

COP23: TECHNICAL PROFILE WITH RELEVANT POLITICAL SUPPORT

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The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference, known as COP23, was held in Bonn (Germany) between the 7-18th of November 2017. Although the presidency of the COP, and therefore host, was the Republic of Fiji in Melanesia, the conference was held at the UNFCCC headquarters in Bonn, with the support of the German government as a co-host, due to a lack of the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the tens of thousands of delegates and observers attending the meeting in Fiji. The six bodies of the UNFCCC based on their respective agendas meet during two weeks. The Parties sent 11,300 delegates to Bonn, 25% less than in COP21 in Paris. More than 6,000 Representatives from UN bodies, specialised agencies, intergovernmental organisation and NGOs were also present, together with more than 1,600 journalists. Altogether, more than 19,000 delegates travelled to Bonn, far from the number met in Paris in 2015.

While the Paris Agreement (PA)⁽¹⁾ adopted in 2015 aims at keeping global temperature increase well below 2°C ⁽²⁾, how this objective was to be achieved was left to be defined in what is known as the **PA Rulebook**, which should include the processes and rules and modalities necessary to guide and facilitate the implementation of the PA, guarantee increasing ambition and monitor and evaluate progress ⁽³⁾. The PA Rulebook should be adopted by the end of 2018, and that is why COP23 was expected to have a rather technical profile to develop the rules and modalities for the implementation of the PA after 2020.

The conference developed in a context of recent **extreme events** in many parts of the planet, an **increasing rate** of CO₂ concentration, the 2017 **spike on emissions** worldwide (after several years stabilization) and the highest concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere for the **last 2 million years**. In the policy arena, the announcement of President of the USA **Donald Trump of abandoning the PA**, being the US the second largest emitter that had pledged to cut its emissions to 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025, was indeed a severe drawback for the UNFCCC process. This had triggered the fear of other countries following example and also leaving the climate negotiations, paradoxically it may also boost the actions of the other countries. Today the fight against climate change is seen by the vast majority not only as a need, but also as an opportunity. The announcement made by **Nicaragua** earlier this year and **Syria** on November 13th of signing the PA left the US more isolated, being the only country that signed the PA that is indicating it will not ratify the Paris Agreement¹.

Key Points

- *Considerable progress was needed at COP23 with regards to the Paris Agreement Rulebook, which must define the rules and modalities for the implementation of the PA and should enter into force in 2018.*
- *However, progress with this regard was limited, except for the Talanoa dialogue, a facilitative dialogue framework to be launched in 2018 which aims at accelerating action under the Paris Agreement.*
- *The need for more ambitious actions before 2020 and the relevance of the stock-taking process in 2018 were recognised during COP23.*
- *The Subsidiary Bodies made some progress on issues such as the climate Gender Action Plan or the Platform for Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples.*
- *A breakthrough was achieved with regards to agriculture as, for the first time, Parties have agreed to address central climate challenges related to this sector, mainly adaptation, emission reduction and food security issues.*
- *In parallel to the official agenda, strong political support to the PA was shown by non-state actors - cities, regions, businesses and NGOs-, who are taking important commitments and are gaining relevance within the climate negotiation process.*
- *The alternative US delegation, gathered under the motto "We are still in", gained a lot of public attention and showed their commitment with climate action.*



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¹Currently, 195 out of 197 countries have signed the Paris Agreement and 170 have ratified it.

