
**Commonwealth Secretary-General Statement
to the High Level Segment
of the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference
Paris COP21/CMP 11
on
Tuesday, 8 December 2015**

President of COP21, Hon Laurent Fabius; Excellencies; Delegates:

Climate change is having a catastrophic impact on the most vulnerable segment of the Commonwealth countries, especially small states. Apart from the development gains regularly and massively lost, there is a clear ethical and moral imperative to help building their resilience as the contribution of these states to the global carbon footprint is minimal, while they are visited by the worst consequences of global warming.

It is against this background that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta ten days ago held a Special Session on Climate Change, and our Leaders representing extraordinary global diversity underscored the collective responsibility of the Commonwealth through a **Commonwealth Leaders' Statement on Climate Action** which emphasised the goals of an international climate agreement that is robust, ambitious, balanced and implementable by all. The Prime Minister of Malta and Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, Hon Joseph Muscat, spoke to this statement last week at the COP21 Leaders' Event. A copy of the Leaders' Statement released on 28 November 2015 in Malta is attached.

In this Statement, Commonwealth Leaders encouraged, *inter-alia*, innovative sources of finance to fund national and international actions that address climate change through adaptation and mitigation. I would like to elaborate on one such initiative.

The **Multilateral Debt Swap for Climate Action** proposal to assist with resource mobilisation for climate action is an initiative that has been put forward by the Commonwealth. Many of our member states face a dual challenge. Climate finance is not flowing to those who need it most on account of capacity constraints, and many of these states also face crippling debt burdens, which adversely affects their ability to invest in adaptation and mitigation. The Commonwealth proposes a mechanism aimed at effectively addressing these two fundamental problems.

Our proposal is endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General, who attended the Commonwealth Special Session on Climate Change, and the UN system has supported it as an innovative idea that offers significant benefits to the smaller and more vulnerable countries whose economies struggle both with climate adaptation and mitigation, and with debt burdens. The proposal was conveyed by me as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth at a press conference in Malta on 27 November 2015, in the presence of Commonwealth Chair-in-Office Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, President François Hollande of France and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

In exchange for investments in climate adaptation and mitigation projects, the more vulnerable would have the prospect of multilateral debt written off using existing sources of climate finance. This would incentivise development and enhancement of national climate change plans and actions, building institutional capacity and aiding sustainability. The Commonwealth will assist in this through the **Commonwealth Finance Access Hub** which was also launched in Malta.

The proposal would also accelerate and increase disbursement of climate finance, allowing for adaptability according to circumstance and scale. This is a variant of a well-established mechanism - the debt-for-nature swap - with a climate change adaptation and mitigation focus on the most vulnerable.

The broad outline of the proposal can be seen on the website of the Commonwealth Secretariat (www.thecommonwealth.org).

Our Commonwealth position is clear: now is the time to take decisions to create new facts where they are needed in climate change. I assure you of the Commonwealth Secretariat's commitment to work with Governments and all partners towards this goal.



The Commonwealth



CHOGM
Malta 2015

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Malta, 27-29 November 2015

Commonwealth Leaders' Statement on Climate Action

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth's 53 member statesⁱ, represent in our diverse national circumstances and common purpose one third of the world's population spread across all continents and oceans. Our countries include some of the largest, smallest, wealthiest, poorest and most vulnerable on the planet. We represent more than one quarter of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Over half of us are least-developed countries, Small Island Developing States or both.

2 We are deeply concerned about the threat posed by climate change, which continues to grow and to put at risk the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of our member states and citizens. Many of our most vulnerable states and communities are already facing the adverse impacts of climate change, which can roll back decades of development gains; for some it represents an existential threat. Some are already suffering significant loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. The consequences of climate change can be a national catastrophe, requiring urgent responses and adequate support.

3 We recall the historical initiative by our host, Malta, in 1988 that resulted in the United Nations General Assembly recognising that, "climate change is a common concern of mankind, since climate is an essential condition which sustains life on earth" and the launching of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). We also recall past Commonwealth leaders' deliberations and statements including the *1989 Langkawi Declaration on the Environment* and the *2009 Port of Spain Climate Change Consensus: The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration*.

4 We recognise that, in our different ways and in varying proportions, our countries have all been contributing to climate change. At the same time, it is equally clear that least-developed countries and Small Island Developing States are bearing a disproportionate burden from the impacts of climate change. We are now mobilising global and national efforts to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and to achieve sustainable economic and technological transformation, both in mitigation and adaptation.

