

Report of UNFCCC climate summit COP 21-CMP 11, 30 November - 12 December 2015, Paris, France

for the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Netherlands

(translation of the original text in Dutch)

Preface

I have tried to use normal English as much as possible. However some technical terms and abbreviations are unavoidable. See glossary below.

Ecumenical movement

The international ecumenical delegation was larger than ever, with over 100 persons. The delegation had different segments: VIPs (church leaders, government delegates), people from ACT-Alliance, LWF and WCC. The participation from other faith groups had grown, forming the Multi-Faith Group. WCC is part of this group, see www.ourvoices.net.

A working team of approx. 40 people was following the actual negotiations and side events, and organized stunts and other activities. The number of young people (under 45) in the team has grown and so has professionalism. Esp. the ACT people brought a lot of expertise and (lobby) skills. Because of this, and thanks to the fact that some government delegates were members of the working team, the team as a whole was kept well informed at all times about the situation inside the negotiations. The work was divided along the different subjects in the negotiations and according to ones preferences. Tasks were divided at daily morning briefings; briefings were sometimes held during the day and there was a debriefing every evening. Communication within the team was very efficient, thanks to group-emails. Because of that it was possible to follow the events quite well even when not actually being there. In that sense I could follow the first week and start work the second week fully prepared. (I was there 6-12 Dec.)

Remarkable was the broad attention for our most important campaign issue: the call for climate justice. Until recently this position was either being ignored or banned to side events. But in the meantime many countries, esp. LDC, SIDS and some LMDC, have aligned with it. The same is true for many environmental organizations which in the past focused mainly on the technical aspects of the climate problem. The UNFCCC Secretariat has expressed gratitude to the ecumenical movement and other faith groups for putting the issue of climate justice on the agenda. Also the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* has helped a lot by pointing out that the climate challenge is in essence a moral and ethical problem. As a result the ecumenical activities received a lot of media attention with articles by AP, in Newsweek, All Africa, Buenos Aires Herald, Der Spiegel, The Guardian, Times Daily and many other magazines and websites, radio- and tv-reports all over the world.

COP 21

Logistics and safety

Logistically the summit was well organized. There were fast bus shuttles from nearby train stations, the completion of the accreditation process went smoothly and there were normal safety controls within the congress venue (Le Bourget, North of Paris). There were some military police outside the

perimeter, but otherwise security measures were normal, with the usual UN-police and -security personnel. I quickly lost any thought of terrorist attacks.

Negotiations

Upfront it was clear that it was 'now or never', which put enormous pressure on the negotiations. Therefore the French COP 21 Presidency, headed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius, had asked the Heads of State to inspire the conference at its very beginning. This resulted in two days of ardent speeches, but also offered a glimpse of the conflicts and problems that would arise in the days ahead. The most difficult one was perhaps the warning by President Obama (USA) that legally binding text on the subjects of mitigation and finance would not be feasible, since the Congress would never approve such text.

The negotiations started after these first two days. Most of the actual 'hard' talks as usual took place in bilateral or larger group settings and are closed to observers (CSO, including the ecumenical team, have the observer status within the UN system). But in most cases information is being leaked by delegates who are either member of, or sympathize with teams such as ours. So the actual 'scene' is like a pressure cooker with ever-changing information and/or rumours that need to be verified at all times. In the course of week one it became clear that it would not be easy to reach a meaningful agreement.

In the beginning of the second week the Presidency presented a first draft agreement. During the discussions in plenary (open to observers) it became clear that groups of countries opposed each other sharply. The most poignant differences:

> The 'old' rich countries (USA, EU, Japan etc.) will approve rapid mitigation only if other less rich or upcoming economies will take part in these efforts, esp. China and India. The same conditionality applies to financial affirmations.

> LMDC on the other hand emphasized over and over again the basic principle in the UNFCCC (the Convention): common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR). In short this means that the rich countries should start mitigation whereas the poorer would still use fossil energies for some time to come in order to enhance their economic development. Also the rich countries should help the poorer with adaptation and with transfer of clean technologies (tech transfer). The rationale behind this is that the industrialized countries have caused and are causing the climate problem in the first place, they affect the environment of the poorer countries and take away their developing space (keeping in mind that clean technologies are often not available and/or too expensive).

> SIDS were demanding max. global warming of 1,5oC instead of 2oC. Remarkably during the second week this stance gained support. According to the most recent scientific reports 1,5oC is a safer boundary than 2oC.

> The inclusion of text on Loss and Damage: a provision on loss and damage caused by climate change, suffered in the past or foreseen in the future that is irreversible and can't be repaired. The LDC and SIDS demanded solid text on compensation and liability, but this was a no-go area for the USA. The latter made sure that no claim of this sort could ever be made, by adding text to this effect.

