

Glasgow's COP26: A Cop Out Or A Baby Step Forward?

BY FEREDOON SIOSHANSI

Greta Thunberg called it "A festival of business-as-usual," others say it's the best we can expect.

The United Nation's 26th **Conference of Parties** (COP) ended more or less as expected, with bickering, lack of unanimity on critical issues and little ambition. While everyone attending knew what had to be done, they couldn't agree on how or when to do it. For example, the issue of phasing out fossil fuel subsidies – the US envoy **John Kerry** called it the "definition of insanity" – was watered down in the final communiqué. Even the *phase out* of coal, the most polluting fossil fuel, had to be toned down to *phase down* at the insistence of India and China at the 11th hour. As is always the case, the delegates stayed beyond the official closure of the event to hash out a statement acceptable to all 197 nations represented – and those with the lowest ambition supported by the powerful fossil fuel lobby – essentially got what they wanted.

While some progress was made, as described in the following article from **David Robinson**, an eyewitness in Glasgow, it was at best modest compared to what had to be done. **Alok Sharma**, representing UK's delegation and the event's host, said, "I apologize for the way this process has ended." The young environmental activist **Greta Thunberg** called it "A festival of business-as-usual." According to Greta, COP26 "... succeeded in watering down the blah, blah, blah, which is quite an achievement." As many had predicted, politicians repeated their passionate speeches and pledges for meeting certain objectives by 2050, or in the case of China 2060, or 2070 for India.

Mocking the meaningless 2050 pledges without any significant change in the near term, **Greg Taylor**, a 73 year-old man from Sydney, Australia pledged that he would stop drinking beer starting in 2050. In the meantime, he would continue his current drinking habits until 2049, when he would turn 101, before stopping drinking. Point taken.

The fact that it has taken 26 gatherings to get to where we are speaks volumes. Even before the **Earth Summit** in **Rio de Janeiro** in 1992, the governments knew what had to be done, but here we are in 2021 debating when and if fossil fuel subsidies should be phased out or the use of coal curtailed. For the first time, however, there is an acknowledgment that the use of fossil fuels must be curtailed.

At the same time, one can sympathize with the politicians who cannot pledge much of anything because they do not have the full support of their own citizens and/or the backing of their political system. The US President **Joe Biden**, for example, was contradicted by Senator **Joe Manchin** of West Virginia a day after

he spoke in Glasgow. **China** and **Russia's** presidents did not even bother to attend. Australia's **Scott Morrison** found himself siding with oil exporting countries like **Saudi Arabia** to block language against fossil fuels – coal and oil, respectively.

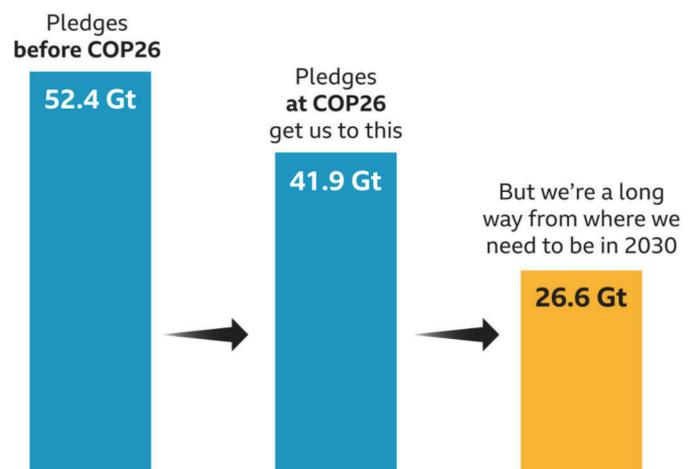
Australia's only contribution to COP26, according to one observer, was to serve decent coffee at its pavilion. Over 40,000 attended the 2-week shindig, with the biggest delegation from the fossil fuel lobby. Many of the same will be at next year's event to be held in **Egypt** in 2022. The show must go on.

Despite the UN's obvious shortcomings – it can convene conferences but cannot demand unanimity, ambition or funding – there were a few hopeful signs of slow progress. **US** and **China**, rivals who account for over 40% of the global emissions, agreed to cooperate on climate issues. One cannot be sure what it means given the vague language of the communiqué.

More important, however, is the relentless pressure from the young activists and their supporters who continue to demand immediate action. The bankers, investors and corporate CEOs – attending or not – can no longer ignore the deafening call for change. And that may be the best outcome of COP26. The pressure is on and it will not go away.

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Ambition gap: What we need vs. what we got

Source: BBC News