fact that phasing out oil and gas never even made it into the draft text – fossil fuels which the US and EU have not already begun to phase out, as they have with coal – indicates where the power continues to lie in the negotiations.

## **Building hope**

Despite the failures of the talks, many drew hope from what happened outside the negotiations. The COP26, which Global Justice Now was part of, reported that there were over **800 actions** globally. There were more than **150,000** protesters that marched in Glasgow, 20,000 in London and other cities in the UK.

Over **15,000** people attended both in-person and digital events during the **People's Summit for Climate Justice** to discuss, learn, network and strategise about building the movement.

There is also an increased awareness that the climate crisis is already, and will increasingly, affect everyone globally. As a global crisis it also demands global collaboration and the UK public supports strong domestic actions according to polls. Ideologically, climate denialists finally lost the argument that climate change does not exist.

At the start of the second week of COP26, Global Justice Now together with many southern networks and Transform Europe organised a "People's Tribunal" where the Jury of the Peoples and Nature found the UNFCCC guilty of failing to address the root causes of climate change.