5 We recognise the scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, especially in its recent Fifth Assessment Report, on the nature and scale of the challenge and of the pathways to address it effectively. We also recognise the need to accelerate and intensify efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change in order to ensure sustainable and climate-resilient development.

6 In the current global effort to address climate change under the Convention, Commonwealth member states have submitted, as of 28 November 2015, 50 Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), whose mitigation components cover 17% of global emissions of greenhouse gases. We recognise that the aggregate impact of the INDCs submitted by Parties to the Convention is an important advance over business as usual. The collective ambition of mitigation efforts will need to be enhanced over time, with appropriate means of implementation, to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to keep climate resilience within reach. To demonstrate our commitment to global leadership, we declare that each of our Nationally-Determined Contributions registered in connection with the entry into force in 2020 of the expected 'Paris Agreement' will be at least as ambitious as the corresponding intended contribution.

7 We are committed to working towards an ambitious, equitable, inclusive, balanced, rules-based and durable outcome of COP21 that includes a legally-binding agreement in the form of a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties, reflecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in light of different national circumstances. Such an outcome, joined and implemented by all Parties, should put the global community on track towards low- emission and climate-resilient societies and economies.

8 In keeping with the theme of our meeting, 'The Commonwealth: Adding Global Value' and as an essential contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we shall work together and with all other Parties to achieve an outcome of COP21 that will:

- a) Stimulate sustainable economic growth and facilitate technology development and transfer, sharing of knowledge and information, and capacity-building support to developing countries, notably in the energy sector, ensuring the spread of climate-friendly prosperity with energy security;

- b) Give a clear signal of the need for deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions through mid-century and beyond, informed by the latest science, recognising that this challenge can only be met by an urgent global response in accordance with UNFCCC processes;
- c) Encourage nationally-determined measures aimed at:
 - (i) Promoting shifts to renewable, clean and low-emission energy, and discouraging wasteful consumption of fossil fuels, including through appropriate incentives and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies over the medium-term, taking account of the aims of poverty eradication;
 - (ii) Promoting long-term low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways.
- d) Support vulnerable states and communities in building their capacity for resilience and adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change, particularly rising sea levels, desertification and extreme weather events, recognising climate-related loss and damage as an important issue that needs to be addressed;
- e) Encourage public and private finance from traditional and innovative sources to fund national and international actions that address climate change through adaptation and mitigation;
- f) Mobilise transparent and accessible public finance from developed countries, with the option of complementary support by other countries, to help developing countries implement plans for adaptation and mitigation, taking into account the urgent and immediate needs of developing countries and communities that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change;
- g) Ensure a robust and facilitative system for accountability and transparency for all aspects of nationally determined contributions reflecting national circumstances and capabilities, and provide for periodic and regular reviews of collective progress with a view to increasing ambition over time; and
- h) Accord equal importance to mitigation and adaptation.

9 We underline the importance of practical and swift action to reinforce outcomes from COP21, especially for climate vulnerable states and communities.

10 The developed Commonwealth countries reaffirm their commitment to play their part in mobilising US\$100 billion per annum by 2020 to address the adaptation and mitigation needs of developing countries, in the context of meaningful mitigation actions, drawing on a wide variety of sources.

11 Our *Commonwealth Charter* describes the protection of the environment as one of our fundamental values, and recognises common action and inclusiveness amongst our fundamental principles. We are, therefore, especially committed to encouraging and welcoming contributions to the required solutions by all concerned. Climate change demands a multi-national and stakeholder approach including in mobilising means for implementation of global and national actions. This includes but is not limited to local, national, and regional governments, regional and international organisations, the private sector, the voluntary and not-for-profit sector, professional bodies and civil society, and individual citizens.

12 We welcome the efforts already in hand by the Commonwealth to strengthen access to existing and new climate finance for small and other climate vulnerable states, including the new initiative of a Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub, and encourage the mobilisation of resources for the Hub. We also welcome the Commonwealth Green Finance Facility initiative, which will explore options for mobilising private finance to help fund sustainable infrastructure projects across the Commonwealth. We applaud the creation of the pioneering global Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network, and the commitment and contributions of this Network and other Commonwealth partners to the realisation of our collective aspirations and to sharing responsibility by all for securing climate stability and safety to the benefit of present and future generations.

13 We express our appreciation to the Special Guests who have joined us at our Special Session on Climate Action, pledge our support to France as host of COP21 in delivering a successful and ambitious outcome, and request the Prime Minister of Malta, Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, to deliver this message of Commonwealth ambition and determination to COP21.

ⁱ There were reservations expressed on parts of paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 by one country