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COP26 summit ends with agreement endorsed by almost 200 countries, but skepticism remains

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The COP26 climate summit in Glasgow has ended with nearly 200 countries endorsing an agreement to cut carbon emissions, scale back the use of coal and fossil fuels and provide more support to developing nations to help them adapt to global warming.

The agreement, called the Glasgow Climate Pact, came late Saturday at the United Nations conference after a one-day delay and three draft proposals. It builds on the 2015 Paris climate treaty by listing a series of decisions and resolutions that all countries have agreed to adopt. They include a commitment to accelerating national action plans to limit global warming.

The overall objective of the pact is to cap the rise in the global temperature at 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, which scientists say is critical to avoiding the worst consequences of climate change.

The deal nearly fell through when India's Environment Minister, Bhupender Yadav, introduced a change that diluted language relating to coal just seconds before delegates were set to approve the agreement.

Instead of countries agreeing to "phase out" the use of unabated coal, Mr. Yadav proposed "phase down." Many delegates were furious at the intervention, but in the end they had little choice but to accept India's amendment or risk the deal falling apart.

COP26 President Alok Sharma apologized for putting delegates in a bind over India's intervention. Afterward, he told reporters: "Of course I wish that we had managed to preserve the language on coal that was originally agreed."

John Kerry, the U.S. climate envoy, called the pact a "powerful statement" that raised global ambitions to protect the planet. "Not everyone in public life gets to make choices about life and death," he said during a plenary session on Saturday. "Not everyone gets to make choices that actually affect an entire planet. We here are privileged today to do exactly that."

However, the deal received only lukewarm backing from delegates representing dozens of poorer countries. They said it contains far too many compromises and fails to commit developed countries to paying for the damage climate change has already done to the developing world.

The deal "does not bring hope to our hearts, but serves as yet another conversation where we put our homes on the line while those who have other options decide how quickly they want to act," said Shauna Aminath, the minister of environment for the Maldives.

"I need some more reassurance from our developed-country partners," said Gabon's environment minister, Lee White. "Africa risks being destabilized by climate change. It's already, in certain of our countries, a matter of life and death. Already we are seeing some of our nations failing."

There were also questions about whether the agreement will achieve its main objective: meeting the 1.5-degree target.

As part of the COP process, more than 100 countries, including Canada, have pledged to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 or 2050, although China's target is 2060 and India's is 2070. However, a [recent report from Climate Action Tracker](#), a coalition of scientists from around the world, said the goals are little more than "false hope." The group said that, based on the commitments made at COP26, the Earth is set to warm by 2.4 degrees by 2100. Even if every country fully met its targets, a 1.8-degree rise was likely, the report added.

Mr. Sharma acknowledged that the pact was a "fragile win" for the environment. "We have kept 1.5C alive – that was our overarching objective ... But I would still say that the pulse of 1.5C is weak," he said.

Despite the reservations, many delegates said the pact represented a significant step forward in the battle against climate change. "Glasgow has delivered a strong message of hope," said Seve Paeniu, Tuvalu's Minister of Finance, as he held up a photograph of his three grandchildren. "Glasgow has delivered a strong message of ambition. What is left now is for us to deliver on that promise."

One of the biggest issues during the summit was how far developed nations should go in helping vulnerable countries recover from the effects of global warming. This kind of reparation, known as "loss and damage," has been a controversial topic for years at UN summits and it has never been included in a COP agreement.

The U.S., Canada and many other developed countries have resisted calls from developing countries for a special "loss and damages fund," which according to some studies could reach US\$400-billion a year by 2030. They argue the groundwork hasn't been laid to determine how the fund would operate, and whether a non-government organization or the private sector would be involved.

"I really don't think we are at the stage where we can start talking about separate funds," Canada's Environment Minister, Steven Guilbeault, said Friday. He added that Canada was "happy to see conversation move forward."

The Glasgow Pact includes provisions to fund a UN agency, the Santiago Network, which will work on developing technical and financial assistance for loss and damage associated with climate change. And the pact calls for further discussion of a financial mechanism for dealing with the issue.

Developed nations have also faced criticism for failing to meet a deadline to mobilize US\$100-billion annually to help poorer countries develop plans to mitigate global warming. The pledge, which is separate from reparations, was supposed to have been met by 2020, but likely won't be fulfilled until 2023.

Saturday's agreement re-commits countries to the financial pledge and calls for meetings to take place every two years to discuss financial support. It also urges developed countries to "at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing country parties."

Another key issue throughout the summit was the [future of coal](#) and [fossil fuels](#). Many nations wanted the pact to call for countries to phase out those energy sources.

However, after objections from several countries, the wording was softened to call for phasing out “unabated coal power” and “inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels, recognizing the need for support towards a just transition.” India’s amendment made that “phasing down unabated coal.”

Unabated coal refers to coal power generation that doesn’t use technology, such as carbon capture and storage, to reduce emissions. Energy companies have argued that using that technology means they can burn coal and control carbon emissions, but environmentalists say the technology has yet to fully develop and it shouldn’t be used as an excuse to continue emissions.

Climate campaigners said that while the Glasgow Pact has some positive features, it fails to reflect the urgency of the climate crisis. “Clearly, some world leaders think they aren’t living on the same planet as the rest of us,” said Gabriela Bucher, the international executive director of Oxfam. “It seems no amount of fires, rising sea levels or droughts will bring them to their senses to stop increasing emissions at the expense of humanity.”

Jennifer Morgan of Greenpeace added: “It’s meek, it’s weak and the 1.5C goal is only just alive, but a signal has been sent that the era of coal is ending. And that matters.”