



Statement to the American House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber

**Written statement
by Ms Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC**

Bonn, 20 April 2021

Thank you to Chairman Keating and to Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber for extending this invitation.

I was pleased to recently join US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, and welcome the return of the United States to the Paris Agreement. I repeat what I said then: we look forward to the resumption of America's leadership role in efforts to address global climate change.

Members, the Paris Agreement is a covenant of hope with the people of the world backed by a global plan of action. It represents the value and necessity of multilateralism when the world needs it most.

Through multilateralism, the world has dramatically reduced extreme poverty, eradicated major diseases, vaccinated against many others and begun to repair the ozone layer. The United States, through various administrations, has been instrumental in each of these efforts.

Multilateralism, at its core, is a recognition that international and domestic concerns are often deeply intertwined. While COVID-19 is the most recent example, nothing exemplifies this dynamic more than our existential climate change crisis.

Climate change recognizes no borders, reflects no political parties, and respects no ideologies. It's coming regardless. As we increasingly see in the United States and elsewhere, it's already here.

The science is clear. It tells us that 2020 was among the hottest three years on record globally, that the past decade was the hottest in human history, that ocean heat is at record levels and that carbon dioxide levels have never been higher.

What science doesn't measure, human misery does.

Between 2000 and 2019, more than 475,000 people lost their lives as a direct result of more than 11,000 extreme weather events globally.¹

The United States, the world's second-largest CO2 emitter, is not immune.

Using data compiled by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information, the United States has experienced **291** weather and climate disasters since 1980 in each of which overall damages reached or exceeded \$1 billion.² **The total cost in this time period exceeded \$1.9 trillion, a number that continues to grow. In 2020 alone there were 22 billion-dollar disasters, the most on record.**

Again, this is about more than money. There were more than 15,000 weather and climate disaster-related deaths in the United States between 1980 and 2020.

Break those numbers down and they get worse by decade.

There were 2,870 climate disaster-related deaths in the 1980s.

In the 1990s there were 3,045.

In just the last five years, there were 3,969.

This is devastating for so many; in the United States and throughout the world, especially the most vulnerable. Over the long term, climate change is a threat to humanity's very existence on this planet.

Despite this, nations have not yet moved the Paris Agreement from adoption to implementation. Nor have they fulfilled its commitments.

The recent NDC Synthesis Report, which covers national climate action plans submitted by December 2020, reveals that we are very far away from meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit global temperatures to 1.5°C by the end of the century.

¹ Source: [Germanwatch](#)

² Source: [NOAA](#)

The report shows that, at the current rate, nations will achieve only less than a 1% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 2010 levels. The IPCC calls for that reduction to be 45% lower.

To say current levels are insufficient is an understatement.

We need stronger, more robust national climate action plans in 2021 and we need them as soon as possible—including from the United States.

Members, we recognize that 2021 is the year of tough decisions. But making the tough decisions — the *right* decisions — could result in a dramatic turning point in human history.

Tough decisions require leadership, courage and determination. The responsibility for making them are not America's alone, but by leading the transformation towards an unprecedented era of growth, prosperity and hope, America will benefit and thrive.

This transformation can only happen if nations build forward from COVID-19, by structuring resilient, sustainable and green post-recovery economies that are aligned with the Paris Agreement.

And it must carry through to the milestone event of COP26 in November. While always important, these negotiations are now crucial.

COP26 represents nothing less than a credibility test for our collective efforts to address climate change, implement the Paris Agreement and continue building climate ambition.

To achieve success, Parties must:

- fulfill promises previously made;
- wrap up outstanding negotiation items;
- raise ambitions in mitigation, adaptation and finance;
- and bring State and non-State voices together to continue building climate ambition.

Each represents an incredible amount of work. Progress will not be easy. To achieve good outcomes, we need a good negotiations process, and that depends on trust, leadership and inclusivity.

We look to nations such as the United States to provide both signal and example.

In addition to submitting a strong NDC, nothing would signal this leadership more than ensuring developed nations fulfil their Paris Agreement pledge to mobilize \$100 billion annually in funding for developing countries to support their action on mitigation and adaptation.

If the finance commitment is not fulfilled, the credibility of the entire process will be undermined.

This should not be seen as an act of generosity, but rather *as an investment for the benefit of recipients and donors alike.*

It is an act of solidarity, but also of self-interest. Unless the transformations required to face our climate emergency take place in every country in the world, climate change will continue to affect us all.

The obligation to support the efforts of developing countries cannot be ignored. Establishing trust here would provide a solid foundation for all subsequent work and negotiations. After all, we cannot expect future commitments to be made if past commitments have not yet been met.

Chairman Keating and Subcommittee Members:

For all Parties at COP26 the message is clear: *this is the time to find the balances and compromises that will allow us to strengthen our common efforts against the climate emergency and to unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement. Billions of eyes look to you.*

We look forward to the US being a valuable leader throughout those discussions and as we work collaboratively, multilaterally, to build a clean, green, sustainable and prosperous future.

Thank you.