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Managing the bumps on the Road to Paris

The dust from COP20 has (barely) settled and now with just 10 months left before COP21 in Paris, Parties need to come together on the way forward to the 2015 agreement.

In Geneva, Parties will start from where they left off the draft negotiating text that is annexed to the Lima Call for Climate Action decision. The current draft has many options on most issues, some of them highly divergent.

There are several key issues that need to be grappled with if we are to get a robust and ambitious post-2020 agreement in December. One of the most difficult is coming to a shared understanding of CBDR&RC (differentiation). This is at the heart of many of the divergent areas, and the differences were just papered over with the last-minute compromise of language in Lima. ECO believes that the earlier Parties attempt to move towards a common understanding on this issue, the easier it will become for the negotiations to make progress towards an ambitious outcome.

The need for a clear and transparent review mechanism within the Paris agreement is another issue. Even though there was no agreement in Lima to conduct a review of the first round of INDCs, an institutionalised review mechanism that not only assesses progress, but also enables countries to plug the ambition gap, is key to the environmental integrity of the agreement.

Civil society needs to be an active

participant within this review and it should be conducted in ear-nest, and in 5-year intervals. The UNFCCC has in the past seen many reviews that only point to the problem without enabling solutions. The review mechanism within the 2015 agreement needs to be different: it should enable and equip countries to bridge the gap between what science requires and what is being put on the table by each country.

This week, Parties should work to narrow down the options in the current text and clarify ideas they had presented earlier in order to produce an acceptable legal negotiating text by the end of the session. As parties start discussing Section C of the draft negotiating text today, here are some suggestions.

First, the agreement should state an obvious fact which even ECO's uncle and aunt would understand: the lower the level of mitigation ambition, the higher will be the adaptation needs, and the loss and damage from climate change impacts and the associated costs thereof, which will require much higher support to vulnerable countries and people who have not caused climate change. A good basis for addressing this continuum of mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage in Paragraph 4 of the current text. In today's thematic session, Parties should support this language, and make further efforts to operationalise it.

ECO believes the phase out of fossil fuel emissions and phase in of 100% renewable energy as early as 2050 should be the long-

term goal of 2015 agreement. Language reflecting this option should be added to the text coming out of Geneva. The text should also note that achievement of this goal rests on up ramping mitigation ambition within the pre-2020 period, as well as

countries putting ambitious INDCs on the table in Paris. Such timely action will not only reduce costs in the longer run, but can ensure that climate impacts are curtailed early on.

While these bumps collectively might appear daunting, they can be overcome through a mix of political will and good faith negotiating. People, businesses, and local authorities across the world are already showing the way; ECO calls on Parties here in Geneva to do the same.

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Pathway to zero

Career coaches assert that in order to be successful, you need to have a clear goal for what you want to achieve, then develop a pathway to get you there.

Today's negotiations on the long term goal of the Paris agreement are, therefore, critical to help de-fine our ultimate objective. That is: to reduce carbon emissions to zero and achieve a 100% renewable-powered world by 2050.

To have a likely chance to remain within the maximum 2°C warming threshold, the IPCC has provided us with a carbon budget of 1000 gigatonnes (CO₂eq). That's it. It's all we can spend until we achieve the magic zero by 2050. If current trends continue, we'll have spent a full third of it by 2020.

A growing number of companies, have endorsed staying within this carbon budget, recognising that the benefits of action far outweigh the costs of climate impacts. Unilever's CEO is just one of many calling for zero emissions by 2050.

The good news is that economics, as well as climate considerations, are already defining the end of the fossil era. China's 2014 decline in coal use shows that with political determination and strong targets and measures, the world's highest emitting country can peak their coal use well

before 2020.

The Economist recently reported that Saudi Arabia's profligate energy consumption means that "the country may have no oil to export by 2030" – a real spur for domestic innovation and diversification.

Clean energy is already the low cost option. In Jamaica, the price of solar power is the same as that of wholesale fossil-fuelled power and in Nicaragua, electricity from wind is half as expensive as power from traditional sources. Renewables are rapidly becoming cheaper all over the world, making the 100% renewable goal ever more attractive, and the decline of fossil fuels an ever-clearer reality.

