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Better together

Encouraging progress at the COP23 climate summit in Bonn can only be sustained through continued global efforts

After two weeks of intense negotiations, the UN Climate Change Conference ended in the early hours of 18 November. The outcomes of COP23 sent a clear signal that all participating states – except one – remain committed to fulfilling the Paris Agreement. Despite some criticism concerning the lack of speed in progress, the results of the negotiations in Bonn prove that multilateral negotiations work and are crucial if we are to strengthen global climate protection.

COP23 was significant for three reasons. It was the first Conference of Parties presided over by Fiji – a small island state that's particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. It was also the first COP following the US announcement that it will withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the landmark climate accord reached in 2015. And it had the extremely difficult task of realising noticeable progress on the Paris Rulebook, a guide to implementing the goals set by the Paris Agreement.

One of the most important things COP23 had to achieve was preparing the ground for raising ambition in national climate action. Under the current nationally determined contributions (NDCs), it will not be possible to reach the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, because the mitigation efforts are not strong enough. Two processes are needed: first, strong climate action before 2020, and second, the Talanoa Dialogue, a process that supports and guides countries to raise ambition in their NDCs, including pre- and post-2020 action. In both areas, COP23 made considerable progress.

Where do we want to go?

The negotiating parties agreed on a fixed pre-2020 stocktake at COP24 in Poland next year, as well as at COP25 in Latin America in 2019. Through this process, industrialised countries in particular will have to

account for the fulfillment of their climate protection goals, as well as their promises to provide climate finance.

Parties at COP23 were also able to give the Talanoa Dialogue a clear design. Throughout 2018, this process will take stock and explore options for enhancing climate action, answering the questions 'Where do we want to go?' and 'How do we get there?'. It will also include pre-2020 action and inputs by experts, non-state actors and civil society, and will be able to create political pressure towards preparing a new generation of more ambitious NDCs. As such it can be a bridge towards viable long-term strategies in climate protection. In providing a roadmap for the Talanoa Diaogue and agreeing on how to integrate pre-2020 action, COP23 prepared the ground for greater ambition in climate policies.

When climate-induced loss and damage was anchored in the Paris Agreement in 2015, it was a huge success; countries vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change were hopeful that it would help them cope with extreme weather events and their implications. As loss and damage goes far beyond what they can adapt to in terms of irreparable losses and recoverable damages, one of the most important focus points in this discussion has always been finance. Developed countries have been blocking progress for years, fearing unlimited liability and compensation.

While it has become clear that the topic is being accepted as relevant to the negotiations, COP23 has not been able to make progress on financing climate-induced loss and damage. The handling of the Adaptation Fund, however – which provides support for countries in adapting and building resilience to climate change – can be considered a success. The German environment ministry pledged €50 million to this fund on the first day of negotiations; an important sign of solidarity with those who have not caused climate change but are already suffering from the consequences.

Parties were also charged with working on guidelines on how exactly to implement the Paris Agreement. This guide, the Paris Rulebook, will have to be settled by next year's conference. Discussions here progressed to developing draft texts for every subsection; while this is positive, they are too long and complex as they stand, leaving much work for negotiators in the coming year. It is essential to develop a rulebook with firm instructions for countries in terms of transparency, accounting and reporting.

Engagement on the local level

Just like in previous conferences in Paris and Marrakesh, the success of negotiations should be judged by more than what came out of plenary hall negotiations and formal meetings. The spotlight must be on climate initiatives as well, as they have the potential to support implementation of the Paris Agreement. Bonn was full of such initiatives.

One particularly interesting project is the Powering Past Coal Alliance, in which 28 countries and regions – among them Britain, Canada, Austria, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Italy – pledge to phase out coal as soon as possible and to stop financing coal completely. While these countries may not be heavyweights in coal extraction, it is nevertheless a sign that more and more countries are realising that the age of fossil fuels is coming to an end.

Then there is the InsuResilience Global Partnership, which aims to support countries in managing their climate risks and increasing their resilience. One instrument is to provide insurance solutions to help them better adapt to climate change. COP23 also brought a lot of investments to the table, including financial support to phase out coal and support renewable energies, and the implementation of national climate protection plans.

International commitment

Stakeholders, mayors and civil society representatives from the US also showed that there is a different United States, one that values climate protection and is committed to fulfilling the goals set by the Paris Agreement. With their own US Climate Action Center forum, they showed that they will do everything in their power to support ambitious climate protection strategies.

These initiatives all demonstrate that there is a strong local, national and international commitment to saving the world from dangerous climate change. They also show that multinational negotiations provide a useful framework for bringing together non-state action. A global challenge like climate change can only be successfully addressed through such joint efforts and global solutions.

The outcomes of COP23 can be considered moderately positive, with parties agreeing on the way forward, especially in terms of increasing climate ambition. None of these steps would have been possible in a national or bilateral framework alone. In turbulent political times, the world needs more cooperation and more exchange, not more isolationism

and ignorance; global fora like this are more important now than ever. For further successful climate action, three things are essential: multilateral negotiations that incorporate all countries; climate action on the ground to maintain the momentum and create political pressure; and the necessary speed to make sure that the 1.5 degrees goal stays within our reach.



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