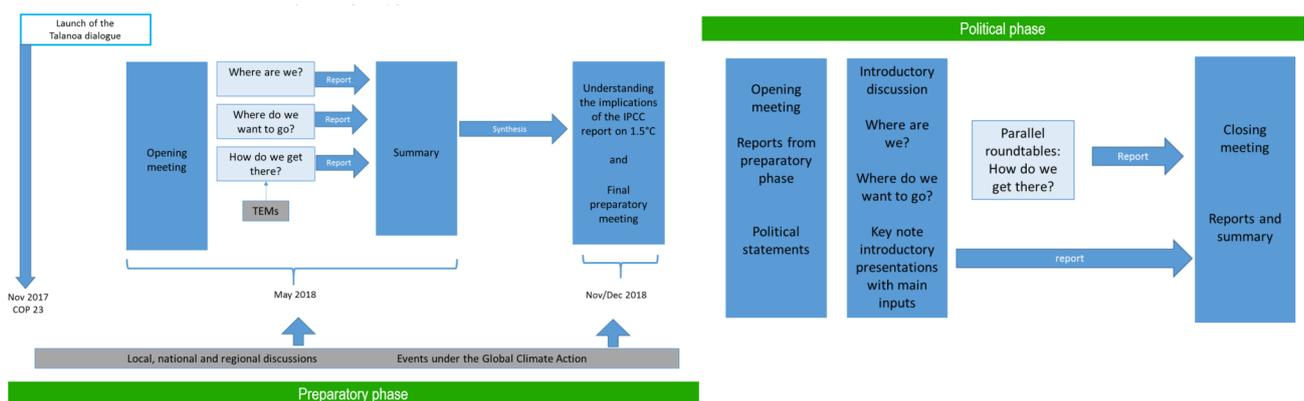
The main outputs of COP23

COP23 advanced on some important matters, after intense discussion in the Subsidiary Bodies. The first issue refers to the establishment of a **Gender Action Plan** (4), which addresses the gender perspective in the UNFCCC and the PA, including capacity building, gender balance and empowerment of women. The second is the launch of the **Local Communities and Indigenous People’s Platform**, which acknowledges that these communities will be disproportionately affected by climate change and promotes traditional knowledge sharing, aiming to facilitate that this knowledge can inform mitigation and adaptation policies. Finally, and while unnoticed to major media, the **agreement on agriculture** (5) has been described as “historic political breakthrough” and “landmark decision”. For the first time, Parties have agreed to address, in subsequent conferences, a number of relevant issues for agriculture, mainly related to the adaptation of this sector to climate change, emission reduction and food security. According to FAO, who welcomed the agreement, agriculture has the potential, as no other sector, to significantly contribute to cut down emissions.

Even if strong emission abatement objectives were achieved, and adaptation measures were timely and efficient, there are some impacts that now have become unavoidable, due to the inertia of the climate system(6). **Loss and damage** refers to these impacts and is very relevant for those countries most vulnerable to climate change impact, such as small island states. This issue, and its implications in terms of historic responsibilities and compensations, has been a topic of discussion since the beginning of the UNFCCC process. In 2013 all parties established the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM)(7) to address loss and damage and in 2015 the PA “recognised the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage” (Article 8) and supported the WIM, whose progress is to be reported annually, but it also stated that “[Article 8] does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation”. The discussion over loss and damage was one of the priorities of Fiji’s presidency and, while the agenda of the conference included this as an issue for discussion, little progress was made.

The **Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA)** negotiations progressed slowly, moving from the conceptual to the technical, many felt that the APA produced uneven outcomes across the five main items (mitigation, adaptation communication, transparency framework, global stocktake, and compliance). As has become clear in negotiations since 2016, the Paris outcome is a delicate balance, since parties interpret some of the articles in different ways. At this COP, developed countries called to stick to the Paris mandate, as they felt developing countries were trying to add issues that were outside the mandate, in particular in the area of finance. To accelerate progress, a 2018 Facilitative Dialogue will be launched, and it may become a model that could inform the global stocktake under the Paris Agreement. The dialogue received the name of the “**Talanoa dialogue** (8)” (named after a Pacific storytelling tradition that fosters empathy and trust referring to the “inclusive, participatory and transparent” dialogue approach traditional to Fiji and other Pacific islands). With the aim of progressively increase ambition, the PA included that Parties should measure the advances of their collective efforts in 2018 in a facilitative stocktaking process, which would feed the second round of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) scheduled in 2020.