And back here in Geneva, much of what needs to be in the text for today is already there. A few changes to C3.1 Option b, so that it requires global GHG emissions to fall by 70% (not 50%) and to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050, gets us to where we need to be. Adding a reminder that we need to transform the energy system so that we have "100% sustainable and renewable energy that meets the needs of all" seems like a goal to endorse.

As Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, put it: going for zero emissions by 2050 "will drive innovation, grow jobs, build prosperity and secure a better world. Why would we wait any longer to do that?"

Human rights protections for all

As you, dear negotiators, tackle Section C of the elements paper today, ECO urges you to think not just about numbers and principles, but about people. There should be unifying language in the general, operational section of the draft agreement text that recognises the human dimensions of climate change. We suggest:

"Parties shall, in all climate change-related actions, respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights for all".

240 organisations endorsed this language in a submission to the ADP co-chairs yesterday. It's also what each of the 76 independent experts of the UN Human Rights Council recommended in a joint statement to the UNFCCC Parties during COP20.

Looks familiar, right? Yes, yes, it's a lot like what's in the shared vision of the Cancun Agreements. Since Cancun, however, we have noticed that this reference hasn't done the job of ensuring that rights are adequately considered in climate policies. This language in Section C will help ensure that these principles apply to all pillars of the Convention.

Today is the day to make sure it lives on in Paris!

Why, you ask? Well, we can't escape the fact that climate change has human consequences. The lives and livelihoods of literally billions of people are riding on what comes out of this process, and this language is relevant to every element of the negotiating text.

It's also nothing new. Parties already have human rights obligations. This language, as in the Cancun Agreement's shared vision, helps spell that out in the context of climate change. And it helps make sure that Parties are looking out for their own people. No matter what delegation or constituency you represent, you care about your people. ECO knows you do. After all, you are a person too.

So as we kick off this week of negotiations, ECO and 240 organisations call on you to make sure Section C ensures that Parties respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights for all. That shouldn't be controversial, so just go do it!

When neutrality undermines Integrity

When ECO thinks of Switzerland we think of skiing, watches, neutrality, delicious chocolate and of course, the Environmental Integrity Group.

ECO appreciates that Switzerland negotiates as part of a group with the stated priority of "environmental integrity", but we wonder about Switzerland's own integrity when it comes to its domestic emissions and commitments?

During the Multilateral Assessment in Lima, Switzerland became very evasive when asked why it would not opt for a conditional target of negative 30% emission reductions by 2020. Perhaps it's because the country, to date, has merely achieved stabilisation of its absolute emissions. Switzerland offers population growth as a cheesy excuse for this lack of ambition. However, there is much more that Switzerland can do—like instituting policies to switch its population off of high-emitting oil heating systems, reducing per capita car ownership, addressing the startling fact that that average Swiss citizen racks up double the annual air miles of people in neighbouring countries.

ECO hopes that Switzerland will admit it has been off piste when it comes to climate ambition, and

demonstrate its integrity by delivering on its 2014 United Nations Climate Summit announcement that it will become carbon neutral.

Minister Doris Leuthard, who made that commitment in New York last September, is in a perfect position to deliver on it. How could she not be when she's responsible for Switzerland's policies on climate, energy, transportation (including aviation), forestry, environment, spatial planning and (tele)communication. It's exactly these sectors that need to change for Switzerland to make an ambitious effort in its INDC submission. ECO also seriously hopes the rumour that Switzerland intends to use carbon markets rather than striving for ambitious emission reductions at home is false. How would this fulfil a vision of carbon neutrality?

To top it off, Switzerland's move in Lima to avoid talking about the next steps for climate finance makes it even harder to see how Switzerland can claim to be a champion of environmental integrity. ECO calls on Switzerland to check its watch and realise how late in the day it is for climate action. On this issue, being neutral isn't a virtue – rather, it's time for bold action.