



COP26 – time for action

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The United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) brings together nations to assess global progress towards tackling climate change. The inaugural meeting—COP1—was held in Berlin, Germany in 1995. Over subsequent years, some of the talks have been rather tortuous with little progress being accomplished. Every now and then however a breakthrough is made. A prime example is when, in Paris at COP21, almost every nation in the world agreed to a new international climate agreement, aiming to keep global warming at 1.5 °C—2 °C, in accordance with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Three decades on at the 26th iteration of COP, climate change has gone from being a fringe issue to a global priority. World leaders, negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens are currently congregated at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland where there are high expectations of fresh pledges from nations to cut carbon emission further and faster than ever before. Indeed, COP26 is not considered as yet another international summit, but rather one that has a unique urgency, not least since the commitments laid out in Paris did not come close to limiting global warming to 1.5 °C. This urgency, particularly for future generations, has already been laid out by a number of memorable words spoken by world leaders at COP26, words that remind us that we are not only “... pushing humanity to the brink”, but also “... digging our own grave by failing to act fast on climate

change”. Leaders have reminded us that “Time has quite literally run out ... and “The world is at 1 min to midnight to act on climate change”.

So what has been accomplished thus far at COP26? Announcements that suggest the world is on an unstoppable path to a low-carbon future include more than 90 countries pledging to cut methane and halt deforestation by 2030. There are also encouraging moves to shift finances to help poorer countries move towards zero carbon and create markets for innovative technologies. Whilst pledges to achieve the goal on zero emission by China and India fall short of other nations, an optimistic consolation is that China at least usually over-delivers on its promises.

And optimism is of the essence here because stopping climate change before it stops us is achievable but only with urgent action that, amongst other solutions, is underpinned with detailed, evidenced-based plans. From an R&D perspective, this will require scaling up the technologies we have now as well as investing in new technologies for the future. As momentous as COP21 in Paris was, COP26 must be even more so if we are to keep alive, the hope of holding temperature rises to 1.5 °C.

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