

Cop26 ends in climate agreement despite India watering down coal resolution

Glasgow climate pact adopted despite last-minute intervention by India to water down language on phasing out dirtiest fossil fuel

- **Cop26: the goal of 1.5C of climate heating is alive, but only just**



Delegates pose for a photo at the end of the Cop26 climate conference. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

Fiona Harvey, Damian Carrington and Libby Brooks

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Countries have agreed a deal on the climate crisis that its backers said would keep within reach the goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C, the key threshold of safety set out in the 2015 Paris agreement.

The negotiations carried on late into Saturday evening, as governments squabbled over provisions on phasing out coal, cutting greenhouse gas emissions and providing money to the poor world.

The “Glasgow climate pact” was adopted despite a last-minute intervention by India to water down language on “phasing out” coal to merely “phasing down”.

The pledges on emissions cuts made at the two-week Cop26 summit in Glasgow fell well short of those required to limit temperatures to 1.5C, **according to scientific advice**. Instead, all countries have agreed to return to the negotiating table next year, at a conference in Egypt, and re-examine their national plans, with a view to increasing their ambition on cuts.

Alok Sharma, the UK cabinet minister who presided over the fortnight-long **Cop26** talks in Glasgow, acknowledged the scale of the task remaining: “We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5C alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action.

“Before this conference, the world asked: do the parties here in Glasgow have the courage to rise to the scale of the challenge? We have responded. History has been made here in Glasgow.”

António Guterres, the UN secretary-general, also warned that further urgent work was needed: “Our fragile planet is hanging by a thread. We are still knocking on the door of climate catastrophe. It is time to go into emergency mode – or our chance of reaching net zero [emissions] will itself be zero.”

The return to negotiations next year, to begin an annual process of revising national targets on greenhouse gases, will be a fraught process, as some countries contend that they are already doing their utmost. Even the small step of agreeing to revise the plans was only achieved after overcoming stiff opposition, yet revision is essential if the world is to avoid surpassing the 1.5C threshold.

One of the fiercest disagreements in the final hours was over the wording of an intention to abandon coal, which was watered down from a “phase-out” to a “phase-down”. Yet it marked the first time that such a resolution had been made under the UN climate process.

Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International, said: “It’s meek, it’s weak and the 1.5C goal is only just alive, but a signal has been sent that the era of coal is ending. And that matters.”

Poor countries were also left frustrated at the pact, which they said did not address their concerns about “**loss and damage**”. This refers to the destruction caused by extreme weather, which is now hitting vulnerable countries far harder and more frequently than had been predicted.

Current climate finance, which is provided to countries to help them invest in green technology and other emissions-cutting efforts, and to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis, is already falling short of promises, and even if fulfilled would be insufficient to cover these heavy losses and humanitarian disasters. By 2050, these hits could amount to a fifth of GDP for some poor countries, according to estimates from the charity Christian Aid.

But rich nations have been reluctant to agree any mechanism for providing funding for loss and damage, in part because some of the debate has been framed in terms of “compensation”, which rich countries cannot countenance.

Many observers called on countries to step up their efforts in the next year. Mary Robinson, former UN commissioner for human rights and chair of The Elders group of leaders and former statespeople, said: “Cop26 has made some progress, but nowhere near enough to avoid climate disaster. While millions around the world are already in crisis, not enough leaders came to Glasgow with a crisis mindset. People will see this as a historically shameful dereliction of duty. Leaders have extended by a year this window of opportunity to avert the worst of the climate crisis. The world urgently needs them to step up more decisively next year.”

Tina Stege, climate envoy for the Marshall Islands, representing the High Ambition Coalition of developed and developing countries, said: “This package is not perfect. The coal change and a weak outcome on loss and damage are blows. But it is real progress and elements of [it] are a lifeline for my country. We must not discount the crucial wins covered in this package.”

Mohamed Adow, director of the Nairobi-based thinktank Power Shift Africa, took a harsher view: “The needs of the world’s vulnerable people have been sacrificed on the altar of the rich world’s selfishness. The outcome here reflects a Cop held in the rich world and the outcome contains the priorities of the rich world.”

Many poor nations accepted defeat on their pleas to put stronger provisions on loss and damage into the text, in the closing hours of the conference, in order to allow the broader deal to go through.

Making the concession, Lia Nicholson, lead negotiator for Antigua and Barbuda, which chairs the 37-strong Alliance of Small Island States, said: “We are extremely disappointed and we will express our grievance in due course.”

Adow added: “We are leaving empty-handed but morally stronger, and hopeful that we can sustain the momentum in the coming year to deliver meaningful support which will allow the vulnerable to deal with the irreversible impacts of climate change, created by the polluting world, who are failing to take responsibility.”

