

Summary of the event ‘La Lutte Contre les Changements Climatiques : Le Rôle des Nations Unies’

Organised by APNU & UNRIC on 11 February 2020, Residence Palace

By Erik C. Post, with critical inputs from Patrick Crehan and Georgios Kostakos

Speakers:

John Hay (Newsroom Chief Editor, UNFCCC),

Peter Wittoeck (Head BE delegation to EU and multilateral climate change negotiations)

Nicolas van Nuffel (11.11.11 & Spokesperson francophone BE Climate Alliance)

Facilitation, Introduction and Conclusions: **Deborah Seward** (Director, UNRIC)

General:

Six CoR-EU members attended the first of a series of 5 APNU conference-debates on the **role of UN institutions with regard to climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development**. The events are organised in the context of the **UN’s 75th anniversary**. Find an overview of the **next events below**. The presentations and ensuing discussion were strongly **connected to the work of the CoR-EU** the issues raised at the Agora on 4 February.

Unfortunately, the event was **not attended to capacity** and those present seemed **already part of the “converted.”** Patrick recalls that **André Hupin (SG APNU & ex FAO in Rome)** who organised the meeting had **enquired about the possibility of collaborating with the CoR**.

John Hay:

John emphasised that UNFCCC activities are rooted in its **mission** to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” **COP25 did not resolve outstanding issues, nor did it raise ambitions**. This means **COP26 will be critical**, hosted by the UK in partnership with Italy, which is emphasising a **focus on youth and climate education**, in recognition that the **youth constituency is clearly a driver for change**. Over **90 countries** have signed up to a **UN plan** to develop **climate-related educational initiatives**. **114 countries** have **committed to increasing ambitions**, even if **most major economies are not yet part of this effort**, beyond the EU and Canada. Independently we have also seen the emergence of climate related shareholder activism and employee activism. It seems likely that these trends will only grow in the coming years.

Nevertheless, we are **“very clearly not” on track** to stay within relatively safe levels of heating. There is “no point kidding ourselves about that,” which is why **the UN no longer speaks of climate change but rather of a “global climate emergency.”** According to the [UNEP Emissions Gap Report](#), we can still manage to **remain within 1.5 degrees of heating if we cut emissions annually by 7.6%**. Even though, the [International Energy Agency](#) has reported that **in 2019 energy-related CO2 emissions have flattened**, we need to accelerate the positive trends we are seeing, notably in clean technology.

Peter Wittoeck:

Peter discussed the current state of play of multilateral negotiations on climate change in extensive detail than Mr Hay. He set the stage by reflecting back on **COP25**, quoting **UN Secretary-General Guterres** to be ‘**disappointed with the results.**’ Even though, COP25 went past the deadline, most agenda items did not result in conclusions. The **Lima work programme on gender** was extended and reinforced, and the **climate-ocean nexus has been integrated in the UNFCCC framework.** Following COP25, **73 countries** have signed on to a **2050 net zero ambition** and **84 countries** signed on to **increased NDC ambitions.** This is a good start, but **sorely insufficient**, since we are on course for truly “**catastrophic climate upheaval.**”

Difficult issues that remain **unresolved from COP25:** 1. **Long-term financing;** 2. **Balance between adaptation and mitigation;** 3. Membership of the **Adaptation Board;** 4. Whether **Loss & Damage governance** falls under the COP or the Conference of the Parties (CMA) of the Paris Agreement; 5. **Design of the Carbon Market**, including the distribution of proceeds, environmental integrity, ensuring a level-playing field, double accounting as well as the transferability of Kyoto Protocol credits. The **main themes of COP26** will be: **Ambition, IT & Finance, Carbon market, Transparency, Loss & Damage, and Adaptation Finance.**

Nicolas van Nuffel:

Nicolas opened his address with a comment on the previous presentations, remarking that **states need to engage much more forcefully.** Via the [Climate Action Tracker](#), one can see that **only 2 countries’ commitments** are proportionally sufficient to **remain within the 1,5 degree ceiling.** Projections are a **catastrophic 3+ degrees** of heating under **current policies.** He also stressed that climate change is not a singular force that expresses itself in spectacular fashion but mostly manifests as an **additional stress that aggravates existing socio-economic and ecological stresses.** It is also not a problem for which people carry equal responsibility: On average, **the poorest 50% of the global population** is responsible for around **10% of emissions**, while the **10% richest** emits around **50% of emissions.** The core problem is that all aspects of contemporary society contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, **necessitating “systemic changes in the capitalist economic structure beyond technical fixes.”** Even if **Agenda 2030** employs a systemic framework, it **offers insufficient changes** in relation to the scale of the challenges.

The **EU Green Deal** is **remarkable in ambition and language**, tacitly recognises the problem, **yet remains in a limited logic of growth** and **lacks the actual means to implement** its ambitious proposals. Instead, a **new UN Global Green New Deal** is needed that contains:

- A **triple goal** of assuring more shared **prosperity** while respecting **Planetary Boundaries** and radically reducing **inequality;**
- A **socio-ecological pact** for a **just transition**, including unemployment benefits;
- A massive **public investment plan** for the transition;
- An international treaty outlining a **universal global tax and a fiscal UN** that combats fiscal competition and tax evasion, ensures progressive contributions and generates extra public income;
- A **bundle of rights for climate change victims.**

During the discussion that followed, Nicolas also referred to the importance of **training business students as the new managers** about these issues.

In light of this, Patrick suggests two opportunities for the CoR-EU to consider:

First, given the centrality of youth and education in the run-up to the COP26, and recalling that Pierrick and the CoR-EU carried out a successful ad-hoc educational initiative with Herman Van Rompuy, **the CoR-EU could scale up activities in the area of education** through:

- **An action aimed at business schools**, in particular final year students, aiming that all business school graduates have attended at least one module on climate and society.
- **An action aimed at secondary schools**, whose students are an excellent vector for the introduction of new ideas and new thinking.

The second opportunity is related to the difficult issue of how to **address the “double crisis” of climate justice**, linking ecological and social justice issues. With the EU green deal as a step in the right direction and arguably signalling the revision of the European social contract, **the CoR-EU could help in conceiving of this grand ecological-social synthesis**, perhaps complementing the original Limits to Growth, with a “New Limits to Growth,” residing as much in “human” resources as in material and natural resources.

Georgios complements the above with two specific suggestions:

First, a Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS) & CoR-EU **joint event on the lessons from COP25**. FOGGS has already done preparatory work for an event on the lessons from COP25, aiming to increase the effectiveness of COP26 in Glasgow in addition to other moves to address the climate emergency.

Second, strengthen sustainability and social responsibility training through **preparation of a modular course on sustainability and social responsibility for all higher education degrees**, including in business administration. FOGGS is considering potential funding sources to facilitate a large-scale implementation of this. Perhaps CoR-EU would be interested in collaborating on advancing this initiative.

Upcoming APNU events

March 2020:	Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security
April 2020:	Biodiversity Loss and Climate Change Impacts
May 2020:	Climate Change and Energy and Industrial Transition
September 2020:	Climate Justice and Migration