The Talanoa dialogue builds around three questions -*Where are we? Where do we want to go? How do we get there?*- and will be developed in two phases: the preparatory phase, that will run from January 2018 until COP24 and will set the basis of the political phase, that will gather high-level representatives of the countries during the next conference to take stock of the collective efforts.



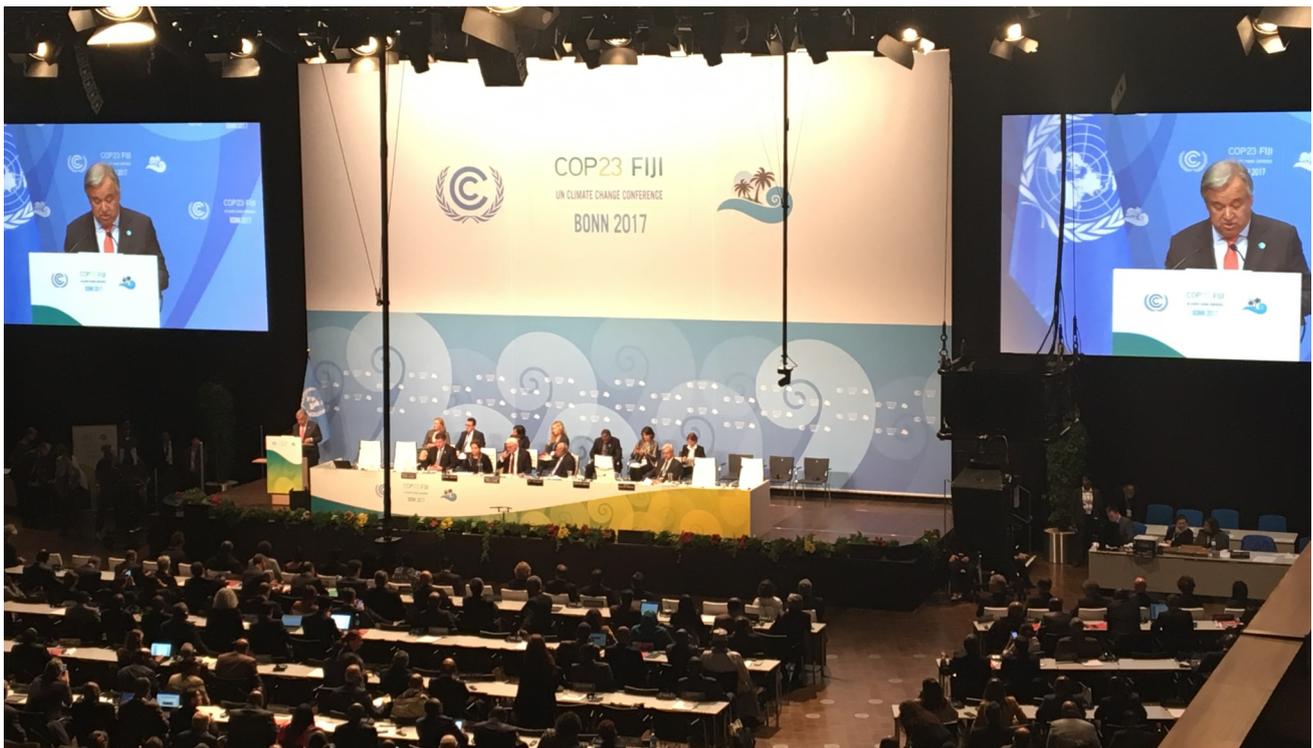
Source: UNFCCC, Talanoa dialogue. Draft decision 1/CP.23 (2017).