The Cop also resolved several outstanding technical issues that had prevented aspects of the 2015 Paris climate agreement from coming into operation. These issues, on carbon trading and the “transparency” with which countries monitor and report their emissions, have dogged the annual climate meetings for six years but compromises were finally reached, which earned applause for Sharma.

Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said: “After six years, this is a significant accomplishment.”

One of the most contentious clauses in the final decision was a vaguely worded resolution to phase down “inefficient” fossil fuel subsidies. Energy experts are clear that phasing out coal will be essential to stay within 1.5C of global heating, but the opposition to the inclusion of the reference to a phase out – particularly from major coal-using countries including China, India and South Africa – showed how hard it will be to gain a global end to the dirtiest fossil fuel in time to avoid a 1.5C rise.

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, told the Guardian that more than 40% of the world’s existing 8,500 coal plants would have to close by 2030, and no new ones could be built, to stay within the limit. He said: “I would very much hope that advanced economies take a leading role and become an example for the emerging world. If they don’t do it, if they don’t show an example for the emerging world, they shouldn’t expect the emerging world to do it.”

Cop26 reactions: ‘Rich nations have kicked the can down the road’

Observers give mixed reception to news of an accord on the Cop26 final text. A selection give their views here



Cop26 president Alok Sharma, centre, speaks during the UN climate conference. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Guardian staff

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Diplomats, scientists, charities and NGOs have been commenting on the adoption of the “Glasgow climate pact” at the end of the **Cop26** conference. Here are some of their initial thoughts.

Laurence Tubiana, one of the architects of the 2015 Paris deal and now CEO of the European Climate Foundation

“Paris is working. Despite the Covid-19 crisis, we have accelerated action, responded to the [scientists’] call to close the gap towards 1.5C, and coal is in the text. But there is a lot more to do. The commitments and claims of the first

week on finance, forests, end of public finance for fossil fuel, methane and cars must now be translated into real policy and oil and gas production still to be addressed.

“This Cop has failed to provide immediate assistance for people suffering now. I welcome the doubling of adaptation finance as climate impacts are every year stronger, [but] loss and damage must be at the top of the agenda for Cop27.

Vanessa Nakate, climate activist from Uganda

“Even if leaders stuck to the promises they have made here in Glasgow, it would not prevent the destruction of communities like mine. Right now, at 1.2C of global warming, drought and flooding are killing people in Uganda. Only immediate, drastic emissions cuts will give us hope of safety, and world leaders have failed to rise to the moment.

“But people are joining our movement. 100,000 people from all different backgrounds came to the streets in Glasgow during Cop and the pressure for change is building.”

Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa

“This summit has been a triumph of diplomacy over real substance. The outcome here reflects a Cop held in the rich world and the outcome contains the priorities of the rich world.

“We are leaving empty-handed [on loss and damage] but morally stronger and hopeful that we can sustain the momentum in the coming year to deliver meaningful support which will allow the vulnerables to deal with the irreversible impacts of climate change created by the polluting world who are failing to take responsibility.”

Alden Meyer, senior associate at the thinktank E3G

“We saw a call here in Glasgow for emergency actions to deal with the existential threat of climate change – and some important initiatives were launched. But whether enough countries raise their 2030 ambition enough to keep 1.5C in reach [when they return in 2022] will be the real test of the success of this Cop26.

“As a lifelong optimist, I see the Glasgow outcome as half-full rather than half-empty. But the atmosphere responds to emissions – not Cop decisions – and much work remains ahead to translate the strong rhetoric here into reality.”

José Gregorio Mirabal Díaz, elected leader of Coica (an umbrella body that includes indigenous leaders from the nine Amazon nations)

“We will always have the hope that we can stop the climate crisis with the support of all, but until now the extractivism development model has deceived the world. This must change now.

“If the solution is to protect nature to avoid climate change, this can only be done with giving land titles for indigenous peoples, allowing us to self-demarcate our territories so that external invasions do not come, whether of oil, gold, mining or any type of extractive exploitation.”

Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International

[On India rewording the language from “phasing out” coal to “phasing down”]

“They changed a word but they can’t change the signal coming out of this Cop, that the era of coal is ending. If you’re a coal company executive, this Cop saw a bad outcome.

“It’s in the interests of all countries, including those who still burn coal, to transition to clean renewable energy, and richer countries need to do more to support the shift. Our future depends on it.”

Rachel Kennerley, climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth

“The road to 1.5C just got harder when these talks should have cleared the way to making it a whole lot easier.

“The UK government cunningly curated announcements throughout this fortnight so that it seemed rapid progress was being made. Here we are though, and the Glasgow get-out clause means that leaders failed to phase out fossil fuels and the richest countries won’t pay historic climate debt.

