

Headline: The end of the world? (2)

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Published Date: 04:30 AM December 05, 2022

Section: opinion

Word Count: 5880

Content:

The worst polluters paying the most susceptible, poorer countries to adjust to a higher temperature world, called “the loss and damage agreement” was the only positive outcome of the conference, achieved after a tumultuous two-day extension. But, desirable as that is, it does little to reduce the pollution of the atmosphere. What is particularly worrying is that the rich countries had tried to keep this funding off the agenda, but they were forced into it.

I’m impressed they did it. World leaders of the rich agreed to help the poor. The loss and damage fund will be created. A very reluctant United States, given the huge sums involved, was left with little choice if it wanted to escape global condemnation. But how Republicans will react now that they control the House puts a question mark on Biden’s capitulation. Achieving firm agreement and action on reducing carbon and methane emissions, which is the whole purpose of these conferences, was not successful.

There’s no question that the polluters should pay for the damage they’ve caused. But for it to have a sufficient impact, the bill will run into the many hundreds of billions of dollars, if not trillions. Where will you find a voting public willing to vote for their leaders to give the money they believe would be better used on themselves to some faraway land? Making it worse, how do you convince them to agree to turn over vast sums to politicians in countries ranked high in Transparency International’s corruption index? This will particularly be a problem if Trump, or one of his ilk, wins in 2024. US agreements can well be rescinded. Trump doesn’t even believe there is climate change.

Where will you find a dictator who will sacrifice the purchase of his new mega-yacht to fund a poor he despises?

A minor technicality: who defines who is rich and who is poor. Under the bizarre terms of the United Nations’ climate convention, China is defined as a developing country, so would be entitled to be a recipient. China’s climate envoy Xie Zhenhua even said that it was the responsibility of developed countries to help poorer countries pay for addressing climate change, but developing countries like China could contribute to loss and damage or other funds on a voluntary basis. So far, China has committed nothing.

So far, only five countries have pledged funding to help finance the loss and damage to developing countries. But what they’re committing is a joke: \$92.5 million when hundreds of BILLIONS are needed. (Austria, \$50 million; Canada, \$18 million; New Zealand, \$12 million; Ireland, \$10 million; Belgium, a petty cash of \$2.5 million.)

The US has done somewhat better with \$100 million for climate adaptation (whatever that involves), and \$150 million for disaster emergency response in Africa. As far as I can tell, none of this is toward reducing carbon emissions, only adapting to it.

A panel has been created that will spend the year till COP28 determining what the fund will look like, who will fund it, and who will get it. No easy task. At the 2009 COP, it was recognized that \$100 billion per year was needed to support the climate-vulnerable poorer countries. The rich world promised \$100 billion to fund help to the smaller countries. Thirteen years later, virtually, none of it had been provided. Political promises.

The outcome is likely to be long-delayed, and a fraction of need. Turning those promises into actual fund releases will be a different matter. Meanwhile, the world will continue warming.

As to reducing emissions, the commitments agreed to in Glasgow last year to keep the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius were not done. One has to ask, what were 500 people from fossil fuel companies doing at COP? They should be banned.

Russian president (hopefully not for much longer) Vladimir Putin has single-handedly accelerated pollution by his unconscionable war, forcing Europe to start up their coal plants again. But, in contrast, it may lead to cleaner air quicker — if Europe completely stops buying gas from Russia. As they certainly now want to do, as Russia can no longer be relied on. They should not shift back to fossil fuels, but to clean energy. The pressure will be immense for them to do so. That shift will need to include nuclear for 24/7 reliable baseload power. Solar and wind are good, but supplying only 2-3 percent today. Getting up toward 100 percent of renewable energy is an awfully optimistic scenario, but must be aimed for.

The rest of the agenda followed history, a history that dates back to 1965 when climate warming was first publicly recognized. The final agreement skirted key issues. They failed to agree to cut the use of all fossil fuels, as keeping temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius commands. Instead, all they could agree on was sticking to the COP26 “phase down of unabated coal use.”

Mind you, there is quite a bit going on outside COP. Countries are independently working toward cleaner energy, green buildings, etc. And companies, too, with the shift to electric vehicles, more efficient solar panels, etc. But it's not enough, it needs the actions COPs have promised.

The Economist summarized it perfectly when it said: “‘We rose to the occasion,’ crowed Egypt’s foreign minister after COP27, the global climate summit that ended on Nov. 20. Hardly. The delegates failed to make a clear commitment to phase out the use of fossil fuels. The best they could produce was a vague agreement that rich countries should pay poor ones for climate-related ‘loss and damage.’”

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What this all says is that the drastic, immediate actions that have to happen, won't. We are doomed to an earth hotter than humans can adjust to. It's hard to see how the apocalypse can be avoided.