

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

# COP OUT OR LEAN IN? LEADERSHIP TACTICS FOR THE NEW CLIMATE ZEITGEIST

BY **ANDREA BONIME-BLANC**.



The COP26 Globe at the Hydro. Photo by Karwai Tang/ UK Government.

NOVEMBER 18, 2021

*Was it a lot of “blah blah blah” or actual progress? A little bit of both and a lot of muddling through. Whether you think it was progress, atrophy, or worse, a key accomplishment of COP26 is that it represents an inflection point in shutting down the international climate change denial machine.*

## CLIMATE CHANGE ENCAPSULATED:

- *We're at 1.1C above pre-Industrial Revolution temperature levels.*
- *Doing nothing or little, we will reach +1.5 soon—before 2030.*
- *If we're lucky we'll get to +1.8 by 2050 if we do everything right starting now.*
- *Barbados stated that: “2 degrees is a death sentence.”*
- *If we do nothing, we could reach +2.4 by 2050.*
- *If we do nothing, we could reach +5C in 2100.*

## OVERHEARD IN GLASGOW:

- *“History has been made here in Glasgow”*
- *“We've kept 1.5 alive though on life support”*
- *“There's real progress and it's not enough”*
- *“Blah, blah, blah”*

## “BLAH, BLAH, BLAH” OR SOMETHING ELSE?

A full spectrum of actors was present at the COP26 Glasgow meeting—from the most devoted global climate activists (Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate, and others) and the most vulnerable island nations (Tuvalu and Maldives) to the still climate denying/obfuscating industries (and their service providers) and “developing” countries still bent on using coal (India and China).

In total, 197 parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) showed up, haggled, took several steps forward and sideways, and then a couple backwards, and at the eleventh hour of an extra workday approved the shape of a new climate agreement.

So, was it a lot of “blah blah blah” or actual, tangible progress? A little bit of both and a lot of muddling through. It certainly was policy “sausage-making” on a grand, global scale.

Whether you think it was progress, atrophy, or worse, a key accomplishment of COP26 is that it represents a true inflection point in shutting down the international climate change denial machine.

Sure, there will always be climate misinformation and disinformation, but the world is starting to see through that fog because climate change has become too personal and too palpable. Hardly anyone anywhere today can plausibly deny that climate change is affecting them—whether directly through local flooding, fires, drought, or hurricanes, or indirectly, through climate-induced supply chain bottlenecks, agricultural shortages, large migrations, or deforestation.

## **RESULT: “NEITHER TRIUMPH NOR TRAIN-WRECK”**

Rich countries didn’t make clear pledges on new climate financing alternatives or grants to address vulnerable countries’ loss and damage. This needs an urgent dialogue, which was encouraged imminently, with action promised starting in 2025.

There was broad consensus and recognition about the need to address, mitigate, and eliminate fossil fuels for the first time, with coal “elimination” language watered down at the last minute by India.

Methane—the second most common carbon emission—was addressed for the first time as part of a global carbon reduction strategy.

The need to stop deforestation and to engage in reforestation was addressed with over 100 nations joining in a pledge to do so.

An agreement was reached on global carbon trading with a greater focus on rolling out carbon tax regimes, though major weaknesses still need to be addressed.

The U.S. and China surprised the meeting with a climate deal, which seems to be part of a larger attempt at cooling off the heightened tensions between the two countries.

The IFRS Foundation announced a widely welcomed addition to progress on creating standardized climate change metrics through the creation of a new International Sustainability Standards Board (akin to the financial IASB).

The business of climate tech innovation got a huge boost from the COP26 dialogue and promises to be one of the big silver linings of our dark times.

## **THE WAY FORWARD: ACTIONABLE LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS**

Think about a world where there isn’t an annual “Conference of Parties” meeting (COP26, in Glasgow this year, COP27 in Sharm El Sheik, next year, etc.). Think about a world where there isn’t a UN to bring everyone together—governments, inter-governmental organizations, NGOs, academia, business, and media. A world where bad actors run rampant, unrestrained, unregulated, focused only on short-term returns exploiting and extracting natural resources unmitigated and deploying toxic materials, plastics, and other harmful chemicals to satisfy the greed. A world without democracies or international governance, where stakeholders are unable to speak up without fear of retaliation and, worse, where the voices of the

vulnerable and oppressed are not heard and the forces of autocracy, corruption, and greed take over the world's resources, land and products, through brutality, aggression and war.

Whether you agree with everything that Greta says, I think everyone can agree with the second part of one of her concluding tweets:

*“The #COP26 is over. Here’s a brief summary: Blah, blah, blah.*

*But the real work continues outside these halls. And we will never give up, ever.”*

Twitter, November 13, 2021.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill's famous quote about democracy:

*Cop26 is the worst global climate agreement in the world except for all the others.*

In other words: the UN COP is all we've got, so let's make it work.

---

About *Andrea Bonime-Blanc*:

*Dr. Andrea Bonime-Blanc is the Founder and CEO of GEC Risk Advisory, a global ESG and cyber strategist, board member, life-member of the Council on Foreign Relations, international keynote speaker and author of several books and many articles.*

*The views presented in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of any other organization.*