

Guide to COP - Conference of the Parties (1995 – Present)

April 1995, Berlin - Germany's then environment minister, Angela Merkel, presided over the **first Conference of the Parties (COP 1)** in Berlin, where Parties (participating countries) agreed that commitments in the Convention were 'inadequate' for meeting Convention objectives, thus laying the groundwork for the well-known **Kyoto Protocol**.

The reasons for this meeting ultimately date back to 1987 when, after the first major worldwide panic over our excessive interference with Nature's finely-balanced systems, The Montreal Protocol was agreed and signed to banish the destructive CFC gasses that were dissolving the protective Ozone Layer, without which we would succumb to serious radiations such as UV and an epidemic of skin and other cancers. In 1988 the World Meteorological Organization WMO and UN Environment Programme UNEP established the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - IPCC**. The Panel predicted we were heading for a series of catastrophes which would result in permanent changes to weather and other patterns.

As early on as 1990, Mrs Thatcher spoke of the future need to make "changes and sacrifices". One of the key villains was the presence of increasing and excess Carbon (Dioxide – CO₂) and other noxious gasses in the atmosphere. The consequence was that the atmosphere (and oceans) were slowly and possibly irrevocably heating up, thanks to human activities.

November 1990 to 1992 – the **IPCC** called for a Global Treaty, leading to the universally accepted (well, almost) **UNFCCC** – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Rio de Janeiro. It declared that we must take immediate action to control "DANGEROUS HUMAN INTERFERENCE WITH THE CLIMATE SYSTEM". **COP1** was set up as Merkel felt the convention was insufficient. UNFCCC declared the need to hold yearly meetings (**COPs**) establishing the new concept of Climate Diplomacy.

Key **COP** meetings and agreements included:

- **COP3 (Kyoto Protocol 1997)** establishing two worldwide groups of rich and poorer nations which spread the tasks according to the wealth or otherwise of each country (our own First World arguably started the atmospheric pollution ball rolling during the Industrial Revolution)
- **EU (2005) Emissions Trading** or first Carbon Market, set up
- As major scientific and climate research increasingly showed, the current and ideal maximum future temperature figures could be measured and defined, as more CO₂ and Methane was pumped upwards - by us, so in 2015 (**Paris Agreement**) 195 countries agreed to limit temperatures to no more than 2°, preferably 1.5° Centigrade (we are currently at rather more than 1.2C)
- 2018, the IPCC emphasised the serious risks resulting from accepting a 2° rather than the preferred 1.5° and nations were all expected to aim for the increase in these gasses to hit zero (ie. NET ZERO) by a certain date
- Glasgow hosted the delayed **COP26** in 2021 whose aim was for participants to show the progress they had made (or not made); at that stage only one country was seen to have made sufficient progress (The Gambia) to achieve the ideal 1.5° by 2030. The UK only got the "almost sufficient" grade!
- 2021, having left the Paris Agreement, the USA, under President Biden, rejoined; the same year the IPCC published its 6th Report

The main (Greenhouse) gasses identified by the Kyoto Protocol included:

- Carbon dioxide (CO₂);
- Methane (CH₄);
- Nitrous oxide (N₂O);
- Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs);

COP26 required four objectives to be accepted:

1. Secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach; countries were being asked to come forward with ambitious 2030 emissions reductions targets that align with reaching net zero by the middle of the century
2. Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats; the climate is already changing and it will continue to change even as we reduce emissions, with devastating effects
3. Mobilise finance; to deliver on the first two goals, developed countries must have made good on their promise to generate at least \$100bn in climate finance per year by 2020
4. Work together to deliver; we could only rise to the challenges of the climate crisis by working together

COP27 Start - 6th November (see <https://unfccc.int/cop27#news>)

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 6 – 18 November 2022. Egypt took over the Presidency of COP 27 with the background of a worsening in the climate and the need for full acceptance and cooperation to reduce the threats. COP27 opened with the key aim of ensuring full implementation of the Paris Agreement 2015, near the end of a year that has seen increased flooding, unprecedented heat waves, severe droughts and disastrous storms.

All are symptoms of the developing climate emergency. “At the same time, millions of people throughout the world are confronting the impacts of simultaneous crises in energy, food, water and cost of living, aggravated by severe geopolitical conflicts and tensions. In this adverse context, some countries have begun to stall or reverse climate policies and doubled down on fossil fuel use”, (*taken from UNFCCC website*).

COP27 is also taking place against the backdrop of inadequate measures to curb greenhouse gas emissions. According to the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**), CO₂ emissions need to be cut 45% by 2030, compared to 2010 levels to meet the key Paris Agreement goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. This is crucial to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Since **COP26** in Glasgow, only 29 out of 194 countries have come forward with more specific national plans.

Some Personal Thoughts

Reading between the lines, I see a belated and growing acceptance in much of the literature that, with Climate Change worsening (bad enough), Atmospheric Pollution is as important a factor at the local or national level as well as seen in a more global sense. A good example may be seen in China, where phenomena such as the infamous Beijing smogs brought home the dangers of toxic gasses and products in and around communities.

Carbon emissions and compromised air quality are caused by the same factors and are as potentially deadly at the local (street and urban) level as well as above us in the wider atmosphere or in our seas. The sources? – domestic power usage, coal combustion, traffic, aircraft, maritime and railway emissions, et al. Even that good old-fashioned bonfire may contribute to the occasional poor air quality.

It does seem to me, when one is confronted with the desperate but not unreasonable cry – “well, what can I do about this? I am just one person”, - that unless we all deal with the local environment and drastically cut back fossil fuel usage in all its forms, we cannot expect to be able to tame the truly more vast problems affecting the geographical Poles, or the warming seas. It’s not just up to the folk in Egypt; it’s up to all of us.

These worsening phenomena have root causes within the aggregated collective of millions of backyards, motorways or high streets, hundreds of power stations and thousands of hourly transport movements. Where do we really think the darkening soot dust in the melting alpine snows, the Himalayas or on the glaciers of Greenland originates?

The website for the Harvard School of Public Health states very clearly that: “Producing and burning fossil fuels creates air pollution that harms our health and generates toxic emissions that drive climate change”.....” Harvard University, in collaboration with the University of Birmingham, the University of Leicester and University College London, found that more than 8 million people died in 2018 from fossil fuel pollution, significantly higher than previous research suggested—meaning that air pollution from burning fossil fuels like coal and diesel was responsible for about 1 in 5 deaths worldwide.”

The TFL website for London is very revealing – you can visit at: <https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/air-quality>

I quote from the website: “The volume of road traffic in London makes it one of the most polluted places in the UK..... 100% of Londoners live in an area where pollution exceeds the latest recommendations from the World Health Organization for particulate matter PM2.5. This is one of the air pollutants thought to have the greatest impact on human health..... Road vehicles are the single biggest cause of London's air pollution. They produce nearly half of all nitrogen oxides and emit tiny particles of rubber and metal - too small to see with the naked eye - into the air we breathe..... A study from Imperial College London says that in 2019 over 4,000 Londoners died because of the impact of toxic air.”

The site lists some interesting “myths” such as “you can leave the engine running in your car when stationary” – not so: “Research shows that turning off the engine significantly reduces pollution levels in the surrounding area”.

So I suggest that generation of toxic and warming gasses, climate change, global atmospheric pollution, warming seas and oceans, smoky high streets and city centres are all interrelated. I think we should wish the participants at COP27 all the luck and good will they need and deserve.

George Andrews
6th November 2022