

Speaking at the opening of The **United Nations Climate Change Conference**, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that with climate change impacts becoming ever more dangerous and apparent, COP25 must convey to the world a firm determination to change course. He said, “We must finally demonstrate that we are serious in our commitment to stop the war against nature – that we have the political will to reach carbon neutrality by 2050,” A major problem at the COP was the presence and power of big business and industry. The fossil fuel industry spent millions on sponsorships and sent lobbyists to Madrid to delay progress, protect profit, and push business-friendly false solutions. Yet, **new hope** lies with the youth, women, and indigenous peoples on the front lines of climate change.



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Only a mediocre outcome at the Climate Conference in Madrid as Major Problems were Kicked Down the Road

Fr. Sean McDonagh, SSC

Expectations for COP 25 in Madrid were high for several reasons. The slogan for that COP was ‘Time for Action’. Furthermore, the recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) carried a bleak warning that, unless we rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, our lands, our seas and every creature, including humans will suffer greatly. It was thought that the weekly climate-strikes by young people right around the world would have put pressure on the delegates to agree to lower greenhouse gas emissions in line with what was demanded by science.

COP 25 was scheduled to take place in Santiago in Chile. However, because of serious unrest and violence in Chile in October 2019, Sebastian Pinera, Chile’s president, announced that the country would not host COP25. Given the importance of COP 25, the acting Spanish government offered Madrid as an alternative to Santiago. The UN accepted the offer almost immediately even though there was less than a month to prepare for this very important meeting on climate change. Still the president of COP 25, Carolina Schmidt and chairpersons of the various committees were all Chilean. To add to the Chilean flavour of the meeting, the main meeting rooms were called after Chilean rivers and other landscape features.

At one of the meetings during COP 25, Greta Thunberg denounced as hollow and deceptive the pledges of wealthy countries and businesses to curb climate change calling it “clever accounting and creative PR.” She called on people to listen to what the science is now saying about how accelerating climate shocks will cause severe weather events and prolonged droughts and floods all over the world.

The European Union endorsed a new plan to seriously reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, provide a just transition of 100 billion euro to help countries like Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to wean themselves off fossil fuels. The goal of the plan is to make Europe climate neutral by

2050. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, told the press that the goal was to “reconcile our economy with the planet … to make it work for all our people.”

Unfortunately, on December 13th, 2019, the paper put forward by the Chilean presidency was considered unacceptable because it lacked a call for all countries to enhance their ambitions and lower their greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Paris agreement in 2015 countries were to keep the global average temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. Since then, scientists have shifted the “safe” limits to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Aiden Meyer, from the Union of Concern Scientists said that the polarization which took place at the 2019 Madrid climate conference was unprecedent since climate negotiations began in 1991. Tina Stege, the Marshall Islands climate envoy, with tears in her eyes said that “it appears we are going backwards on the issue of ambition when we should be calling for a quantum leap in the other direction.” Ministers from countries which are calling for higher ambition targets, say that countries which are blocking a consensus such as the United States, Australia and Saudi Arabia should be challenged for their irresponsible and immoral behaviour.

The United States, the largest per-capita emitter of greenhouse gases, is leaving the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2020. It was accused of undermining the negotiations in Madrid. The US has continued to block the world’s efforts to help people whose lives have been adversely affected or even destroyed by climate change.

Another failure at COP 25 it that, because of a lack of consensus among delegates it was decided to kick many of the major decisions about finance and carbon markets down the road to COP 26 which will meet in Glasgow in December 2020. Will a Boris Johnson conservative, populist government be up to the task? If it isn’t the consequences could be horrendous for all species and our planet.