> Finance: the poorer countries demanded concrete text on financial support, following the promise of the Copenhagen summit in 2009 (\$ 100 bn annually in the Green Climate Fund). The effort was to make this a binding agreement including a provision for gradual scaling up of this amount. This was a harsh fight.

> Ambition and ratcheting up: the need to become more ambitious continuously, even when mitigation efforts have already started. The INDCs, issued by some 185 countries previous to this COP, are not binding but voluntary in nature. In order to reach the mitigation goals necessary to slow down global warming, these goals need to be adapted progressively, e.g. using a 'ratcheting' mechanism so that all countries remain on board and scale up their efforts.

> MRV (measuring, reporting, verification): a consented global mechanism is necessary to keep track of and maintain progress. Esp. for China this is a difficult topic since it does not want 'peeping toms'.

Analysis

Of course the above is only a superficial impression, merely outlining the fundamental differences in position and insight. The 'old' rich countries are pragmatic and state that all countries need to be involved in mitigation efforts, esp. the upcoming economies, in order to hold global warming within critical boundaries. At the same time they reject their historic responsibility for the CO₂-problem. They are very reluctant to make binding financial promises and rather keep those on a voluntary basis. The overall aim is to execute climate policies – including aid and development assistance – via the corporate world.

The poor nations on the other hand continue to emphasize the historic responsibility of the rich nations, since it is they that initially caused global warming. Therefore they demand compensation payment, financial support for adaptation (i.e. the necessary adjustments to already existing climate change), space for economic growth using fossil energy if necessary, as well as access to cheap clean energy and technology. Otherwise there won't be any possibility for economic growth for these countries. In short, the poor(er) nations focus mostly on financial support and don't want to commit to binding mitigation targets.

The new economies (China, India, Brazil a.o.) try to position themselves in between in order to benefit from both sides. They present themselves as developing countries, demanding space for development using fossil energies. At the same time they acknowledge that starting mitigation efforts is unavoidable, since they are major polluters (China = no. 1, USA = no. 2, India = no. 3). The immense smog-problem in Beijing at the time of the COP certainly helped a bit.

Then there are countries with special circumstances. Firstly the SIDS, of which some islands are already disappearing as a result of sea level rise. Secondly countries with large (rain) forests which seek to raise awareness of the pivotal function of forests as sinks, and therefore emphasize the need of protection via REDD+. Thirdly the oil-producing countries such as OPEC that try to block mitigation agreements as much as possible. Thanks to the fact that solar energy is getting cheaper than fossil (oil) energy, and thanks to the input of CSO a.o., their efforts did not reach far this time.

Until Wednesday the second week the negotiations seemed to be stuck. Work already continued by night. The French Presidency had asked some ten ministers from various countries to act as aids to the President. They moderated a great number of bilateral meetings and prepared new draft text. Their work led to a second draft Agreement in the course of the second week. This approach offered space for everyone's input and created goodwill among delegations, but also caused a lot of delay. Not Friday at 6 pm but Saturday around 8 pm (12 December) the final draft Agreement was finally adopted. A stunt by the EU and USA may have helped to achieve agreement. On the night of Wednesday on Thursday a 'coalition of ambition' was launched and made public by the world press, consisting of EU/USA and ACP (countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific), in total some

110 countries. This 'stunt' functioned as a wake-up call and urged esp. China and India to enhance their willingness to look for common ground and compromise.

Essentially it is no small miracle that the Agreement pulled off - the world owes the French Presidency and its masterful diplomacy a great deal.

Assessment of the results

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is legally binding, but many promises are optional or voluntary. The ecumenical team's analysis:

- > The fact that there finally is a worldwide agreement is positive. An important international success.
- > Positive is the goal to limit global warming to 2oC, whilst striving for 1,5oC. The SIDS have had to compromise, but this result is second best.
- > There is clear text on Loss and Damage anchoring the WIM – a positive achievement. Even though compensation and liability claims are made impossible (USA). This is a victory for LDCs and SIDS which can count on increased aid assistance and financial support for insurances (a promise made by the G7).
- > Less positive: there are no concrete mitigation targets in the text (with figures and time-paths). All efforts remain voluntary and are streamed through the INDCs. Estimates are that this approach will not deliver enough results. Positive though is that the plans will be reviewed every 5 years and adjusted if necessary: a decrease in ambition is not allowed. Also positive is that the latest scientific data will be used.
- > Less positive: no concrete financial promises, other than the one already made in Copenhagen in 2009 (i.e. the Green Climate Fund in which \$ 100 bn annually will be stored as of 2020, to be used for both mitigation and adaptation projects). Already now it is clear that this will not nearly be enough. On the other hand there is a broad call for de-investment from fossil energies and re-investment in low-carbon development. But this is again a voluntary effort.
- > Positive/negative: in principle a good start has been made to reach more transparency (MRV) in the future, but the text is still too vague. This issue needs to be solved before 2020.
- > Negative: aviation and shipping ('bunkers') has been lost in the text, although it was mentioned in the first draft. Apparently it has been subject to a trade-off. This issue needs to be dealt with in future negotiations.

