

At COP26, nations strike climate deal that falls far short

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COP26 President Alok Sharma makes his concluding remarks during the climate summit in Glasgow on Saturday [Paul Ellis/AFP]

Glasgow, November 14 (RHC)-- Nearly 200 countries at the United Nations COP26 summit in Scotland have agreed to a deal to contain the world's climate crisis — but the pact did not go far enough to tackle catastrophic global warming.

The final text of the two-week Glasgow talks was finally adopted on Saturday, a day after the talks had initially been scheduled to end and following a last-minute proposed change by India. The change called

on parties to accelerate “efforts to phase down unabated coal power, and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” — weakening what had originally been “efforts to phase out”.

The agreement is the first ever UN climate deal to explicitly plan to reduce coal, the single biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and specifically mention fossil fuels. However, several countries — including small, low-lying island nations — said they were deeply disappointed by the watering down of the crucial language but had no choice than go along with it. “There was a real sense of ambush in the air,” said Al Jazeera’s Nick Clark, reporting from the talks.

COP26 President Alok Sharma said he was “deeply sorry” for how the summit ended. “May I just say to all delegates I apologise for the way this process has unfolded and I am deeply sorry,” he said, his voice breaking with emotion after hearing from vulnerable nations which expressed their anger over the changes to the text.

“I also understand the deep disappointment but I think as you have noted, it’s also vital that we protect this package.”

UN chief Antonio Guterres called the global deal “an important step” but said “it’s not enough. It’s time to go into emergency mode.” “The approved texts are a compromise. They reflect the interests, the conditions, the contradictions and the state of political will in the world today,” he added. “They take important steps, but unfortunately the collective political will was not enough to overcome some deep contradictions.”

Negotiators say the agreement is aimed at keeping alive the overarching 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times.

The agreement in effect acknowledged that commitments made so far to cut emissions of planet-heating greenhouse gases are nowhere near enough, and asked nations to set tougher climate pledges next year, rather than every five years, as they are currently required to do.

Scientists say that to go beyond a rise of 1.5C would unleash extreme sea level rise and catastrophes, including crippling drought, monstrous storms and wildfires far worse than those the world is already suffering. But national pledges made so far to cut greenhouse emissions — mostly carbon dioxide from burning coal, oil and gas — would only cap the average global temperature rise at 2.4 Celsius (4.3 degrees Fahrenheit).

After resistance from rich nations led by the United States and the European Union, the text omitted any reference to a specific finance facility for the loss and damage that climate change has already caused in the developing world. Instead, it promised future “dialogue” on the subject.

The text noted “with deep regret” that wealthy nations had also failed to pay a separate annual sum of \$100 billion they promised over a decade ago. It urged countries to pay up “urgently and through 2025.” It also promised to double finance to help developing countries adapt to rising temperatures by the same date.

Laurence Tubiana, the architect of the Paris deal, said “COP has failed to provide immediate assistance for people suffering now.” Meanwhile, prominent Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg said the talks had achieved nothing but “blah, blah, blah.” “The real work continues outside these halls. And we will never give up, ever,” the figurehead of the Fridays for Future movement posted on Twitter.



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