**A planet in peril**

BY J A M I L A H M A D 2021-12-07

THE recent UN Climate Conference in Glasgow (COP26) renewed pledges to enhance ambitions to reduce emissions and increase climate financing for low-income countries. A commitment was made to `phase down` the use of coal.  
  
Emanating from inside the conference rooms and echoing outside in the streets was a message that immediate climate action is needed globally. Reflecting this sentiment, the Glasgow Climate Pact demands urgent action to reduce emissions from 2010 levels by 45 per cent by 2030, and to net zero by midcentury. If these targets are achieved, it will be good news for the planet.  
  
Eighty per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the 20 largest economies, spelling doom for the planet as well as extracting a heavy toll on poorer nations.  
  
Even if emissions are cut drastically, the greenhouse gases already in our atmosphere can increase global temperatures by 2.4 degrees Celsius by the end of this century.  
  
However, the planetary crisis is already here. Many developing countries are enduringitsconsequencesintheshapeofdegraded ecosystems and shrinking economies. Africa and Asia are disproportionally affected by droughts, floods, crop failure, water stress and pollution. Those who are least responsible for climate change are suffering the most.  
  
Vulnerable and least equipped to absorb the impacts of environmental disasters, poor nations are on the front line of a war they did not start. Therefore, they seek `new and additional financial resources` from the industrialise d rich nations to enhance their resilience to the changing climate. Developing countries say that climate change is a matter of justice and intergenerational equity, a view that is increasingly shared by others.  
  
Talks in Glasgow were marked by dissensions between developed and developing countries on approaches to climate finance and on the question of `loss and damage`a euphemism for compensation to vulnerable countries affected by the emissions of wealthy nations, invoking the principle of historic responsibility.  
  
Current trends of climate finance are tilted in favour of mitigation. However, the severity of the crisis requires a balanced approach that not only prevents the rise of temperatures through mitigation by the wealthy, but also forestalls further environmental devastation among poor nations through effective adaptation policies.  
  
Adaptation to changing climate involves policies and measures that address the realities of the impacts of climate change: ensuring food security through climate-resilient crops; protecting cities and public infrastructure; dealing with reduced water availability;safeguarding coastlines and communities from sea-level rise, and better management of forests and lands.  
  
Pakistan, among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, will have to prioritise adaptation policies on a wider scale. In addition to planting trees, Pakistan must secure its growing urban sector, agriculture, energy and water management from environmental hazards.  
  
Implementing such critical adaptation plans would require huge amounts of funds that are beyond the reach of most developing countries. The as yet unmet 2009 pledge by wealthy nations of raising $100 billion annually for climate finance for developing countries will also be insufficient.  
  
The UN Environment Progamme`s Adaptation Gap Report 2021: The Gathering Storm released at Glasgow puts these costs in the higher end of an estimated $140bn$300bn per year by 2030 and $280bn-$500bn per year by 2050 for developing countries. It urges the world to `scale up public adaptation finance through direct investment and byovercoming barriers to private sector involvement`, while recommending stronger implementation of adaptation actions in developing countries.  
  
Reeling under debtandpoverty,the economic woes of low-income countrieshave worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, funds allocated to climate action may be diverted to other sectors.  
  
UNEP reports that `overall, estimated adaptation costs in developing countries are five to ten times greater than current public adaptation finance flows, and the gap is widening`. Urgent increase in financing and implementation of actions to adapt to the growing impacts of climate change is called for.  
  
In an encouraging signal, the Glasgow Climate Pact prodded developed countries to `at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation` to developing countries.  
  
To avert the gathering storm, the current pool of climate finance will have to be enlarged exponentially to serve mitigation and adaptation needs and ensure an effective strategy for adaptation to assist, equip and enable developing countries for urgent climate action. This is a prerequisite for creating a just, sustainable future for our fragile planet.  The writer is director of intergovernmental affairs, United Nations Environment Programme.