“With the Cop moment over, countries should break away from the pack in their race for meaningful climate action and let history judge the laggards. The UK, as

a country with huge historical responsibility for emissions, can end support for a mega gas project in Mozambique, pull the plug on the Cambo oilfield, stop the new coalmine in Cumbria and drilling for oil in Surrey. After all, the prime minister talked a big game at the beginning of the fortnight.”

Amanda Mukwashi, CEO of Christian Aid

“We were told that Cop26 was the last best chance to keep 1.5C alive but it’s been placed on life support. Rich nations have kicked the can down the road and with it the promise of the urgent climate action people on the frontline of this crisis need.

“After two weeks of negotiations, the voices of those experiencing the harsh impacts of climate change have largely been excluded and not been heeded. Warm words on loss and damage and finance for developing countries to adapt to climate change are not good enough. Rich nations need to accept their responsibility, put their money where their mouths are, and provide the billions needed. Developing nations have done the least to cause this crisis but have shown commitment to tackling it.”

Lord Nicholas Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change

“Overall, Cop26 has been a major step along the way, but it has still left us far short of the target of limiting warming to 1.5C. That it is why it is so important that countries agree to put forward by the end of next year more ambitious pledges for emissions cuts by 2030. Cop26 embodied a shared understanding of just how dangerous our current path is, and indeed the dangers of warming beyond 1.5C.

“There is so much work to do over the next 12 months ahead of Cop27 in Egypt. The work on finance will be crucial to raising ambition. If we are slow to unlock the finance, we will be slow to raise the ambition.”

COP26 climate deal includes historic reference to fossil

fuels but doesn't meet urgency of the crisis

By [Angela Dewan](#), Amy Cassidy, Ingrid Formanek and [Ivana Kottasová](#), CNN

Updated 2206 GMT (0606 HKT) November 13, 2021

Glasgow, Scotland (CNN) Nearly 200 nations reached a climate agreement on Saturday at COP26 with an [unprecedented reference to the role of fossil fuels](#) in the climate crisis, even after an 11th-hour objection from India that watered down the language around reducing the use of coal.

The COP process has tried and failed for years to include an acknowledgment that the climate crisis has been caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Coal is the [single biggest source of greenhouse gases](#) and phasing it out was a key priority of COP26 President Alok Sharma. But despite that progress, the text doesn't reflect the urgency expressed by international scientists in their ["code red for humanity" climate report published in August](#). Rather, it defers more action on reducing fossil fuel emissions to next year. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported the world needs to roughly halve emissions over the next decade.

Success at Glasgow will ultimately depend on whether countries come to COP27 next year with more ambitious commitments to slash their greenhouse gas emissions.

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Visibly teary after a long two weeks, and following marathon talks that went late into the night Friday, Sharma formalized the agreement with strikes of a gavel. He orally made India's requested amendment, changing the text to a phasing "down" of coal as opposed to a phasing "out."

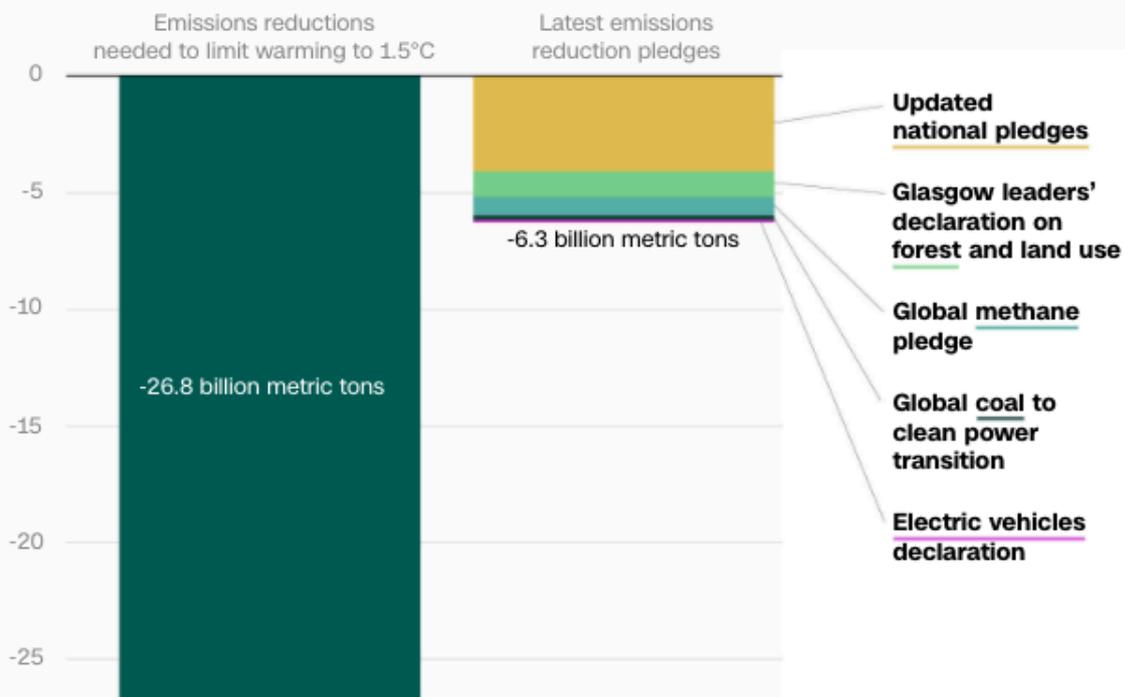
The text also includes language around moving away from fossil fuel subsidies.

