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Increasing climate ambition: the challenge of the year

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For the first time since the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), we are likely to see a year without a Conference of the Parties (COP), as the Chilean Presidency has requested a postponement of COP 25 to January 2020. However, 2019 has been heralded as the year of climate ambition with several major events, culminating with the [Climate Summit](#) organised by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on 23 September in New York.

2020: a major deadline to put ambition back on track

According to the Paris Agreement on Climate, by the end of 2020 countries must renew or step up their climate commitments (known as “nationally determined contributions”, or NDCs) submitted in 2015. These must represent a progression compared to previous contributions, and reflect the “highest possible ambition” (Article 4.3). For each country to be able to present new commitments in the next 18 months, they will need to dedicate 2019 to making preparations, particularly through national dialogue processes and consultations to develop long-term low-carbon transition strategies that give coherence to these successive steps. Where do we start from today to give substance to this mechanism of ambition?

The previous climate conference—COP 24, held in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018—fell short in terms of ambition: it was unable to respond to the scientific urgency or to people’s concerns, and nor was it able to create a real political impetus for deepening and accelerating climate action. Too little was done to put this issue of “ambition” and its increase at the heart of the debate last year, because it was not among the priorities announced by the Polish Presidency. All that was achieved was a joint call by the Fijian and Polish Presidencies to do more, at the end of the “[Talanoa Dialogue](#)”, a formal exercise aimed at [taking stock of global efforts](#). Only the [Marshall Islands](#), one of the world’s lowest emitters, submitted their second NDC prior to COP 24, while only a few other countries have indicated their intention to review their plans at this stage, including New Zealand and fourteen European countries through the Luxembourg declaration.

Events focused on ambition

The summit convened by Antonio Guterres aims to improve this situation by reminding heads of states and governments of their responsibilities. By providing a high-level platform for actual initiatives aimed at limiting greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience, and by bringing together governments, the world of finance and business, as well as civil society, the Secretary-General hopes to generate international momentum, which would translate into more ambitious national policies and long-term commitments consistent with limiting the rise in temperatures to 1.5°C. While there remains uncertainty regarding the number of countries that will bring firm new commitments, this summit aims to demonstrate, once more, the many possible actions in key sectors that have a strong potential to reach the global objective. Partnerships between “leader” countries and institutions have thus been designated as volunteers to drive this dynamic on topics such as energy transition (Denmark/SE4All), industrial transition (India) and climate finance (France/Jamaica).

One of the challenges of this summit will be to avoid a repetition of the one held five years ago on the initiative of the previous Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon: one year before the COP 21, the issue was to convince governments not only that technical solutions to climate change actually existed, and were economically viable, but also that companies and citizens were ready to commit to this low-carbon transition, to define our collective destiny in an international treaty. Five years later, the challenge is no longer the same, since there have been many opportunities to demonstrate this, such as the [Global Climate Action Summit](#) (GCAS) held in September 2018 in California. The aim now is to demonstrate coherence between words and actions, between the collective objective defined by the international community and the deployment of national policies.

The One Planet Summit, held by France since 2017, is part of this dynamic—going beyond marginal adjustments and initiating a real systemic transformation—which will be reproduced in 2019 at two events that may feed the UN summit: the first in March in Nairobi (Kenya) on the sidelines of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the

second in Biarritz (France) in August on the sidelines of the G7. This year's novelty is the formation of a high-level advisory group, called One Planet Lab¹, bringing together influential figures from the business community, international financial institutions and academia to enrich future One Planet Summits with innovative proposals for international cooperation, not only in terms of sustainable finance but also in terms of action to simultaneously address three related challenges: the fight against climate change, and the conservation of biodiversity and oceans.

Realising the ambition

These major events will be held in parallel with the publication of two new special reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): one in August on the interactions between climate and land, land-use change and forestry; the other in September on the oceans and the cryosphere (i.e. areas where water is present in its solid state). These reports will address both the major impacts of climate on these ecosystems and the contribution they make and could make to mitigate its effects, or promote adaptation. In addition, it is in the perspective of true global neutrality that this year we will also have to monitor closely the work of SBSTA (UNFCCC's Scientific and Technological Advisory Body), which should lead to the adoption of rules on new international carbon credit mechanisms at COP 25, introduced in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. It is hoped that these important scientific contributions aiming to link environmental threats to one another, combined with the citizen mobilisations that are already underway, will send a lightning bolt to encourage all actors, governments and companies towards greater ambition.

For this ambition to materialise, the need to fully integrate solidarity and social justice issues into the heart of climate policies became tangible in 2018 at the COP 24 with the [Silesia Declaration on the "just transition"](#), but also more widely through social and civic mobilisations like that of the *gilets jaunes* movement in France. It is now clear that taking these concerns and demands into account is necessary to prevent the transition from derailing, before it has even started. The national political responses to this groundswell will have to be monitored this year, alongside energy transition policies in Germany or South Africa, during the great national debate in France, which notably raises the question of the role of taxation, or in the emergence of a new political platform among US Democrats around a Green New Deal combining the welfare state, growth and ecology.

Clearly, there is no lack of important international deadlines this year. There is now a need to bring forward proposals and commitments that are both real and credible, but above all ambitious, that is to say consistent with the achievement of carbon neutrality by the middle of the century, and that can be accepted by a large majority of citizens, without which the recommendations of the scientific community will remain an unobtainable mirage.

¹ IDDRI and I4CE have been mandated by the French Ministry of the Ecological and Inclusive Transition to provide the scientific secretariat of One Planet Lab.

CLIMATE

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COP24

TALANOA DIALOGUE

CLIMATE INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS