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Canadian Edition

Published by the World Federalist Movement - Canada, a non-governmental organization that advocates more just and effective global governance through the application of the principles of democratic federalism to world affairs.

VOL. 4, ISSUE 2
SPRING 2021

Better Climate Governance Matters!

by Christine Peringer

As countries begin to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, the upcoming COP26 (Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) taking place this November in Glasgow Scotland provides an occasion for the international community to make up for lost time in the global effort to keep climate-altering emissions of greenhouse gases within the limits agreed at the 2015 Paris Agreement. Recall that the Paris Agreement established a goal to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. Often world federalists are critical of a treaty structure that sets a global goal but then leaves it to national governments to individually determine what their contribution will be toward achieving that goal – as the Paris Agreement does through what are known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

It's a fair criticism. But we should also remember that the Paris Agreement negotiated in 2015 was probably the best that could be achieved at the time. An earlier treaty attempt, in Copenhagen in 2009, failed to achieve consensus.

One thing that can be said in favour of the Paris Agreement is that it provides an obligation on participating states to do better, year after year. The treaty works on a 5-year cycle of increasingly ambitious climate action carried out by countries. The intention was that the 5-year conference, initially scheduled for 2020, would be an occasion for governments to submit more ambitious plans for reducing emissions. Since

the pandemic forced the cancellation of last year's conference, this year's COP26 takes on added significance.

On behalf of World Federalist Movement – Canada and Mediators Beyond Borders International, I have joined with colleagues in the UK (Newcastle University) to explore ways that the governance arrangements for these meetings could be better managed, and potentially yield better outcomes. Our findings point to the utility of mediation and facilitation approaches as a means to overcome disagreements.

This work has led to examination of other ways that international climate negotiations could be improved. At a conference taking place (online) this April 19, we will explore:

- 1) How can UNFCCC decision-making and knowledge-sharing be improved, e.g., which formats support a culture of communication that is more conducive for effective negotiation and climate action?
- 2) How can countries best leverage the learning of others, e.g., through knowledge transfer and capacity building?
- 3) How would formats need to change to make better use of non-state actors?

The conference will share the Better Climate Negotiations Toolkit. It will also launch a “Better Climate Governance Network” of leading actors interested in improving the effectiveness of climate governance within and beyond the UNFCCC.