

Global Conversation: COP26

Picture A



Picture B



These photographs show the “**pilgrims’ procession**” in which thousands of climate activists/protestors walked 500 km from London to Glasgow for the Cop26.

1. What **messages** can you see in the two pictures? (there is not PLANET B – Earth before protest– walk the walk)

2. What do you think is the meaning of the phrase in the banner – **“There is no planet B”**? (open)
3. What does the **Extinction Rebellion** symbol on the flags in Picture B suggest to you? (the circle represents the Earth and the hourglass indicates that time is running out)
4. **How optimistic/pessimistic are you about the future of the world’s climate?** (open)

COP26

The **United Nations Climate Change Conference UK 2021** was held in Glasgow, Scotland from 31st October to 12th November. The name used for this conference is **“COP26”**.

The Background

In order to understand this acronym and number we need to take a look at the steps taken in the last thirty years.

In December 1990 the General Assembly of the United Nations created the **“Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee”** (INC) which began to work on a framework convention on climate change.

The **United Nations Framework on Climate Change** (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992 and signed at the **Rio Earth Summit**. Two years later, on 21st March 1994 the UNFCCC entered into force.

Today, it has near-universal membership. The 197 countries that have ratified the Convention are called **“Parties to the Convention”**. Preventing “dangerous” human interference with the climate system is the ultimate aim of the UNFCCC.

The Conference of the Parties

For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits – called COPs – which stands for **‘Conference of the Parties’**. The first COP was held in Berlin in 1995. Since then the COP has been an annual event.

COP3 (1997) stands out as one of the most significant conferences, producing the so-called **Kyoto Protocol**, the first treaty for the reduction of greenhouse gases. This treaty officially came into force in 2005 when it was ratified by the Russian federation.

Another major milestone was the **Paris Agreement** signed in the French capital at COP15 in **2015**. 195 nations agreed to combat climate change and to take actions and investment towards a low-carbon, resilient and sustainable future. These nations committed themselves to aim for a “cap” or upper limit to rising temperatures of 1.5 degrees. Every fraction of a degree of warming will result in the loss of many more lives lost and livelihoods damaged.

Under the Paris Agreement, countries committed to bring forward national plans setting out how much they would reduce their emissions – known as **Nationally Determined Contributions**, or ‘NDCs’.

In 2018 a special Global Warming of 1.5C report by the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) confirmed the need to maintain the strongest commitment to the Paris Agreement's aims of limiting global warming to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, which include more frequent and more severe droughts, floods and storms

Over the years climate change has gone from being a fringe issue to a global priority. Good intentions, however, have not always been accompanied by real action and protest at the failure of governments to move from words to action – to “walk the walk” and not just “talk the talk” – has seen the growth of youth activist groups, inspired by the “**Fridays for Future**” movement launched by **Greta Thunberg**.

The COP26 was preceded by the **Youth4Climate Summit** held from 28th to 30th September in Milan, with the support of the Italian government. This event provided young delegates an unprecedented opportunity to put forward ideas and concrete proposals on some of the most pressing issues on the climate agenda.

At the end of the Milan event, **Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi** addressed the assembly, accepting the criticism of the young delegates and recognising the urgency of the issue:

“This generation, your generation, has the most to lose from climate change. And you know extremely well the dramatic consequences of global inequalities on poverty, malnutrition, access to health.

You are right to demand accountability and change.

Under current trends we are falling short of our promise to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.”

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson likewise referred directly to young people in his comments on the Glasgow event, attempting to transmit a more positive attitude:

“Securing a brighter future for our children and future generations requires countries to take urgent action at home and abroad to turn the tide on climate change. It is with ambition, courage and collaboration as we approach the crucial COP26 summit in the UK that we can seize this moment together, so we can recover cleaner, rebuild greener and restore our planet.”

What has been achieved at the COP26?

Perhaps not surprisingly, the results of the conference offer some hope but fall short of expectations.

The 195 countries that agreed under the Paris Agreement to make changes to keep global warming “well below 2°C” and to aim for 1.5°C have been asked for their plans to reduce CO₂ emissions by 2030 and to achieve “**net zero**” by 2050.

India, which has a population of over 1 billion people, has already announced that this will not be possible until 2070.

On a more positive note, the COP26 first major success has seen more than 110 nations, including Canada, Russia, Brazil, China, the US and the UK, promise to **end and reverse deforestation by 2030**.

Experts welcomed the move, but warned a previous deal in 2014 had “failed to slow deforestation at all” and commitments needed to be delivered on.

More than 100 countries have agreed **to reduce methane emissions** by 30% by 2030, but big emitters **China, Russia** and **India** have not joined.

More than 40 countries have agreed **to move away from coal**, the single biggest contributor to climate change, but some of the world’s greatest users of coal, including **Australia, India, China** and **the US** have not signed up.

What the leaders say

If we were to judge this event on the basis of the expressions of good intentions offered by world leaders we would surely give a sigh of relief and satisfaction. The reality of the last ten years, however, justifies a certain cynicism and highlights a growing gulf between adults – older political figures and decision makers who have generally failed to take the climate crisis seriously – and the young, who rightly point out that the issue of climate change affects **their** future and the future of following generations.

This gulf can be seen clearly in the comments they have made:

“Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink. We face a stark choice: Either we stop it — or it stops us. It’s time to say: enough. ... Enough of treating nature like a toilet. Enough of burning and drilling and mining our way deeper. We are digging our own graves.”

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

“The people who will judge us are children not yet born and their children, and we are now coming center stage before a vast and uncountable audience of posterity, and we must not fluff our lines or miss our cue, because if we fail they will not forgive us.” **UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson**

"There's no more time to hang back or sit on the fence or argue amongst ourselves. This is a challenge of our collective lifetimes. The existential threat, threat to human existence as we know it, and every day we delay the cost of inaction increases. So let this be the moment that we answer history's call here in Glasgow." **US President Joe Biden**

"We are already gasping for survival. Tomorrow is not an option, for it will be too late." **Seychelles President Wavel John Charles Ramkalawan**

"The political decision makers who will meet at COP26 in Glasgow are urgently summoned to provide effective responses to the present ecological crisis and in this way to offer concrete hope to future generations." **Pope Francis**

"Change is not going to come from inside there [the Glasgow conference] — that is not leadership, this is leadership. We say no more 'blah blah blah,' no more exploitation of people and nature and the planet." **Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg**

Answer the following questions

1. How many of these acronyms do you understand?
COP (Conference of Parties)
UNFCCC (United Nations Framework on Climate Change)
NCD (Nationally Determined Contributions)
IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)
2. When and where was the first "COP" held? (1995 in Berlin)
3. Which treaty first called for the reduction of greenhouse gases? (the Kyoto Protocol, ratified in 2005)
4. What did the Paris Agreement of 2015 seek to achieve? (a limit or cap to rising temperatures of 1.5°C)
5. What event immediately preceded the Glasgow COP26? (the Youth4Climate Summit in Milan)
6. What did India announce in Glasgow? (It will not be able to achieve net zero before 2070)
7. What "major success" has come from the COP26? (the promise to end and reverse deforestation by 2030)
8. Which nations failed to agree to move away from the use of coal? (Australia, India, China and the US among others)
9. What does Greta Thunberg mean by the expression "blah blah blah"? (talk but not action)