

The Challenges of COP26

By Mohamed Khalil

I will share with you some views and remarks with regard to the challenges related to COP26, to kick off the discussion and the debate so that we can have, as you rightly pointed out, an interactive discussion and interactive dialogue.

The first type of challenge is related to the year where we are: 2020, five years after the adoption of Paris, and also the year when the real and effective implementation of the Paris agreement should start. And here we have a challenge related to the management of expectations, as this is the year when the Paris agreement should start being implemented. Of course, expectations are high with regard to what is expected as an outcome from COP 26. Definitely the issue of managing the expectation is a major challenge for COP26.

The other major and most important challenge is related to the question of ambition.. raising the ambition. There is a need to increase ambition with regard to three main issues: to reduce GHG emissions, and with regard to adaptation as well as finance.

The problem is that the small incremental steps approach that used to be the way of doing things in climate change is not sufficient anymore. We need to go big. We need to go deep. And we need to be very ambitious with that, because climate change is no longer a distant threat for future generations.

It is the defining challenge for the current ones. The Paris agreement sets an objective of limiting the temperature to two degrees and to below two degrees to be 1.5. Now the science is telling us that in order to achieve that, we need not to exceed 40 Giga tons of CO2 equivalent by 2030 and not to exceed 24 in order to reach the one point five degrees. The current trajectory, if we are following a business as usual scenario, is leading us to from fifty nine to fifty three gigatons, This shows the burden that we need to deal with and this is why we need we need to multiply the level of ambition and to go well beyond what we are currently doing. This is a challenging task for COP26 is to raise ambition in an unprecedented way

All these challenges were there before the covid-19 crisis.

So, of course, after the covid-19 crisis, the task is much more difficult and much more challenging now because there is the need to resist the tendency from countries to step back under the pressure from the covid-19 crisis, and we need to resist and encourage countries not to fall in the trap of addressing a systemic crisis by parking another one. But I believe also that the covid-19 crisis provides important and good lessons with regard to dealing with the climate imperative and climate urgency. The first one, I believe it's a preview. We've been talking a lot about the impacts of climate change. Of course, it can be fatal and extreme weather events that are taking place from time to time here and there in different corners of the globe are providing an evidence. But we have never witnessed what a systemic crisis would look like, and the covid-19 gives us a perfect example of that. And the only difference is the pace, the pace at which the crisis is taking place, of course, much more expensive than the climate one. But in terms of magnitude, in terms of the crosscutting effect and in terms of the complexity and multidimensional impact, it's very similar to what is

happening with the climate. So this gives us a tool, too, in terms of messaging and in terms of pressing on the urgency aspect of it to explain to not only the those who are relevant or dealing with the matter of the special person, but even for the public. Now, they can have a preview of what we are talking about is going to look like.

Also, another lesson from the covid-19 is that when the danger is imminent, the potential is unlocked and swift actions are taking place and we've seen this in the responses to the covid-19 how countries rushed to a stimulus programs, how actions were taken in a swift way, and even public money suddenly with an unprecedented large scale was available. And one would come to a question why the same thing is not happening with the climate. What is the problem? Why we are not reacting the same way to the climate crisis if we all agree that it is something that it's going to be systematic as well and even it can be part of a much bigger and much larger magnitude. Is there a problem with the messaging, is there a problem with the communication and dialogue with the public and people and with the different stakeholders? I think this is something worth reflection.

Also, another lesson that is important and directly linked to the climate issue is the issue of finance, because I believe the issue of finance has been always the big elephant in the room that can unlock the potential to reach a solution or not. And I think the 2010 Cancún conference is a good example of that, that when there is a progress on the finance track, we can achieve good and important results as well.

So the issue of finance is relevant here because it has been always argued that public finance is not enough and we cannot mobilize public finances. But what we have seen with the covid-19 crisis is that countries managed to provide a stimulus package and huge and unprecedented levels from public finances.

So apparently, again, when really the issue is pressing and when there is a will and there is a need, then we can find solutions.

As I said, there are challenges related, of course, to COP26 even before the covid-19, which are related to reducing GHG emissions, progressing well with regard to adaptation and finance.

But even it becomes much more difficult and much more challenging with the COVID-19 Crisis. And I think. However, there are some good news. Not enough, of course, but good steps are taking place, as Marion pointed out in her remarks that we've been seeing lately, an announcement from countries to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and by 2060. This applies to the EU, China, Japan and Korea.

And of course, these are encouraging signals. But we would like to see more countries to come forward in this regard. We would like to see strong leadership from developed countries with regard to emission reductions and with regard to provision of finance.

And I believe if we can get the right signals, this will help addressing the challenges related to COP26.