

The dust settles after COP26 – Prime Minister addresses the House of Commons

In the days since COP26 closed in Glasgow the Prime Minister has made three speeches, and this is the text of the address he made to the House of Commons on Monday 15 November 2021.

While others criticise the wording of the Glasgow Climate Pact, saying that it was watered down to accommodate demands from China and India, the Prime Minister says he is very much a glass half full type of personality. At a press conference on Sunday evening he said there was little difference in the wording eventually agreed and that on the table at the eleventh hour. There is “not much difference” between phase down and phase out in relation to fossil fuels according to what the Prime Minister said in response to a question at the Downing Street press conference. However he also referred to the Edinburgh conference at one stage, a point picked up in the House of Commons on Monday, a point picked up by SNP Leader Ian Blackford as you can read below.

Prime Minister’s address

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP said: “Mr Speaker before I begin today’s statement I would like to say a few words about the abhorrent attack that took place yesterday morning outside the

Liverpool Women's Hospital.

"On behalf of the whole House I want to pay tribute to the swift and professional response by the extraordinary men and women of the emergency services, who once again showed themselves to be the very best among us.

"The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre has today raised the nationwide threat level from substantial to severe, meaning an attack is highly likely. The police are keeping both myself and the Home Secretary informed on developments and we will of course in turn keep the House updated on the investigation as it continues.



PHOTO ©UK Parliament / Jessica Taylor

"And now Mr Speaker with your permission I should like to make a statement on the United Nations Climate Change Conference better known as COP26 which took place in the magnificent city of Glasgow over the past two weeks.

"It was the biggest political gathering of any kind ever held in the United Kingdom. 194 countries were represented.

"We had around 120 heads of state or government. 38,000 accredited delegates. And there were countless tens of thousands more in the streets and parks and venues outside. It was a summit that many people predicted would fail. A summit that I fear some quietly wanted to fail. Yet it was a summit that proved the doubters and the cynics wrong. Because COP26 did not just succeed in keeping 1.5 alive. It succeeded in doing something no UN climate conference has ever done before by uniting the world in calling time on coal. In 25 previous COPs, all the way back to Berlin in 1995, not one delivered a mandate to remove so much as a single lump of coal from one power station boiler.

"For decades, tackling the single biggest cause of carbon emissions proved as challenging as eating the proverbial

elephant. It was just so big that no one knew quite where to start. But in Glasgow, Mr Speaker, we took the first bite. Because we have secured a global commitment to phasing down coal – and as John Kerry has pointed out, you can't phase out coal without first phasing it down as we transition to other, cleaner energy sources – and we have, for the first time, a worldwide recognition that we'll not get climate change under control as long as our power stations are consuming vast quantities of the sedimentary super-polluter that is coal.

“That alone is a great achievement, but we haven't just signalled the beginning of the end for coal. We've ticked our boxes on cars, cash and trees as well. The companies that build a quarter of the world's automobiles have agreed to stop building carbon emission vehicles by 2035 – and cities from Sao Paulo to Seattle have pledged to ban them from their streets.

“We've pioneered a whole new model, an intellectual breakthrough, that sees billions in climate finance, development bank investment and so forth being used to trigger trillions from the private sector to drive the big decarbonisation programmes in countries like South Africa.

“And we've done something that absolutely none of the commentators saw coming by building a coalition of more than 130 countries to protect up to 90 per cent of our forests, those great natural soakers of carbon. Mr Speaker none of this was a happy accident or inevitability.

“The fact that we were there at all, in the face of a global pandemic, is in itself the result of a vast and complex effort involving countless moving parts. Right until the very end there was a very real prospect that no agreement would be reached.

“And what has been achieved has only come about thanks to month after month of concerted British diplomacy, the

countless meetings, the innumerable phone calls. The banging of heads at UNGA, at the Petersberg Dialogue, at President Biden's climate summit, the Security Council, the G7, the G20. And the setting of an example, several examples by the UK.

"Because again and again the task of our negotiators was made easier by the fact that the UK wasn't asking anyone to do anything we're not doing ourselves. We've slashed our use of coal so much that our last two coal-fired power stations will go offline for good in 2024. We've more than doubled our climate finance, providing vital support for poor and vulnerable nations around the world. We've made a legally binding commitment to reach net zero, the first of the major economies to do so. We've set a date at which hydrocarbon internal combustion engines will reach the end of the road. And we've shown the world that it's possible to grow your economy while cutting carbon – creating markets for clean technology and delivering new green jobs that reduce emissions and increase prosperity.



