



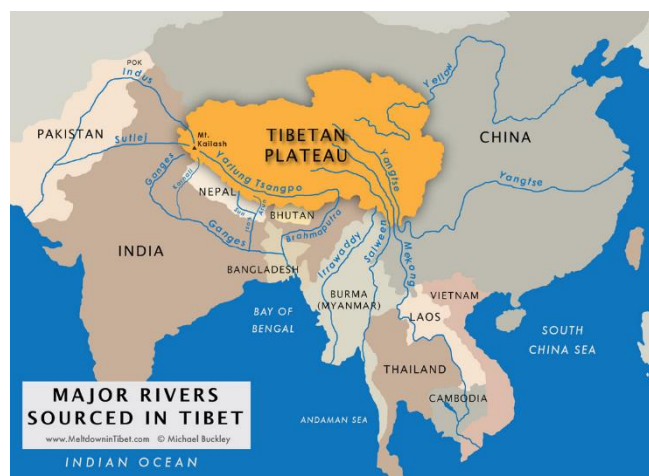
Tibet's Climate Crisis Can No Longer Be Ignored

COP 26 fails by excluding Tibetan and other frontline community voices

The climate crisis in Tibet will directly impact approximately half the world's population and the indirect effects will reach even further. This is a reality which the Chinese government has attempted to obscure, and which too many governments have been only too happy to ignore, for far too long. They can do so no longer.

Climate Change in Tibet

The Tibetan Plateau is a fragile and strategically critical ecosystem that is extremely sensitive to climate change. Changes in the Plateau ecosystem significantly impact regional and global weather patterns, river systems and biodiversity. Tibet is warming 2-4 times faster than the global average. Current predictions report 36% of the glaciers along the Hindu Kush and Himalayan range will be gone by 2100, even if global warming is limited to 1.5 °C. If emissions are not cut, the loss increases to two thirds. Such changes are expected to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather conditions such as snowstorms, floods and droughts. Warmer temperatures will also lead to increased permafrost subsidence, which can cause landslides and avalanches.



Perhaps the greatest issue, however, is water security. Most of Asia's major rivers originate in Tibet and rely on meltwater from glaciers and permafrost during the dry seasons. If the glaciers disappear then so does the water supply. Some 1.4 billion people live within the watersheds of these rivers, depending upon them directly for freshwater supplies, while close to 4 billion people are fed by agriculture and industry dependent upon those supplies – approximately half the world's present population.

The role of water scarcity as a trigger for conflict is well documented and there is a high risk of regional or even international conflicts emerging as climate breakdown

starts to cause acute food and water shortages. It is also likely that the areas most severely affected by climate change will become incapable of sustaining their current populations, leading to mass migration and creating the potential for further conflict.

What is happening to Tibet's environment today is the result of global warming, exacerbated by the political disenfranchisement of the Tibetan people and the policies of the Chinese government in Tibet. Prior to the Chinese invasion, Tibet's environment enjoyed the protection of natural geographic barriers and the majority of Tibetans maintained a sustainable lifestyle based on farming and nomadic pastoralism. Since the 1980s, policies such as grassland privatisation and fencing, the enforced resettlement of at least 1.8 million nomads, urbanisation and in-migration combined with increased mining, damming and infrastructure projects, have altered the ecosystem, increased desertification and accelerated the effects of climate change. These policies have been rolled out under the guise of economic development or environmental conservation with limited consultation and to the serious detriment of local Tibetans and the environment.

Tibetan Representation at COP 26

Despite the clear strategic importance of Tibet and its environment, there has been no official Tibetan representation at COP 26 and climate change on the Tibetan Plateau has not been adequately addressed. The Cross-Party Group on Tibet (CPGT) is greatly concerned by both of these issues.

The CPGT welcomes the fact that an unofficial Tibetan delegation was present at COP 26, comprised of women from the Tibetan government-in-exile and leading NGOs, including:

- Tenzin Choekyi, Senior Researcher, Tibet Watch
- Dechen Palmo, Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute, Central Tibetan Administration
- Palmo Tenzin, Advocacy & Research Officer, International Campaign for Tibet
- Dr Lobsang Yangtso, Environmental Researcher, International Tibet Network
- Pema Doma, Campaigns Director, Students for a Free Tibet



L-R: Tenzin Choekyi, Palmo Tenzin, Pema Doma, Dechen Palmo, Dr Lobsang Yangtso

Policy Recommendations for Climate Justice in Tibet

The CPGT secretary, Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, met with the Tibetan delegation and attended the COP 26 side events which they hosted in Glasgow. The CPGT would like to commend the incredible work of the delegation and, in particular, the briefing paper which they produced. The key recommendations stated in that paper, and which the CPGT wholeheartedly endorses, are as follows:

1. Recognise the strategic and ecological importance of Tibet and the wider Tibetan Plateau, acknowledging its unique biodiversity, its impact on regional weather patterns and its place at the heart of food and water security in Asia.
2. Improve access and transparency in scientific research on climate change, with particular focus on encouraging the inclusion of Tibetan experts in collaborative work.
3. Adopt a rights-based approach which empowers and engages frontline communities and respects the value of traditional knowledge.



L-R: Ross Greer MSP, Sonam Tsering Frasi, Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, Mercedes Villalba MSP, Tsering Tsomo

Sonam Tsering Frasi, Representative of the Dalai Lama for the UK and Northern Europe, was also in Glasgow to attend COP 26, together with Tsering Tsomo from the Office of Tibet. The CPGT Co-Conveners, Ross Greer and Mercedes Villalba, and the CPGT Secretary met with them in Glasgow to discuss the current situation in Tibet, the experience of COP 26 and ways that the Scottish Parliament could support Tibet. CPGT member, Alex Cole-Hamilton, also met with the representatives at Holyrood.

One of the clear themes emanating from COP 26 is a strong call for greater inclusivity – for civil society, frontline communities and indigenous peoples to be represented and involved. There is an incredible depth of knowledge and experience within these communities, which is simply being wasted by their exclusion. Echoing the Tibetan

delegation's call for a rights-based approach, the CPGT strongly encourages a more collaborative and inclusive approach to tackling the climate crisis.

The other theme which the CPGT would like to highlight, and which is related to the first, is the sense of urgency which is keenly felt by frontline communities, including those across Tibet, but which seems to be lacking in so many of those around the negotiating tables. Climate breakdown is not a possibility or something which will happen in the distant future. It is happening now. Frontline communities are feeling the impact now. Tibet is in climate crisis and urgently requires a response which matches the challenge of climate change in scale, character and complexity. The COP 26 agreement is a small step in the right direction but ultimately falls short.