

CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Podcast Talk for St Mary's Cathedral, June 2020

Hello – My name is Patrick Grady, and I'm the Member of Parliament for Glasgow North, covering the West End, Maryhill, and that of course includes the parish of St Mary's Cathedral on Great Western Road. It's a privilege to have been asked to contribute to this series of CLIMATETALK podcasts, anticipating the preparations for the major Climate Conference that is coming to our city.

We originally expected the conference to take place in November of this year – and I originally expected this recording to be a live presentation in the Cathedral itself – but the coronavirus pandemic has changed all that, and indeed changed the perspective we might have on the climate crisis and the importance of the COP26 event which will now take place in November 2021. COP26 is the 26th Meeting of the 'Conference of Parties' to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the global agreements to mitigate and adapt to the effects of a changing climate.

The focus of this presentation is climate change and international development, both subjects close to my heart. Before I was elected in 2015, much of my professional career had been with the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, SCIAF to its friends, one of the largest aid agencies in Scotland and part of the global Caritas network, second only to the Red Cross in terms of its global reach. In my first years as an MP I was the int dev spokesperson for the SNP, and since 2017 I've been chair of the Malawi Chair and WFD Board member. In all those positions I've had the opportunity to see first-hand how climate change

has affected efforts to tackle global poverty and injustice, and the importance of a holistic approach to all of these issues.

- And now we have a new context – the coronavirus has changed, and will keep changing, so much that we previously took for granted, and in very practical terms, the COP 26 conference has been delayed by a year. But, as I'll explore in this talk, this gives us the opportunity to learn lessons and consider how we move to a new normal that puts people and the planet at the heart of global decision-making.
- The pandemic hasn't just shifted the date of the conference – it has dramatically increased both the potential & importance of COP26.
 - Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, the coalition of civil society organisations in our country who are mobilising in advance of the conference, have rightly noted that Glasgow was a home of the industrial revolution – and that it was the industrial revolution and growth of carbon emissions since the 19th century that have had such significant consequences of that for climate change; The groups now argue, rightly in my view, that Glasgow as a city now has the potential to be new beginning for climate action, undoing the damage of climate change
- And that opportunity helps us to consider the wider Concept of Climate Justice – central to any international development perspective on response to climate change
 - Glasgow's Caledonian University has a dedicated academic centre for teaching and research on climate justice. Prof Tahseen Jafry, the director of the centre, defines Climate justice

a concept which “recognises humanity’s responsibility for the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on the poorest and most vulnerable people in society by critically addressing inequality and promoting transformative approaches to address the root causes of climate change.”

- And to me, what that means and requires is that those of us who have benefitted from the practices that have caused climate change accept our personal and collective responsibility, and change our behaviour accordingly;
- And this is particularly important from an international development perspective, as Climate change now threatens to reverse the very progress that has been made in tackling global poverty in recent decades. As more countries, including the UK, have met the aid target of spending 0.7% of their income on development aid, frameworks like the Millennium Development goals have helped to dramatically reduce absolute poverty and increase access to health and education. But a changing climate, which displaces populations, which makes it harder for small-scale farmers to grow their own food, which devastates infrastructure through flooding and storms, puts all of that progress at risk.
- And so, the concept of climate justice requires us to go further than just traditional aid – there must be additionality in the financial and practical support provided to countries and communities hit by a changing climate.
- The Scottish Government has shown leadership in this area, and since 2012 has operated a dedicated climate justice fund: currently this supports a £3.2m Climate Challenge Programme Malawi (2017-2020) helping a select group of rural communities

to identify and implement their own solutions for adapting to and building resilience against the worst effects of climate change, contributing directly to many of the UN Global Goals, especially Goal 13 on climate action.

