

COP21 - A Pivotal Agreement

Written by Betsan Martin

COP 21 is pivotal for creating a platform for global co-operation on climate. Affirming the target of 2 degrees, 'and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees', is key to keeping stronger ambition in view.

Let us congratulate Small Island Developing States for their remarkable concerted strategy to keep the Parties vigilant about a stronger ambition of 1.5 degrees. Two degrees will not avert the impact of rising oceans on Islands and low lying countries, so for these Parties, survival is paramount. The Marshall Islands, Cook Islands and the Seychelles played poignant roles in showing the significance of the Oceanic regions to the viability of life on the planet. During a Small Island Developing States presentation, an image of the EEZ regions of the SIDS was presented, then overlaid with a map of Europe, which was dwarfed by the immensity of the oceanic regions and the scope of the marine responsibilities of the Small Island States.

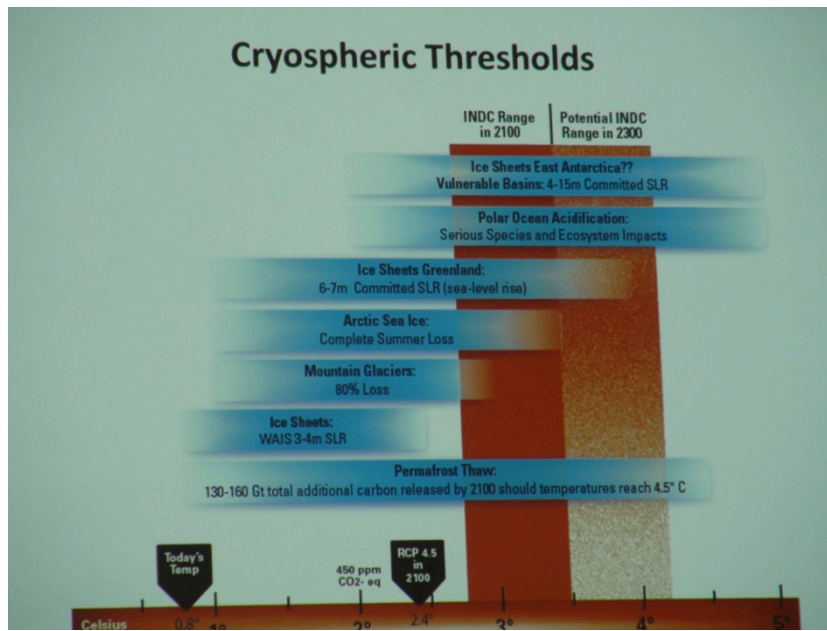
The Seychelles showcased exquisite diplomacy with the innovation of debt exchange. Their negotiator engaged President Hollande in a unique opportunity for success from the COP by offering to make third of



Seychelles negotiator and Cook Islands PM

their EEZ a protected area in exchange for cancelling €30 million of debt. This immediately opened the door to further negotiations for debt exchange for the benefit of environmental protection mechanisms for developed and developing countries.

The Paris meeting offered opportunities to engage in every facet of climate interests. One of the threads that led to a successful Paris agreement was the benefit of several decades of IPCC scientific evidence of the mounting crisis of climate. The science is continually evolving.



A science panel on the cryosphere brought home the compelling prospect of crossing irreversible thresholds, with a foreboding message of an tipping point on climate. The cryosphere includes all the regions of ice: Arctic and Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, mountain glaciers, and permafrost, which are, in turn, impacted by ocean acidification.

The cryosphere is key to the stability of the climate system, and directly linked to sea levels and the impacts of altered thermodynamics and hydrological systems.

Taking permafrost as a case in point of the scale of significance of ice, about one quarter of the northern hemisphere is in permafrost – a surface layer of a few meters which is a mixture of soil, sediment and ice, which remains frozen throughout the year. When permafrost melts, CO₂ and methane are released into the atmosphere. Models predict that 30% of permafrost will be lost if warming is held at 1.5 degrees, and 70% with a 4.5 degrees warming scenario. A 2 degree rise would release 50 Gt of Carbon, out of a total global carbon budget of 275 Gt. The science panel noted ‘once carbon is released from thawed permafrost this carbon loss is irreversible on all but geologic time scales’.

Crucially, the science on the cryosphere is not yet included in the IPCC reports and the scientists in this side event are set for this to inform the next assessment report. The plea in this session is for science and politics to meet – with the observation that science can’t be negotiated.

During the Paris COP there were activities and events all over Paris, included an ‘installation’ of huge blocks of ice at the Pantheon forecourt, melting by the moment. This conveyed the forces at work with wordless eloquence.



