

## Reading One

### What is the COP26 Summit and what might it accomplish?

At this pivotal moment in the global climate crisis, leaders of nations from around the world are meeting in Glasgow, Scotland to discuss how governments should respond. The United Nations-sponsored COP26 (for “Conference of the Parties”) runs from October 31 to November 12, 2021.

Youth activists will also be gathering in Glasgow to demand swift and far-reaching action.

Observers consider this to be the most crucial meeting on climate since world leaders gathered in France in 2015 to create the Paris Agreement, a framework of goals and actions that various nations vowed to take to reduce their carbon emissions and confront the climate crisis.

The 197 countries that signed the Paris Agreement agreed to collectively cut greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature rise, and the climate chaos that is already resulting from that rise, from floods to fires to violent storms.

The commitments they made were informed by scientists, who believe that to limit the worst impacts of global warming, we must keep global temperature rise at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius (about 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). At the Paris meetings, participating countries also agreed to check in on their commitments, and make updates to them as necessary, every five years.

COP26, delayed one year by the Covid-19 pandemic, marks the first five-year “checkpoint” where countries must report on whether they are achieving the goals outlined in Paris. Leaders are under extra pressure to demonstrate that they are doing enough to keep up with their commitments, and some countries have stepped up their efforts in advance of the summit.

Reporting for CNN, digital news producer Ivana Kottasová [outlined](#) some recent decisions made by global leaders to help curb global emissions. Kottasová writes:

This past year of deadly wildfires and floods in many parts of the world has left little doubt that climate change is here now, and is touching all corners of the Earth. UN Secretary General António Guterres on Tuesday appealed to world leaders to act, [warning](#) that humanity was on track for a climate "catastrophe."

But there are signs of hope....

US President Joe Biden announced Tuesday he would [double America's financial commitment](#) to help developing nations confront the climate crisis to \$11.4 billion per year. He will need Congress' approval to appropriate those funds.

It's a U-turn from the years under the previous US administration, when then-President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement.

Chinese President Xi Jinping also made a big announcement Tuesday, saying his country will [not build any new coal-fired power projects](#) abroad. Though China itself remains the world's largest

consumer of coal, the announcement effectively ends a long history of China bankrolling coal plants in places like Africa, eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/21/politics/biden-climate-change-global-funding/index.html>

While these statements from the US and China are positive developments, the overall progress made by nations to date in cutting their carbon emissions has been far from adequate.

The website [Climate Action Tracker](#) indicates that, among the 36 countries that have reported their progress toward Paris Agreement goals, only Gambia has currently met its obligations under the treaty. Most other nations have fallen far short of their commitments, including the world's largest polluters, including China, the US, India, and Russia.

As COP26 approaches, many critics are concerned that the countries negotiating will not do enough to keep global warming below the critical level needed to prevent catastrophic climate change.

As Fiona Harvey, Environment correspondent for The Guardian explains, COP26 is a good opportunity to take stock of global progress on combating climate change. Harvey [writes](#):

There has been important progress on COP26 in the last six months. An increasing number of countries, including [China](#), the EU and the US, have set targets to reach net zero emissions around mid-century. Many have also set targets on emissions for 2030, including the UK, the EU and the US....

One of the big achievements of the UK presidency is to keep the COP26 talks focused on limiting global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures.... Setting a strong target for the summit is just one step, however: ensuring a concrete program of action comes out of COP26 must be the main goal. Veterans of the UN talks warn that several key elements are still missing....

National plans on emissions cuts, called [nationally determined contributions](#) or NDCs, are the bedrock of the Paris climate agreement. But the [plans submitted so far to the UN](#) would mean temperatures rising by more than 2C. China, the world's biggest emitter, has [yet to submit an NDC](#)....

Another big issue for COP26 is funding. Developing countries were promised they would receive \$100 billion a year by 2020 in climate finance, to help them cut emissions and cope with the impacts of climate breakdown. That [target has not yet been met](#), and failing to meet it is eroding trust among developing countries.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/23/protesters-urge-boris-johnson-to-take-cop26-climate-talks-seriously>

Given these concerns, environmental organizations and activists, including many young people, are organizing in advance of COP26, demanding decisive action to avert a climate catastrophe.

### **For Discussion:**

1. How much of the material in this reading was new to you, and how much was already familiar? Do you have any questions about what you read?
  2. What struck you most about the reading?
  3. What is the significance of the COP26 Summit? What is the meeting meant to accomplish?
  4. Scientists believe to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we must limit global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius. What progress has been made toward this goal, and in what ways has international action been inadequate?
  5. The Global Climate Tracker shows that the world's most developed nations are responsible for the great majority of historic carbon emissions. And yet, poorer countries in the global South are likely to experience many of the worst impacts of global warming. How do you think global leaders should address this imbalance?
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## **Reading Two**

### **How Young People are Preparing to Be Heard**

In advance of COP26, young people around the world are organizing to push world leaders to take bold action. These activists are using protests in the streets as well as meetings of their own.

"Everyone is talking about making promises, but nobody keeps their promise. We want more action," explained Farzana Faruk Jhumu, 22, a youth climate activist in Dhaka, Bangladesh. "We want the work, not just the promises."

