

Political Hypocrisy at COPS26

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COPS26 is the UN Climate Conference held at Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom from October 31 to November 13, 2021. Global Climate Summits called COPS (short for Conference of the Parties) have been held by the UN for the past three decades. Almost every country on earth is represented at this conference. This was the 26th annual conference, hence known as COPS26. Below are some thoughts on the hypocrisy of world leaders at COPS26.

If hypocrisy were a type of fuel, the 20,000 attendees at COPS26 would have solved the climate crisis at a stroke. Amazon owner Jeff Bezos flew in to Glasgow in his £48million Gulfstream jet, leading a 400-strong parade of private aircraft transporting billionaires to the climate conference. The jets will disgorge more carbon into the atmosphere in a few days than 1600 Scots burn through in a year. And the reason these plutocrats are flying in to Glasgow, of course, is to wag their fingers at ordinary people, insisting we reduce our carbon emissions or face the wrath of the next generation. 'It's one minute to midnight,' Boris Johnson warned, neglecting to mention that he has taken more than 20 private flights since becoming Prime Minister.

Perhaps the ultimate example of these double standards is a Sky chief executive who has not been shy about lecturing her rivals for not doing enough to promote the green agenda. So, is she leading by example? Not exactly. For the first six months of her term as chief executive, she 'commuted' to Sky's London headquarters from her home in Philadelphia via private jet. That meant she completed the 7,000-mile round trip multiple times before she relocated to London in June.

At least the billionaires will be able to say they used electric cars to ferry them from Glasgow Airport to the conference centre. Jaguar Land Rover is another sponsor of the talks and has placed 240 electric vehicles at the disposal of the VIPs. But it turns out Glasgow doesn't have enough charging points to service this enormous fleet, so the organisers of the conference have helpfully supplied oil-fuelled generators that can be cranked up to power the 'eco-friendly' vehicles.

When challenged about this absurd piece of environmental theatre, the Cabinet Office responded that these aren't diesel-powered generators. Oh no. These are 'green' generators that run on cooking oil, spewing out less CO₂ than common-or-garden lawnmowers. That's alright then. At least they're trying, I suppose.

The same cannot be said for the President of the United States, who arrived in Glasgow on Air Force One, accompanied by four other large aircraft. In addition to pumping out 2.2 million pounds of carbon to attend Cop26, Joe Biden stopped in Rome on the way, where he paraded around in an 85-car motorcade. His own car, a 9,000kg armoured Cadillac known as 'the Beast', which was flown to Glasgow from the US, only does eight miles to the gallon.

Perhaps all this mind-boggling hypocrisy would be forgivable if the climate conference were likely to result in a net reduction in the planet's carbon emissions, even if ordinary people will have to pay the price. But given that the leader of China – the world's biggest CO2 producer – didn't even bother to attend in person, Cop26 will be a colossal waste of time.

Many people around the world already consider the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow a disappointment. That is a massive understatement. Global leaders – especially in the developed world – still fail to grasp the gravity of the climate challenge. Although they acknowledge its severity and urgency in their speeches, they mostly pursue short-term national interests and make conveniently distant 'net-zero' emissions pledges without clear and immediate commitments to act.

Rich countries, which are responsible for the dominant share of global carbon-dioxide emissions to date, are dithering on longstanding commitments to provide climate finance to developing countries. The declared COP26 promises also reveal the developed world's double standards. A group of 20 countries, including the US, pledged to end public financing for "unabated" fossil-fuel projects, including those powered by coal, by the end of 2022. But the prohibition applies only to international projects, not domestic ones.

The climate finance commitment is now 12 years old. At COP15 in Copenhagen, advanced economies promised to provide \$100 billion per year to the developing world, and the 2015 Paris climate agreement made it clear that all developing countries would be eligible for such financing. This amount is trivial relative to developing countries' need, which is in the trillions of dollars, and also when compared to the vast sums that rich countries have spent on fiscal and monetary support for their economies during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the developed world has not fulfilled even this relatively modest pledge. In 2019, total climate finance channeled to developing countries was less than \$80 billion.

As it has been said, hypocrisy is the compliment vice pays to virtue. To put it another way, for the international billionaire class and their political bag-carriers, signalling virtue is more important than actually being virtuous.

Questions

- 1) What are the roots of the hypocrisy of the political leaders at the conference? What do they want to really achieve?
- 2) What does the Quran say exactly about this type of hypocrisy? Check 61:2-3. Read about the importance of matching words with actions - <https://academyofislam.com/reflection-no-239-on-q-612-matching-your-actions-with-your-words/>