

The Politics of Climate Change

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Climate change has, worldwide, affected the socio-economic livelihoods of individuals, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups. Ordinary rights-holders have been across the world often the most vulnerable victims of harmful effects of climate change. For instance, the floods in late October 2024 in the Valencia region of Spain illustrated that the negative impact of climate change, together with a lack of sufficient action on state and regional levels, can lead to disastrous environmental outcomes that interfere with human rights (Gamallo Carballude 2024, Benítez Ostos 2024). The Valencia floods have caused a death toll of over 220 ordinary persons that state and regional authorities could have prevented with different climate change adaptation and mitigation measures (Hidalgo Pérez, Clemente Pomedá, 2024). Nonetheless, a deplorable blame game started between public officeholders at different levels of the Spanish state and regional authorities in the ensuing weeks and months. The aftermath of a climate change disaster often does more bad than good for climate change resilience. The recent Spanish flood disaster illustrates that concrete answers on how to prevent and thereafter respond to negative impacts are often missing or are, in the best-case scenario, only partial. Blame games should be avoided, and adaptation and mitigation measures should be preferred.

The recent COP29 in Baku has illustrated that climate change adaptation and mitigation is increasingly turning into an ideological conflict between the Global South and the Global North. The full-fledged responses to tackle climate change on a global level are still missing. The main focal point is a discussion about

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how we will cover financial losses and damages for the negative impact of climate change. The Global South countries are placing the primary burden on states and corporations in the Global North to compensate for the adverse effects of climate change on human rights in countries of the Global North. The countries of the Global South present their cases in the form of climate justice deriving from human dignity, advocating that the Global North countries should fully recognise their obligations in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The countries in the Global South have always argued that the Global North has been historically responsible for the negative effects of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights. The Final outcome of COP29 was that the Global North countries agreed to the New Collective Quantified Goal, which would require them to transfer \$300 billion for the climate change adaptation and mitigation in the Global South countries. The New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance urged “...all actors to work together to enable the scaling up of financing to developing country Parties for climate action from all public and private sources to at least USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2035” (NCQUCF, para. 7)). The Goal argues that it “reaffirms, in this context, Article 9 of the Paris Agreement and decides to set a goal, in extension of the goal referred to in paragraph 53 of decision 1/CP.21, with developed country Parties taking the lead, of at least USD 300 billion per year by 2035 for developing country Parties for climate action...” (Ibid., para. 8). The funds are based three conditions; the plurality of financial sources (Ibid., 8 (a)); in the realm of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures (Ibid., 8 (b)), and “recognizing the voluntary intention of Parties to count all climate-related outflows from and climate-related finance mobilised by multilateral development banks...” (Ibid., 8 (c)). The Goals themselves remain essentially legally unbinding, programmatic, and declaratory. Nonetheless, they create soft-law commitments and pressure the Global North countries to bring about positive change. However, the language used by proponents of such or even higher commitments has been optimistic and perhaps utopian, as the realities of the international community and real life are more sobering (UNCTAD, 2024). As some commentators note, it will be difficult to translate such commitments into practice (The Economist, 2024).

The new climate finance goals on climate change mitigation are set ambitiously; however, they again employ the language of ideological division from the Cold War. Notably, small island countries from the Global North have submitted that they have disproportionately suffered due to climate change and have called for financial funding to address the negative impacts of climate change. They argue for creative funding mechanisms such as global taxes on energy sources most detrimental to climate change adaptation and mitigation, globally taxing the wealthiest persons, and globally taxing financial transactions and logistics.

A more holistic approach to climate change challenges is that all actors, either state or non-state, have responsibility and accountability in mitigating and adapting to climate change, thereby avoiding the blame game so often furtively seen in the international arena. The fact is that the negative impacts of climate change also occur in the Global North, not only in the Global South, and there is a need for concerted action from all parts and stakeholders. The politics of climate change should, therefore, focus on drafting binding commitments by taking a reasonable and human rights-based approach. Above all, it should attempt to avoid rule-of-law conflicts and vested interests and should centre on strengthening the position of rights-holders. Such a position could follow a holistic approach that includes accountability of state and non-state actors for business-related negative impacts on climate change. As a result, political leaders should leave the work in climate change adaptation and mitigation to experts, civil society and activists on the ground and avoid using it for private and short-sided aims.

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