

## There is a climate emergency, but hope is still possible<sup>1</sup>

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My 40-year long experience working on climate change allows me to stand back a little from the agitation of this COP, the 23<sup>rd</sup> I am attending.

What are we doing here? The COP is moving and removing brackets in technical texts. It is important, even essential to provide a firm ground to implement the Paris Agreement.

While this happens, humanity, particularly the richest part of it, continues to use the atmosphere as a dump site for the results of fossil fuel combustion. We send about 50 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere every year. Between 15 and 40% of that amount will still be present in the atmosphere in a **thousand years** from now. This increases the thickness of the thermal insulating layer around the planet. Imagine that we are adding an additional sweater around the planet every year. The planet does not need any additional sweater: global temperature and the intensity of associated extreme events have increased already too much. This metaphor helps to understand, without any complex climate model, why it is so essential to reduce emissions to “net zero” ASAP! If we don’t do that, we will increase the insulation layer thickness, and suffocate underneath.

The IPCC SR15, a report adopted by all governments just two months ago, has described at length the importance for both humanity and ecosystems of not overshooting the 1.5°C target. One of the many reasons is the fact that **ice sheets are melting at a faster rate** than expected just a few years ago, and the long-term consequences for sea level are severe. Unfortunately, ice sheets are not around the table here at the COP, and nobody, even so-called superpowers, can negotiate with the laws of physics and the fact that ice melts at 0°C (32° Fahrenheit for clarity). What is needed now is a recognition that 1.5°C is a much safer target overall. We need to **love** that target (hence my tie!), and the report about it. It is a question of survival for a large part of humanity (and many other species)!

The IPCC SR15 has been invited by COP21 (para 17 of 1/CP21) to specify the 2030 level of greenhouse gas emissions compatible with 1.5°C warming. The answer from IPCC is clear: 50% lower than today’s emissions in 2030, that is about 25 Gigatonnes of CO<sub>2eq</sub>. The best way to recognize the work done by IPCC would be to stop arguing about whether **to note or to welcome** the SR15, and start to take its numbers seriously. This must be done in a COP decision, the main outcome from Katowice. And with a clear reference, a logical reference, to the need for all countries to increase their ambition level (in all three areas mentioned in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement: Mitigation, Adaptation, and Finance).

The faster we reach net-zero emissions, the less damage and suffering there will be. The more governments invest in this **transition, in a just manner**, respecting human rights, the better. Especially if it’s done while seeking also the **many synergies** with the other SDGs (sustainable development goals), as the SR15 has shown. To achieve that, it is urgent for all Parties, particularly the largest polluters, to **revise their NDC before 2020**, to increase their ambition, and most importantly, to ACT accordingly.

Only then will governments and economic actors give some **hope** to Greta<sup>4</sup>, Toci, Jamie, Lilly, or Bo, and the many other young people who are increasingly speaking truth to power. They are asking our generation: “Which world do you want to leave us”? Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Invited remarks at the press conference given by Climate Action Network (CAN) International, Katowice, Poland, COP24, 12 December 2018

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<sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch))

<sup>4</sup> Greta Thunberg (Sweden, @GretaThunberg), Toci Naulusala (Fiji, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx\\_11Y\\_nG40](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx_11Y_nG40)), Jamie Margolin (USA), @Jamie\_Margolin), Lilly (Netherlands, @Lillyspickup), Bo (Belgium, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_138v-vwgQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_138v-vwgQ))