In short the ecumenical delegation is moderately satisfied with the Paris Agreement and sees it as an important first step to limit global warming. Positive is the clear signal to the international corporate world: the end of the fossil era has begun. At the same time the team's work (and that of other CSO) needs to continue and step up: this is only the beginning.

Other results

Alongside the Paris Agreement there were a few other congenial announcements:

- > Africa launches the African Renewable Energy Initiative producing 300 GW in 2030, sponsored by the G7 with \$ 10 bn;
- > Twenty USA-states will double their R&D investments in renewable energy, worth \$ 5 bn extra per year;
- > Breakthrough Energy Coalition: 28 billionaires will venture high-risk capital for R&D in energy efficiency and storage, transport, industrial processes and agriculture;

> Global Solar Alliance: an alliance of 120 mostly tropical countries lead by India, plus some European countries including France, will invest \$ 400 mn in solar energy.

And the rest...

During COP 21 as usual enormous halls were filled with booths from hundreds of CSO, including ACT-Alliance. Also there were many informative side events, presentations, stunts and campaigns. And last but not least there were a number of ecumenical and multi-faith gatherings and services. To name a few:

Ecumenical

November 28

> Multi-faith gathering in the basilica in St. Denis. Here the 1.8 million signatures collected by the different climate pilgrimages (on foot or bicycle, in Africa) were handed to UNFCCC-secretary Christiana Figueres. There was a lot of media attention, see a.o.:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73K0Z-0hJxo>. Also several ecumenical leaders had been blogging about the pilgrimages.

November 29

> Strategy meeting by the working team

November 30

> Stunt by ACT: Don't gamble with the future of our planet

> Side Event: Faith-based Engagement in the Climate Crisis, participation by WCC

December 1

> Fast for the Climate: monthly fasting by WCC, this time as a multi-religious lunch-stunt within COP 21. Participation by several ecumenical leaders, lots of media attention.

December 3

> Ecumenical service in the Nôtre Dame, many ecumenical leaders present. Unfortunately the 'Green' Patriarch Bartholomew could not attend and sent a representative. See

<http://www.ktotv.com/video/00100808/celebration-oecumenique>

> Side Event on Loss and Damage, ACT Alliance, Brot für die Welt, in cooperation with UNU and governments of Germany, Fiji and Gambia.

> Stunt by ACT: photo wall with background ACT for Climate

December 4

> Stunt: Loss and Damage protest with acting and photos of disasters, ACT Alliance and Christian Aid

> Ecumenical Youth Climate Day, young members of delegations invited (WCC)

December 5

> Side Event: CSO analysis of low-carbon development; Brot für die Welt, WWF, GermanWatch a.o.

December 6

> Strategy meeting by working team

> Multi-faith workshop on religion and climate change, American Cathedral

December 7

> Stunt by ACT: choose 1.5oC or 2oC by walking across a green or red carpet

> Side Event: humans, human rights and justice; CIDSE, Caritas, Misereor, FoEI a.o.

> Workshop on religion and climate change by Tearfund and the Christian Reformed Church in North-America; American Cathedral

December 8

- > Stunt by ACT: the importance of gender balance in text under negotiation – link with human rights, an important focus of WCCs climate work
- > Speech by WCC-SG Dr. Rev Olav Fykse Tveit in plenary COP 21
- > United Protestant Church in France announces full divestment from fossil energy
- > Stunt: Pan African Cycling Caravan demands climate justice
- > Side Event: Gender Justice for Climate Justice, participation WCC climate group members
- > Celebration of Our Voices, GreenFaith, WCC and other religious communities; American Cathedral
December 9

- > Stunt ACT a.o.: Bringing the Fasters' Voices to Paris. Twelve fasters arrive at the premises; the Fast for the Climate Campaign is linked to Loss and Damage
- > Stunt ACT: choose 1.5oC or 2oC by walking across a green or red carpet
- > Side Event: impact of climate change on children; OECD, Unicef and WCC
- > Sit-in by CSO for 1.5oC, participation by ecumenical team
December 10

- > Reps of religious communities hand the 1.8 million signatures over to French president Hollande in the presidential palace. Lots of media attention, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIPc4QTRjag> and <http://actclimate.org/right-now/>
- > Stunt ACT: more climate finance is needed – fake money in a piggy bank
December 11
- > Stunt ACT: don't gamble with the future of the poor, more ambition is needed

Daily

ACT Alliance newsletter with the most important topics and developments; announcements and reviews. Many (video)blogs, short interviews, twitter, videos on YouTube etc.