Sharma earlier told delegates he was "infinitely grateful" for "keeping 1.5 alive," referring to his overarching goal to contain global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. [Scientists say that limit is critical](#) to avoid worsening impacts of the climate crisis and to steer away from catastrophic climate change.

Glasgow pledges fall short of global-warming goal

The world needs to cut the rate of greenhouse gas emissions by almost 27 billion metric tons a year in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2030, according to projections by the Climate Action Tracker. But current pledges, including those worked out at COP26, get about one-quarter of the way there.

Estimated reductions in annual global greenhouse gases by 2030, compared to current policies, in billion metric tons of CO₂ equivalents.



Note: Chart uses average estimates for current policy level projections and median estimates for emissions leading to 1.5°C of warming.

Source: Climate Action Tracker
Graphic: John Keefe, CNN

Deep divisions remained on key issues on Friday evening and even after the agreement was adopted, several countries expressed their opposition to key parts.

Swiss Environment Minister Simonetta Sommaruga complained that the process to amend language on fossil fuels at the last minute was not transparent enough.

"We don't need to phase down but to phase out coal and fossil fuel subsidies," said Sommaruga, who represents the Environmental Integrity Group, which includes six parties to the UN climate change agency. She added that the EIG chose not to stand in the way of an agreement, but that the group was "disappointed."

"This will not bring us closer to 1.5 but make it more difficult to reach it," Sommaruga said.

There was a sharp divide between developed and developing nations all week over funding to adapt to the climate crisis, but also the idea of setting up a new "loss and damage" fund which would have seen wealthy nations pay for climate crisis impacts in more vulnerable countries.



Seve Paeniu, Tuvalu's climate envoy, intervenes during the session on Saturday to give feedback on a draft agreement.

Seve Paeniu, climate envoy for Tuvalu -- a low-lying atoll nation under threat of sea level rise -- told journalists before the final session that he was heartened by the progress but that words need to be followed by actions.

"There's a lot of commitment to take action. So between now the next COP, countries just need to deliver on those commitments. So there's a lot of work now. I think Glasgow has provided a platform for ambition. The challenge now is for countries to actually deliver on those," he said.

But he added he was disappointed that the loss-and-damage fund wasn't agreed on. A US official told CNN the country was opposed to it, while a source told CNN the EU was also resisting. An EU spokesperson declined to comment.

"First of all, little countries made our voices heard, but in a negotiation room like this, you've got the big countries. So it's a case of take-it-or-leave-it kind of deal," he said. "So there was no other option left for us. We just want to work with this and are hopeful that some outcome would come out of this dialogue."

Nick Mabey, co-founder and chief executive of climate think tank E3G, said that leaders came to Glasgow with some "real progress" in the run-up but understood they needed to do more to meet the moment of the climate crisis.

"By agreeing this emergency package they have responded to rising climate damage with an action plan to keep 1.5C within reach," he told CNN. "But the real task begins now as every country must go home and deliver on their Glasgow promises."

A key achievement of the agreement is an article asking countries to upgrade their ambitions to slash greenhouse gas emissions by the end of 2022, for COP27 in Egypt. Countries were not originally due to enhance their pledges until 2025.

The UN's August report and extreme weather events throughout the Northern Hemisphere this summer both sounded the alarm that climate change was happening faster than even scientists had previously understood.

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But there are many critics of the Glasgow deal, particularly from the developing world over the lack of concrete decisions on loss and damage.

"This outcome is an insult to the millions of people whose lives are being torn apart by the climate crisis," said Teresa Anderson, climate policy coordinator for ActionAid International. Andersen said that "the wealthy countries most responsible for our warming world — particularly the United States — have blocked their ears and hung those most impacted out to dry."