[**Rushing towards a calamity**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1658548/rushing-towards-a-calamity)

[Rafia Zakaria](https://www.dawn.com/authors/410/rafia-zakaria)Published November 17, 2021 - Updated 2 days ago

The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.

THE [climate summit](https://www.dawn.com/news/1657985) held in Glasgow did not produce the agreement that the ailing planet that we all inhabit so desperately needed. Many thousands of people attended, Covid-19 restrictions notwithstanding. Most came from the Western countries that are directly responsible for producing the crisis itself, and few, according to Mary Robinson, a former Prime Minister of Ireland, came with a “crisis” mindset that would lead to any sort of urgency in coming to a consensus.

When things wrapped up on Sunday, an agreement was reached, but it was lukewarm, with its most certain promise being another climate summit to be held in Egypt next year. The destination, that elusive master agreement to reduce emissions and reliance on fossil fuels, the hopeful seem to have decided, could perhaps be reached then. China and India, the two major countries currently responsible for much of the world’s emissions, that could not be persuaded to make concrete commitments this year, would perhaps feel the urgency to make changes more acutely another year from now.

Pollution levels in Lahore show why addressing the climate challenge cannot be put off to a later time.

This would be the most hopeful characterisation of the climate summit that was. A harsher assessment would be that this entire model of glitzy and massive diplomatic convenings, one that permits huge droves of bureaucrats within the world’s largely inept international institutions, mischaracterises the entire nature of the problem that sits before the world at this moment. There is no deep diving required to see why; the idea of thousands of delegates from all sorts of countries taking innumerable plane trips, burning thousands of gallons of fossil fuels to reach a destination where they hobnob with all the people that they haven’t been able to because of the Covid-19 pandemic, seems like the stupidest plan ever.

**Read**: [*UN chief warns climate catastrophe close, Thunberg trashes deal at COP26*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1658185)

If anything, the summit seems to be a raucous comeback event for the purveyors of global diplomacy and bureaucracy to announce that they were indeed back in business. That the format and waste that this meeting (to prevent waste and pollution) would produce was in itself an ironic example of how we got here as it seemed to be largely lost on those arranging, organising and then attending the discussions.

The truth of this could be heard through the statements made by those whose countries are actually in peril. One official from the Maldives, whose many island outposts stand to sink with the unceasing rise in sea levels, noted just this when she declared that whatever little agreements were cobbled together to make the whole get-together seem worthwhile were not enough to save her little country — this was in addition to the fact that most delegates from countries in the Global South could not even attend the summit because of the protracted Covid-19 precautions. Those countries, unlike nearly all the Western world, do not have ready access to Covid-19 vaccines and therefore could not produce all kinds of documentation or follow the quarantine requirements put in place for the summit.

One of the stumbling blocks in reaching global consensus on climate is the issue of money. At this moment, the global market in carbon offsets (via which polluting companies pay money for the pollution that they produce) means that rich countries get money from companies and corporations. Since rich countries are historically responsible for the pollution that now threatens the world, poor countries want access to some of the money from the sale of carbon offsets. They could then use this money to better fund measures that allow their populations to deal with climate-related illnesses. The United States and the European Union were against such a proposition.

This was not the only reservation regarding money. Another was over the fact that 10 years ago countries came together to create a $100 billion fund that would provide money to developing countries as ‘climate finance’, which would help them deal with the repercussions of climate change. This ‘fund’ is billions of dollars short because wealthy countries that promised to make large contributions have simply not paid up.

Then there is the other elephant in the room. It is perhaps best summed up by a quote from Malik Amin Aslam, an advisor to the prime minister of Pakistan on climate change. [Scoffing](https://www.dawn.com/news/1655944) at the distant net-zero goals being promised by countries like India, Aslam said: “With the average age of 60 I don’t think anyone in the negotiating room would live to experience that. That’s net zero in 2070.”

The statement is telling; wealthy countries that have already moved on from the heavy industry that produces the bulk of emissions and raises the global temperature are having trouble making the case to poorer countries, like India and even China, who still see manufacturing as the mainstay for their economies. So far, there does not seem to be much progress on this front or in convincing India and China that there may not be a habitable world remaining for them to parade the power they would earn from continuing to pollute in exchange for getting rich. The issue about age is also very pertinent. There is a huge generation gap between those who are 50 or older and have largely spent their lives in a world where smog and breathing issues were not part and parcel of living in any large city.

Even as the climate summit was gearing up, Lahore in Pakistan was declared the world’s most polluted city on Thursday last week, when the Air Quality Index rose above 700. This was the highest level the metropolis had ever recorded. The AQI has improved somewhat since then, but the fact remains that in the Global South, the rapid deterioration of living and breathing conditions is not something that can be postponed to a later date.

*The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.*

[**rafia.zakaria@gmail.com**](http://mailto:rafia.zakaria@gmail.com)

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