Side Events and press conferences

December 4

Side Event: dialogue between **Al Gore and CSO** on the role of CSO in the climate negotiations and in the wider process addressing climate change.

December 8

Presentation by **Al Gore** on weather-related disasters over the last ten years, with photos and film (video) footage. Striking: in the USA alone there were 7 extreme weather events, hitherto classified as 'once in a thousand years' events. India and Pakistan many thousands died of extreme heat, 2015 was the hottest year on record. Worldwide many people died or fled their homes, and there was a lot of material damage caused by droughts, storms and floods, also on coast-lines such as in West Africa. Global warming and the reaction of weather systems is happening faster than expected, even by climate scientists. On a positive note: the year 2015 will probably be the 'turning point' - global CO₂- emissions equaled those of 2014 and are expected to fall as of this year. In 2013 global investment in renewable energy matches that in fossil energy; the graphs are diverging into opposite directions since then. The potential capacity of wind- and solar energy is large enough for global energy need. In September Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, stated that the global economy is at risk, unless the use of fossil energy is stopped a.s.a.p. Also other top bankers are warning for a 'carbon bubble'. The divestment movement is growing fast. China announced the launch of an emission trading scheme on September 25, 2017, that will apply to six sectors.

December 8

Press conference **Holy See**: a call to all nations to show solidarity following the principles of CBDR. The earth should be inherited by future generations as a garden, not as a wilderness. To achieve that de-carbonization by 2050 is necessary, in other words rapid divestment from fossil energy. Aid to the poor is imperative, esp. access to clean energy a.s.a.p. The Pope is worried about the Amazon; a Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network has been set up.

December 10

Side Event **International Organisation for Migration** with a.o. Jan Egeland. Every second someone flees his/her home because of an extreme weather situation. The global number of climate-related displaced persons (i.e. refugees within a country as well as into another country) is twice the number of war- and violence refugees. Of those 95% stays in or goes to a developing country. Much more investment is needed in prevention and adaptation. In 2045 there will be 9 bn people, for a large part living in climate-sensitive areas in poor countries (e.g. Bangladesh). Most countries are not or ill prepared for the huge refugee issue. Migration and cultural convergence will be the megatrend in the 21st century. We need a new, positive narrative; the USA could serve as a model.

December 10

Side Event **Wuppertal Institut** (G), universities of Stockholm, Linköping (S), Free University, Ecofys (NL) and E5 (=European Business Council for Sustainable Energy):

The UNFCCC process is too slow because of the consensus principle and it is not delivering concrete measures such as the phasing out of fossil subsidies. But such measures are sorely needed. Maybe a group of countries taking the lead in de-carbonization would help. Society at large and the corporate world need to be part of the process in a systematic way, not just via NAZCA but also in the UNFCCC-process itself. A Swedish research project shows that there is a lot of support for this. Research within NAZCA done at the Free University ("Harnessing Climate Action Beyond Paris") shows that a lot is being expected from the corporate world and from non-national organizations and - governments, such as cities. But in order for these expectations to become real a transparent MRV-process is necessary (Ecofys); until now carbon-reporting is insufficient and very diverse (e.g. via the Carbon Disclosure Project). Discounting CO₂-emissions in production processes, transport and the use of products is imperative, but still in an early stage of development. According to E5 countries are reticent to impose legally binding measures because they are afraid their economies might collapse. E5 helps countries to overcome this fear by showing that the green corporate world can deliver (even < 1,5oC) but only within a supportive legal framework.

Abbreviations

- CBDR – common but differentiated responsibility, a core element of the Convention.
- CSO – Civil Society Organizations (previously called NGOs: non-governmental organizations).
- INDC – Intended Nationally Determined Contribution: voluntary national plans of action for mitigation and adaptation; approx. 185 countries submitted these plans to the UNFCCC secretariat prior to COP 21.
- LDC – Least Developed Countries: the poorest countries.

- LMDC – Like-Minded Developing Countries: a large group of countries lead by Malaysia, including a.o. China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt. They advocate CBDR and want to keep space for economic growth using fossil energies.
- NAZCA – Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action, set up at COP 20 in Lima, as part of the LPAA, the Lima-Paris Action Agenda.
- R&D – Research and Development.
- REDD+ - Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, including forest conservation and sustainable management.
- SIDS – Small Island Developing States (such as Tuvalu, Barbados etc.).
- WIM – Warsaw International Mechanism, a plan of action addressing loss and damage, agreed in 2013.
- UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: the ‘umbrella’ of the international climate negotiations.

Photos and websites

www.oikoumene.org/cop21photos

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change>

<http://actclimate.org/>

<http://actalliance.org/>

<http://ourvoices.net/>

<http://www.greenfaith.org/>

Amsterdam NL, 24 December 2015

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