As the PA applies only to the era post-2020, there was a strong concern, particularly among developing countries, that developed countries commitments before 2020 were insufficient. This concern was based on the fact that the \$100 billion contribution to the Green Climate Fund had not materialise and the lack of ratification of the Doha Amendment (9) that defined for Annex I countries the mitigation effort by 2020 under the Kyoto Protocol. Before COP23, 84 Parties had submitted instruments of acceptance and during the conference seven additional Parties deposited instruments of acceptance (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK), however 54 additional ratifications are needed in order the Doha Amendment to enter into force. Nevertheless, the EU

has announced its intention to unilaterally enforce the emission reduction pledges under the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

During COP23 it was recognised the need for more ambitious actions before 2020 and the importance of the 2018 stock-taking process. The progress on the actions pre-2020 will undoubtedly be in the spotlight during the next two conferences of the Parties, as well as the need of increasing ambition after 2020.

With regards to announcements during the COP23 on fossil fuels, the UK and Canada led a [declaration](#) to join the "[Powering Past Coal](#)" alliance, later endorsed by 28 countries and regional actors, in which they commit to “accelerate clean growth and climate protection through the rapid phase-out of traditional coal power”. The text of the declaration explicitly states that coal needs to phase out no later than 2030 by OECD and EU28 countries, if the target adopted in the PA is to be met. Even if signatories are not committed to a specific date, the declaration has a strong political relevance and it represents a clear message to the world. It was nevertheless significant the absence of Germany in this pledge, despite the commitment of the German government with the Paris



Source: World Meteorological Organization photostream

agenda during the COP23.

Strong political support to COP23

While the official negotiations process remained quite technical, **strong political announcements** were made in parallel to the COP aiming to support the PA. The joint high-level segment under the COP, CMP and CMA² brought together 15 heads of state and government, in addition to ministers and heads of delegation. The US official delegation was present but with a low profile interventions. However, an alternative US delegation, under the slogan “[We are still in](#)” and led by Governor of California, Jerry Brown, and former New York mayor, Michael Bloomberg, showed the determined commitment of many US states, cities, companies, universities and other stakeholders with the PA and their will to fill in the gap left by the Trump Administration.

Important announcements were made by the private sector, such as that made by the multi-national **Iberdrola** who declared the [closing down of all the coal energy plants](#) of the company and inviting the rest of the energy companies to follow the way. So, **non-state actors** are making [relevant pledges](#) and gaining prominence in the climate negotiations process. It is clear that non-state actors have given the fresh air that the negotiations needed at this stage, as was certainly seen in the frenetic activity in the Bonn Zone (side events) compared with the Bula Zone (negotiations area), showing huge and serious commitment to cut emissions, enhance resilience and contribute to funding of the climate efforts of developing nations beyond states.

² CMP is the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, while CMA is the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (see [UNFCCC glossary](#) of climate change acronyms for further details information).

How and when this multilateral process will engage the non-state actors in some sort of initiative far more ambitious than the so-called [NAZCA platform](#) remains to be seen. The need to seriously coordinate efforts between non-state actors and states as well as the high level of ambition of the non-state actors' actions is increasingly being recognised as it is indeed a very important issue. Yet much more is needed from the 192 states member of UNFCCC to achieve the 2°C target (let alone the 1.5°C). This will lead to interesting debates on whether a new governance system is needed to achieve the necessary level of ambition.

CONCLUSIONS:

COP23 started with the expectation of becoming a rather technical summit to develop the rules, procedures and accounting for the implementation of the PA and it ended with some progress achieved, although very modest, so most of the work will have to be done from now to the 2018 summit. An intense year of negotiations is thus expected during 2018, in the run up to COP 24.

In parallel to the official progress, a number of relevant pledges were made that show the momentum still continues, in particular by the hand of non-state actors. The extreme climatic events registered during this year made it clear that **action is urgent**. Despite that slow progress in the negotiations by the countries, it was more evident than ever that cities, regions, businesses and NGOs are determined to take a prominent role on climate change. However, this [might not be sufficient](#). Keeping global temperature increase well below 2°C is a challenge that needs the compromise of all.

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