Key issues of the 'obligation to protect human rights, the right to health, the rights of Indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, people with disabilities, people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality' are all in the preamble to the Paris agreement text, where they serve as a guide the operational articles. The night before the final text was presented I went to a Human Rights press conference where there was high tension with a prospect of these being removed from the text, and also a plea that rights in the preamble, should also be in the operational articles.

The interests of Indigenous Peoples have additional value to climate transformations. They articulate world views of interdependence and guardianship, wrought from recognizing interdependence with nature. Only now, after the histories of desecration, the significance of these social orders can be recognized for the reshaping of the post industrial era.

Metrics, measures which are consistent and comparable across Parties, and trade are central matters for the post 2016 period, and beyond the scope of this commentary. There consternation over the status of climate agreements vis-à-vis the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Trade in Services agreements currently being negotiated. Are these parallel globally negotiated systems mutually enhancing or does the impetus for trade trump climate accountabilities?

The Alliance group at COP21 worked in the preparatory period on a Declaration of Interdependence and Responsibility – in recognition of the unprecedented scale of human, biospheric and planetary interdependence.

A moment of opportunity was presented to do a synthesis of a Declaration of Interdependence, initiated by Mireille Delmas Marty and Michand Rocard, and the Declaration of Responsibility, as a possible framework for the Paris Agreement. These two documents draw on both initiatives to acknowledge the great historical moment of the climate crisis with the fundamental disruption of established economic systems and the transformations to be engaged to bring human civilizations and development interests into alignment with planetary ecosystems.

The document we prepared, a 'Declaration of Interdependence and Responsibility', did not appear as framework for the preamble. However the text contains references to the 'common concern of humankind', and many references to responsibility in the frame of 'common and differentiated responsibility.

At a global paradigmatic level we see that transformation is needed at philosophical, economic, spiritual, and social spheres. The economy that has fuelled industrial development, largely on the fossil fuels of coal and oil, is founded on theory largely premised on private property, self interest and entitlement, certain interpretations of sovereignty, and accumulation of wealth through resource extraction without attributing an account of environmental debt in the systems of accounting. It is a system that tolerates and perpetuates inequality.

Sovereign State interests and responsibilities shaped during the industrial period have gradually been eroded by the multinational expansion and profit interests which escape the reach of accountabilities to the State. Outsourcing of labour is a case in point. This is not to be retrograde about multinationals, but to seek their engagement in the common agenda of humankind for climate



Freedom to Pollute

accountability. It is significant that the President of the World Bank, Mr Kim, applauded the Paris agreement saying, the Paris agreement represents 'the biggest shift we have ever seen on this global crisis.' The reorientation in the economy needs a parallel shift from individual sovereign state interests towards solidarity sovereignty – as suggested by Professor of Law Mireille Delmas-Marty, Collège de France.

For the first time at a COP meeting, education was brought to the table of the Agreement process. The text acknowledges the role of education, training, public awareness and access to information in the transition to a climate responsible world.

There was an historic moment for mayors at the Paris COP with 'resilience pledges' to dedicate 10% of city budgets to climate resilience and innovation, and a follow up campaign called 'was your Mayor at COP21?', signalling a new level of recognition of the tremendous role to be played by cities and regional authorities. The direct responsibilities of regional councils and territorial authorities over the management of land, waters and natural resources, and their roles in adaptation brings to mind the significance of regional governance to climate futures.

The Paris agreement gives us the platform from which to navigate the task of recalibrating economies, measures, accountabilities and converting to renewables. Working with interdependence, common good and responsibility as organizing principles offers a compass to navigate systems of implementation.

We can celebrate that we have come to the moment of confidence in the new venture.

The COP21 text is itself a treat in the art of engagement and diplomacy, as was the whole of the previous year in regard to France's care in attending to the interests

and outcomes wanted by each member state. The pivotal issue of achieving universal buy-in to the Paris Agreement hung in the balance on many occasions, with a final amendment of a 'shall' protect human rights changing to a 'should', to appease the US's refusal to be bound by the requirements of a 'shall'.

Crucially, the Paris Agreement acknowledges the 'significant gap between the aggregate effect of the Parties mitigation pledges [Intended Nationally Determined Contributions , INDC's] in terms of global annual emissions of green house gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways' to limit temperature rise to 2 degrees, or 1.5 degrees. It is now a matter for enhanced action – to bring 'nationally determined commitments, to come into alignment with a 2 degree / 1.5 target. From my position, this needs to start with one of the most retrograde Parties, with regard to their commitment, New Zealand.



COP22 in Morocco will bring a feature to climate transitions in Africa. As Pierre has mentioned, and we will do so further in our proposals for Alliance activity in 2016 through a reciprocal working relationship with AGAR – Alliance for Governance in Africa

Responsibility grows importance as freedom discovers itself to be unjust. Levinas