

The Climate Action Summit Fiasco

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No one could fail to be touched by the fear (for the future) and urgency in Greta Thunberg's young voice as she broke down while addressing world leaders on the last day of the UN Climate Summit. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Special Report on the oceans showed a worse prognosis, the patient is clearly worse.

Sad to say, despite all Greta's efforts, nothing happened — no commitment by any of the major polluters. Trump sauntered by before going on to mock her in his address — a grown man bullying a 16-year old girl!

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres wanted a commitment to the higher ambition of limiting global warming to 1.5C instead of 2C. He got excuses, and of course no promise of net zero by 2050 from any major polluter. Net zero implies balancing carbon emissions with carbon removal. He also wanted a commitment to no new coal plants beyond 2020. Instead China, India and Turkey will be shamelessly expanding coal power well beyond that date.

China wanted the developed nations to take the lead due to their long history of emissions and consequent responsibility. It refused to make concrete commitments unless the US and EU did so. The EU blames Poland, a coal exporter; the US has Mr. Trump. In the end none of the major polluters (China, India, EU, US) did although 80 other countries pledged to reach net zero by 2050.

Included in the 80 who pledged were 47 least developed countries (LDCs) although they are the least responsible for the emissions. They have also been victimized by past colonialism, slavery, and for many the IMF's notorious structural adjustment programs.

The climate data from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) presented at the summit is sobering: Global temperatures are up 1.1C since 1850 of which a 0.2C (or near 20 percent) rise occurred from 2011 to 2015. The five-year period from 2014 to 2019 is the hottest on record while carbon emissions over the same period are up 20 percent from the previous five years. Sea level rise since 2014 has averaged 5mm annually while the 10-year average up to 2016 was only 4mm.

One consequence of the sea level rise and warmer temperatures has been the human catastrophe from the unprecedented storms in Mozambique and the Bahamas recently.

Ninety percent of the excess heat from climate change is absorbed by water, and the WMO recorded the highest ocean heat content on record in 2018. It poses a special danger for the Greenland ice sheet and the Arctic. New research (July 2019) also finds melt *under* the water surface from glaciers reaching the sea and icebergs is ['orders of magnitude' greater than previously believed](#). It threatens a dramatic sea level rise by the end of the century.

Professor Brian Hoskins, a meteorologist from Imperial College London warns, “Climate change due to us is accelerating and on a very dangerous course,” adding “We should listen to the loud cry from the school children ...” No one is listening Professor, despite human-induced warming exacerbating storms, wildfires, heatwaves, coastal flooding, etc. No, not a single major polluter stood up to make a commitment. The EU blames Poland which relies on coal exports and has veto power over any EU-wide policy; the US, Brazil and Saudi Arabia scrupulously avoided the event as if it were a plague.

The IPCC officially adopted its report on oceans and the cryosphere (those portions of Earth’s surface where water is in solid form, including sea ice, lake ice, river ice, snow cover, glaciers, ice caps, ice sheets, and frozen ground). Compiled by 100 scientists, it forecasts a catastrophic rise in sea levels, coastal flooding and worsening disasters. It moved none of the implacables — not even the terrifying fact that Greenland’s ice sheet alone can raise sea levels by 20 feet. All of it was ignored and instead of a breakthrough, the IPCC was left touting its evidence and reports at the end of the summit.

To summarize, nothing happened. The climate action summit became a climate inaction summit, and the climate can was kicked down the road to Chile for the next IPCC meeting in December.

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