



COP 26 Was a Wake-up Call Heard Around the World

COP 26 will be remembered as the climate alarm that was heard all across the world. Lone voices in the wilderness have been warning about the harm that humans have been doing to our planet for four decades and more. In a recent television interview, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, President Abdullah Shahid of the Maldives, reminded us that it was that long ago that his country, and other small island states, began to sound a warning about changes in the environment of our planet that threatened their very existence. At that time, few people outside of the scientific community took notice.

In the decades that followed, issues of climate change, environmental degradation, species extinction and the consequences of global warming were highlighted in many ways. They included the report of a Nobel-Prize-winning team of scientific experts from around the world, initiatives of the Commonwealth Secretariat, a dramatic feature film by a former US Vice-President, and numerous conferences and meetings, culminating in the Paris Accord of 2016. Full recognition of the implications of current lifestyles and energy use worldwide has been a slow process, bedevilled by scepticism and naysaying. Until COP 26.

The one message that was heard around the world, in all reports from COP 26, was that civilisation everywhere in the world is threatened by current and past human action. Unless humanity manages to change course urgently, the dire consequences of climate change may well overwhelm human civilisation before the end of our century. It is not surprising that young people are panicked by this news, because the terrible fate that looms will probably appear within their lifetimes.

The importance of this global alarm should not be underestimated. It is an essential global awakening, the implications of which will hopefully be recognized in every nation and every society on the planet. Only when all nations and every citizen contemplates our common fate, as things now stand, will there be the international motivation to organise for meaningful change. That is how the world builds on the consciousness that has come out of COP 26.

Humanity's only hope is the creation of a truly international political sentiment and determination to arrest and reverse our civilisation's race towards the climate disaster. As everyone realises, the pledges made at COP 26 do not begin to address the problem, and, like previous undertakings, they are unlikely to be fulfilled in total. That is a result of political consciousness and political organisation that frustrates the will to joint action that produces results to benefit all of humanity. Truly global initiatives of a scale that only rich and large, well endowed countries can afford are what is required. Policies and projects must be motivated, designed and implemented in a way that benefits all of mankind, and not just the citizens of any one nation. At the moment, this seems too much to ask, given a worldwide resurgence in nationalism. Our next challenge is to confront this dilemma, all across the globe: nationalism stands squarely in the way of the urgent actions that are essential to reverse the catastrophic warming of our planet and the befouling of our environment. The challenge facing humanity is to convert our new-found consciousness of the imminence of climate disaster into a conscience that propels political action that is motivated by a concern for our fellow humans, of whatever nationality.