Boris Johnson Prime Minister with COP26 President Alok Sharma seated on his left ©UK Parliament / Jessica Taylor

"Every one of those achievements was not just great news for our country and our planet but another arrow in the quiver of our fantastic team in Glasgow. A team led by COP president the Rt Hon Member for Reading West. From the moment he picked up the COP reins he has been absolutely tireless in his efforts to secure the change that we need. And while I'm pretty sure that what he really needs right now is a well-deserved break

"I don't think any of us here will be able to hold him back as he sets off pushing countries to go further still and making sure the promises made in Glasgow are delivered not diluted. But success has many parents and I want to say a huge thank you to the officials in our own COP unit, in Downing Street and across government in embassies around the world, and at the United Nations who pulled out all the stops to make the

event work and shepherd through the agreements that have been reached.

“I also want to thank everyone on the ground at the SEC in Glasgow – security, catering, transport, the relentlessly cheery volunteers, the police from across the country who kept us safe from harm, the public health authorities who kept us safe from Covid – and everyone in The Scottish Government. And above all I want to say thank you to the people of Glasgow, who had to put up with so much disruption in their city and welcomed the world all the same. I say to the people of Glasgow – we couldn’t have done it without you.

“Is there still more to do? Of course there is. I am not for one moment suggesting we can safely close the book on climate change.

“In fact I can think of nothing more dangerous than patting ourselves on the back and telling ourselves that the job is done. Because this job will not be complete until the whole world has not only set off to reach net zero but arrived at the destination.

“A goal that, even with the best of intentions from all actors, cannot be achieved overnight. While COP26 has filled me with optimism about our ability to get there I cannot now claim to be certain that we will, because we have seen countries that really should know better dragging their heels on their Paris commitments. But if, and it is still an if, they make good on their pledges, then I believe Glasgow will be remembered as the place where we secured an historic agreement and the world began to turn the tide.

“Before Paris we were on course for four degrees of warming. After Paris that number fell to a still catastrophically dangerous three. This afternoon, after Glasgow it stands close to two. Still too high, the numbers are still too hot, but closer than we have ever been to the relative safety of 1.5,

and with an all-new roadmap that will lead us there.

“Aristotle taught us that virtue comes not from reasoning and instruction but from habit and practice. And so the success of the Glasgow Climate Pact lies not just in the promises but in the move that the whole world has now made from setting abstract targets to adopting the nuts and bolts programme of work to meet those targets and to reduce CO2 emissions.

“We are now talking about the how rather than the what and getting into a habit of cutting CO2 that is catching on not just with governments but with businesses and with billions of people around the world. It is for that reason that I believe COP26 has been a success and 1.5 is still alive.

“That is something in which every person in our United Kingdom can and should take pride, and I commend this statement to the House.”

Labour response

Sir Keir Starmer addressed the house saying: “I join the Prime Minister in extending our thoughts across the House to the people of Liverpool who are in shock at yesterday’s events, and pay tribute to the response of the emergency services.

“Let me start by paying tribute to the COP President. Whatever the shortcomings of the deal, his diligence, his integrity and his commitment to the climate are clear for all to see. I also pay tribute to his team of civil servants. Their dedication, expertise and service was never in doubt but always remarkable. They knew that COP26 was the most important international summit ever hosted on these shores. Why? The simple maths of the climate crisis. At Paris we set out the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°. That is the tipping point beyond which the world is set to see billions of people facing extreme heatwaves, countless millions displaced from their homes, and the destruction of natural wonders like the

world's coral reefs. The science does not negotiate and no politician can move the goalposts. To have any hope of 1.5°, we must halve global emissions by 2030. The task at Glasgow was to set out credible plans for delivering that.

“Although the summit has been one of modest progress, we cannot kid ourselves: plans to cut emissions are still way short. The pledges made in Glasgow for 2030, even if all fully implemented, represent less than 25% of the ambition required. Rather than a manageable 1.5°, they put us on track for a devastating 2.4°. That is why, according to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, [Toggle showing location of Column 336](#) the goal of 1.5° is now on “life support”. We need to deliver intensive care, and that starts by being honest about what has gone wrong.

“International negotiations are complex and difficult, and those who have dragged their feet the most bear the greatest responsibility, but the summit was held back by the Prime Minister's guileless boosterism, which only served to embolden the big emitters. The Prime Minister praised inadequate net zero plans. He called the Australian plans heroic, even though their plan was so slow that it was in line with 4° of global warming. By providing this cover, the Prime Minister had little chance of exerting influence over the other big emitters, and we saw many more disappointing national plans.

“The Prime Minister also dressed up modest sectoral commitments as being transformational. Earlier in COP, the Government claimed that 190 countries and organisations had agreed to end coal. On closer inspection, only 46 of them were countries. Of those, only 23 were new signatories and 10 do not even use coal. The 13 that remain do not include the biggest coal users: China, the US, India and Australia.

