

Harry Kennard 0:18

Hello and welcome to Episode Four of the climate change and health podcast. I'm Harry Kennard from the UCL Energy Institute. Today's episode is a slight deviation from normal proceedings. I don't have anyone to interview, but with COP 26 in Glasgow mere days away, I'm going to attempt to condense the history of the UN Environment and Climate conferences into a brief podcast. I've been delving into the UN archives to find out what has and hasn't changed in the last 50 years. We begin long before the COP started in 1972 atmospheric levels of CO₂ around 327 parts per million.

UN reporter 0:58

Stockholm, Sweden June 12 1972, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India arrived today to address the first United Nations Conference on the human environment. He was met by the Secretary General of the conference, Mr. Maurice Strong, who escorted Mrs. Gandhi to the rostrum.

Indira Gandhi 1:16

It is clear that the environmental crisis which is confronting the world will profoundly alter the future destiny of our country. No one amongst us, whatever our status, strength or circumstance can remain undetected.

Harry Kennard 1:34

In those days, greenhouse gases were far from central to the agenda. Some of the themes would be recognisable to those who think about the environment and the climate today, but much of the language now sounds very outdated, and parts of it even quite strange. There was a framing of health to many of the conference declarations for example, principle seven,

Anna Carow 1:53

States shall take all possible steps to prevent pollution of the Seas by substances that are liable to create hazards to human health to harm living resources and marine life, to damage amenities or to interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea.

Harry Kennard 2:07

But carbon dioxide is mentioned only once in recommendation 57.

Anna Carow 2:12

It is recommended that the Secretary General take steps to ensure proper collection, Measurement and Analysis of data relating to the environmental effects of energy use and production within appropriate monitoring systems. That design and operation of such networks should include in particular, monitoring the environmental levels resulting from emission of carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, oxidants, nitrogen oxides, heat and particulates, as well as those from releases of oil and radioactivity.

Unknown Speaker 2:44

And climate change and recommendation 79

Anna Carow 2:48

that approximately 10 baseline stations be set up with the consent of the states involved in areas remote from all sources of pollution in order to monitor long term global trends in atmospheric constituents and properties, which may cause changes and meteorological properties, including climatic changes.

Harry Kennard 3:07

Fast forward to 1979 CO₂ is up 3% in the five years in Stockholm 337 parts per million, the First World climate conference is convened in Geneva. This wasn't a UN Conference per se, but it solidified the evidence base behind anthropogenic climate change. And the scientists in attendance unanimously agreed that action was urgently necessary. It ultimately led in 1988 to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change the IPCC. This is the group of scientists who establish what the best available evidence is on global warming, climate change and its impact. The next big milestone is the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, UNCED, or as it was more popularly known, the Rio Earth Summit. It was June 1992, atmospheric CO₂ hit 360 parts per million. Here's the then UN Secretary General Maurice strong in the run up to the conference.

Maurice Strong 4:02

So this will be the first global summit conference ever mandated as such, and if it's in my view, his success is going to be difficult to achieve. But whether it succeeds or fails, and I can't I think failures on thinkable. But it will be a great historic event and it will be one of the most important events of our times. The people say well, what do you think? Why, you know, why is it Why are you so optimistic? Well, I'm a realist. I'm a pretty practical person. But I believe we will succeed because we have to succeed, there is no option and if we don't win, we win in our times, will we get the leaders of all the countries in the world to get together again, to address these issues and will it not be too late? By the time we wait for another opportunity, which might not come for a generation So it will be a sort of an historic event. And that's why we you know, we have to do everything possible to ensure that during this process of build up to it, there we, the people of the world understand the importance of the decisions to be taken there, and that the power of the people is behind. The leaders who assemble at the summit of the summit isn't just detached from its base.

Harry Kennard 5:28

you'll recognise that his words sound quite familiar in the context of UN conferences on the climate. One of the central outcomes of this meeting was the establishment of the Framework Convention on Climate Change un f Triple C, the objective of that convention was the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. But one of the weaknesses of this convention is the ambiguous wording What does dangerous mean? And crucially, who is it dangerous for one of the results of the UN f Triple C was the agreement to meet yearly at the Conference of Parties or COPs. The first one of major note is the Kyoto conference in 1997. This was caught three atmospheric levels of CO₂ and hit 364 parts per million. The result of this conference was to extend the UN Framework Convention and establish broad outlines on emissions targets, but nothing was binding or particularly ambitious. Us lawmakers refused to ratify the agreement as it contained no requirements for commitments from developing nations. And without the support of the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the treaty was doomed to fail. Later, Canada would withdraw 12 years

after that hopes were incredibly high for a meaningful improvement on Kyoto as leaders met in Copenhagen at COP 15. emissions had grown 40% since the Kyoto meeting, and CO₂ in the atmosphere had reached 387 parts per million. The outcome of this meeting was total failure. Only a week political statement resulted. negotiators returned to the drawing board. And then 18 years after Kyoto, Paris 2015, COP 21 CO₂ had passed 400 parts per million in the atmosphere.

Laurent Fabius 7:11

"I note no objections, the Paris Climate Change Accords are accepted"

Anna Carow 7:21

this agreement and enhancing the implementation of the convention, including its objective aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, and the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, including by a holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre industrial levels. recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change, be increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production. And C, making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development.

Harry Kennard 8:14

So what's left to be done? Well, even though the Paris Agreement finally established a framework, which covered global emissions, which followed the recommendations of the IPCC, in limiting warming to well below two degrees C, and required each nation to submit and update their nationally determined contributions or NDCs, it still faces many hurdles, and ultimately isn't binding, and it relies on the goodwill of each nation to establish the emissions cuts necessary to avoid this warming. So that takes us to COP 26 in Glasgow, which is the deadline for improving on commitments after Paris. Let's hear from the now UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on where things stand.

António Guterres 8:55

On Friday, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change issue the report on the national determined contributions the commitments of all parties to the Paris agreements. Based on the present commitments of member states, the world is on a catastrophic best way to 2.7 degrees of heating instead of 1.5. We all agree should be the limits. And science tells us indeed that any single above 1.5 degrees would be a disaster. To limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, we need the 45% cut in emissions by 2030. So we can reach carbon neutrality by mid century, instead of the commitments made until now by countries imply an increase of 16% in greenhouse gas emissions, not a decrease of 45%. Any increase of 16% in greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 compared to 2010 levels and these means that unless we collectively change course, there is a high risk of failure of COP 26. So today asked leaders to do what is needed to make sure COP 26 is a success, and that it marks a true turning point.

Harry Kennard 10:17

So there we have it, once again at a critical juncture for the world's climate emissions are still rising. The reduction seen as a result of the covid 19 pandemic have been reversed. There are signs of hope if you look hard enough, but whether anything meaningful results from COP 26 we'll find out soon enough.

You've been listening to the climate change and health podcast. I'm Harry Kennard and if you'd like to get in touch, you can find me on Twitter. I'd like to acknowledge the audio clips included in this podcast. They come from the UN audio visual library, you can find that <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/> I'd also like to thank Anna Kuro for reading the UN declarations and of course Kevin MacLeod for supplying the music. Finally, I'd like to point you towards the work that members of the Bartlett faculty of the built environment have been doing and the Raptor cup. These podcasts fit into that work, you can have a look at a whole host of resources related to climate change and buildings <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/together-climate-action>. Please have a look and thanks very much for listening.