- And there is a broader Climate Justice Innovation Fund, launched in 2017 to support projects developing innovative solutions for strengthening African communities against the effects of climate change.
- Some of this kind of work I've been able to see first-hand. I've met farmers who have access to water all-year round thanks to solar-powered pumps which means they can irrigate their crops, growing enough to feed their families and send their children to school. But They need that irrigation because the rains do not fall are regularly and predictably as they once did. And even in the space of time since I first went to Malawi in 2005 an my most recent visit in 2019, the visible impact on parts of the country was clear.
- And this is borne out on a global level: climate change is real: NASA: "The current warming trend is of particular significance because most of it is extremely likely (greater than 95 percent probability) to be the result of human activity since the mid-20th century and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented over decades to millennia." And it identifies clear trends – Global Temperature Rise, Warming and Acidifying Oceans, Shrinking Ice Sheets, Glacial Retreat, Decreased Snow Cover, Sea Level Rise, Extreme Events – all of which will have devastating consequences for us all if action isn't taken.
- But we know action can be taken and change is possible:
 - The COP26 will build on many successful Historical examples

- Montreal Protocol 1987, to limit emissions which were damaging the Ozone Layer, and the swift concerted global effort to reduce these means scientists now project that the ozone layer will return to 1980 levels between 2050 and 2070
 - Kyoto protocol 1997 – first agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions, and which has been the bedrock of future agreements ever since – the most recently significant of which was the
 - Paris Accord, agreed in 2015: which sets a long-term temperature goal to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels; and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 °C – and that will require countries not just to hit specific targets but to keep these under review in light of scientific evidence.
 - And that will be one of the key roles of COP26, to review & expanding on Paris – and for countries individually and collectively to make more specific commitments on reducing emissions and supporting efforts to mitigate change that is already happening.
- And so, the delay presents some important opportunities
- Firstly around mobilisation, in very practical terms there is more time to plan end education, to bring together not just the civil society organisations already making an effort, but the trade unions, the universities, the new generations who mobilise using social media, and of course the churches who have always played such a key role in the campaigns of the past – such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign or Make Poverty History.
 - And the second opportunity is to learn lessons from pandemic – increasingly we hear voices who want society to ‘build back

better' and that investment to restart the economy should take the form of a 'green new deal' – so if this restart, this re-set, puts people and the planet at the heart of decisions, then the role of COP26 in bringing about global agreement becomes very significant indeed.

- So, as we prepare, there are some practical steps we can take
 - Personal action and lifestyle choices (also post-pandemic) – consumerism, transport – we can see and hear the impact of lockdown with cleaner air, quieter streets; people are getting more exercise from walking and cycling, which is good for health and the environment. And these little actions add up to significant change.
 - And people must take political action, calling for change, lobbying politicians – such as myself. In these weeks of lockdown, I've felt my own sense of accountability very keenly as constituents have been in touch with many of the difficult challenges facing them during the pandemic – and as representatives we have to give voice to those concerns in places where decisions are made. I cannot stress enough the importance of contacting local representatives, and we will need to hear those voices to keep the pressure on the global leaders at the COP.

- In all of this, there is much inspiration to be drawn from the teaching and examples of Pope Francis, particularly his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, on Care for our Common Home. 2020 is the fifth anniversary of its publication, which was timed to provide a rallying call in advance of the Paris COP in 2015. In the encyclical, the Holy Father asks all people of goodwill to hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the

poor” and is clear that “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all”. He says powerfully:

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- “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”
- So, in the new normal that the pandemic is creating, the COP26 in Glasgow must be a manifestation of that “summons to solidarity”, and it must deliver a “preferential option” for our poorest brothers and sisters. In the most recent days of the pandemic, the world, especially the young, have mobilised to the call of Black Lives Matter – and it is certainly the case that the people most affected by climate change around the world are not white.
- So, it would be right for those from a Christian perspective to see the COP Kairos moment – an appointed or an opportune time for radical change. After the pandemic, there is no going back to normal.
- Our economic structures, our health and social care systems, how we all interact on a daily basis – and how we think about the planet and each other here at home, and the poorest and most vulnerable around the world, will all change as a result of the pandemic

- – the question and opportunity is how to make that change for the better. Decisions made in our city next year will shape that change – so let's make the most of it.