“As things moved forward with no public pressure, the big emitters were emboldened. They clubbed together later in COP to gut the main deal's wording on coal. Only someone who

thinks that promises are meaningless could now argue that an agreement to “phase down” coal is the same as an agreement to phase it out.

“Then there was the long overdue £100 billion in climate finance. It is still not being delivered, even though that money was promised to developing countries more than a decade ago. Failure to deliver has damaged trust and created a huge obstacle to building the coalition, which can drive climate action, between the most vulnerable developing countries and ambitious developed countries. That coalition was the foundation of the landmark Paris agreement in 2015, creating the pincer movement to maximise pressure on the world’s biggest emitters, including China. It is deeply regrettable that at Glasgow, we did not see a repeat. Instead, developing countries were still having to make the case for the long-promised \$100 billion in the final hours of the summit.

“Given all that, and the imperative to revive 1.5° from life support, what will be different in the next year in the run-up to COP27? Britain has a special and particular responsibility as COP president. First, we need to reassemble the Paris climate coalition and build trust with the developing world. Cutting overseas aid does not build trust; it destroys it. Will the Prime Minister therefore immediately commit to reversing those cuts?

“Secondly, there can be no free passes for major emitters, including our friends. We are doing a trade deal with Australia where we have allowed it to drop Paris temperature commitments. That was a mistake. Will the Prime Minister put it right?

“Thirdly, the Prime Minister is right to say that we need to power past coal and phase out fossil fuels, but his ability to lead on the issue internationally has been hampered by his actions at home. It has never made sense for the Government to be flirting with a new coal mine or to greenlight the Cambo

oilfield. Will he rewrite the planning framework to rule out coal, and will he now say no to Cambo?

“Finally, will the Prime Minister sort out the Chancellor? The Budget was delivered in the week before COP26 as world leaders began to arrive on these shores, but it did [Toggle showing location of Column 337](#)not even mention climate change. It gave a tax break for domestic flights and fell woefully short of the investment needed to deliver green jobs and a fair transition.

“The Prime Minister has been the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. Glasgow has been a missed opportunity—a stumble forward when we needed to make great strides, and more climate delay when we needed delivery—and 1.5° is now on life support. We still have the chance to keep 1.5° alive, but only with intensive care. We must speak honestly about the challenge that we face to rebuild the coalition that we need and to take on the big emitters. We can, and we must, change course.”

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Sir Keir Starmer MP ©UK Parliament / Jessica Taylor

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SNP response

The SNP Westminster Leader, Ian Blackford MP addressed the house saying: “Let me thank the Prime Minister for advance copy of his statement.

“And I’m delighted that today the Prime Minister remembered that COP happened in Glasgow rather than in Edinburgh – as he said last night.

“Maybe he would have led more from the front at COP if he had actually known which Scottish city the conference was taking place in.

“But in fairness, it is right to acknowledge that there was at least one member of the UK government who committed himself passionately to the Glasgow conference.

“The UK President of COP, the member for Reading West, deserves credit and thanks for the role he played in the last number of weeks.

“Mr Speaker, we all know that the Glasgow Climate Pact is far from everything it should be, but it does contain many positives that must be built on.

“Whether or not it succeeds now depends entirely on whether countries deliver on the commitments they made.

“That is the only way to truly keep the 1.5 degree target alive.

“If that urgent leadership is to be shown – then the example of that leadership needs to begin at home.

“The Scottish Government led on climate justice throughout COP – we were the first country to pledge funds for loss & damage to help those vulnerable countries who have contributed least to climate change but are suffering its worst effects.

“This is about reparation, not charity – so, will the Prime Minister reverse his cuts to international aid and follow our First Minister’s lead – will he back and contribute to the creation of a loss and damage facility?

“The Glasgow Climate Pact also contains a commitment to increase nationally determined contributions by the end of 2022.

“So, can the Prime Minister confirm that the UK will urgently update its own NDC commitments?

“And meeting our targets also means rapidly increasing investment in green jobs.

“Prior to recess, the Prime Minister made a commitment to go and look again at the issue of investment in Tidal Stream Energy.

“So now that he has presumably looked at this, can he today commit to a ring-fenced fund of £71 million for Tidal Stream Energy as part of the contracts for difference process?

“And finally on carbon capture and storage.

“Now I know the Prime Minister is expecting this question, and I make no apology for the fact that I will keep asking these questions until promises made to Scotland’s North-East are finally delivered.

“Last week INEOS added their voice to the growing shock and anger that Track 1 status for the Acorn project was rejected by this UK government – so will the Prime Minister reverse this devastating decision and back the Scottish Cluster?”