Demonstrations such as school strikes and protests that shut down city transit have intensified in the run-up to the summit. The [Fridays For Future](#) student movement (inspired by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg) organized a global school strike on September 24. According to Reuters, demonstrations were planned in more than 1,500 locations. The protests began in Asia with small-scale demonstrations in the Philippines and Bangladesh, and spread throughout the day to European cities including Warsaw, Turin, and Berlin.

Activists have noted the power of being in person with one another after the long periods of lockdown and isolation prompted by the Covid pandemic. Reporters Karla Adam and Rick Noack [interviewed](#) several young activists for The Washington Post on September 24, 2021. Adam and Noack wrote:

Many protesters in different parts of the world commented on the importance of being able to attend demonstrations in person again.

Patricia Kombo, a 25-year-old media analyst from Nairobi, said that a group of about 40 people gathered in a local park and tagged Kenya's Ministry of Environment in their social media posts from the rally. They were then invited to the ministry's office, she said, where they met with their delegates for COP26. "It was great to actually talk to them," she said, adding that protesting in public still offers "a lot of visibility."

Sommer Ackerman, a 24-year-old in Helsinki, was among the 150 or so who gathered outside of Finland's Parliament to demand urgent action, with a focus on local issues such as forestry. "We are sick and tired of empty promises," she said. "It's not good enough to set targets for 10 or 20 years out; the world will be even more on fire than it is now."

She said that during the pandemic, activists in Finland "always tried to find a way," and relied on social media, tweet storms and writing messages around the city with chalk.

Dylan Hamilton, a 17-year-old marching through the streets of Glasgow, said that since the last big march before the pandemic, climate concerns have gained more traction in political circles. But he said he was unconvinced that action would match the rhetoric.

"The government's messaging has gotten better, but emissions are still going up," he said. "We want them to go down, and will keep marching until they do."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/09/24/fridays-future-greta-climate-protests/>

In addition to street protests, young people are also participating in gatherings of their own designed to insert the voice of young people into the official process. The Conference of Youth, which will take place from October 28 to October 31, directly before the COP26 summit, will bring together youth activists from more than 140 countries to draft a policy proposal reflecting views of rising generations.

In late September, youth climate activists between the ages of 15 and 29 from 180 countries gathered in Milan, Italy, for a three-day Youth4Climate summit, to discuss ideas, propose concrete actions, and develop a declaration to present to politicians at COP26.

While such meetings create important opportunities for young people to speak out, leading youth activists have insisted that they will not be patronized by politicians who refuse to take their concerns seriously. At the Milan conference, Vanessa Nakate, a 24-year old activist from Uganda, and Greta Thunberg, the 18-year-old Swedish student whose personal school strike propelled the Fridays for Future movement, criticized world leaders for failing to live up to their responsibilities. An AP News report [quoted](#) statements by Thunberg and Nakate:

"They invite cherry-picked young people to pretend they are listening to us," Thunberg said. "But they are not. They are clearly not listening to us. Just look at the numbers. Emissions are still rising. The science doesn't lie."...

Nakate, a 24-year-old activist from Uganda, said pledges of 100 billion euros (\$117 billion) a year to help countries particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change have not materialized, even as wildfires in California and Greece and floods in Germany and Belgium show that "loss and damage is now possible everywhere."

“In fact, funds were promised by 2020, and we are still waiting,” she said. “No more empty conferences. It’s time to show us the money. It’s time, it’s time, it’s time.”

Nakate dramatically underlined how climate change is affecting Africa, “which is ironic given that Africa is the lowest emitter of CO2 emissions of any continent except Antarctica.”

Just last week, she said she saw police taking away a body that had been washed away by violent storms in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, while others searched for more victims. Her mother told her that one man dragged off by the water had been trying to protect the goods he was selling.

Nakate collapsed in tears after her emotional speech, getting comfort from Thunberg, who followed her to the podium...

[Thunberg] has clearly heard enough from leaders, whom she said have been talking for 30 years while half of all carbon emissions have occurred since 1990, one-third since 2005.

“This is all we hear from our so-called leaders: words. Words that sound great but so far have led to no action. Our hopes and dreams drown in their empty words and promises. Of course we need constructive dialogue, but they have now had 30 years of blah, blah blah. And where has this led us?” she said.

<https://apnews.com/article/climate-change-business-science-summits-africa-aa79d1c9b8e056c3eea04bd8d93381b2>

The message from young activists is clear: today’s politicians will not see the full impact of climate change in their lifetimes. It is young people who will be most affected – and their demands must be addressed.

**For Discussion:**

1. How much of the material in this reading was new to you, and how much was already familiar? Do you have any questions about what you read?
2. Youth-based environmental groups are escalating protest efforts in advance of the COP26 summit. Meanwhile, some activists are also participating in formal talks to draft proposals for leaders at the summit. What do you think are the pros and cons of each of these approaches? Are both of them worthwhile? Explain your position.
3. Activists Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg expressed concerns that politicians are not taking young people seriously. What did you think of their statements?
4. If you were given the opportunity to attend the Conference of Youth prior to the COP26 summit, what message or ideas would you bring?