

Opening Statement for Committee on Climate Action

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Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25)

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was one of 3 conventions adopted at the 'Rio Earth Summit' in 1992. Its sister Rio Conventions are the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The first Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP1) was held in Berlin in 1995. Significant agreements were reached at COP3 (Kyoto Protocol), COP15 (Copenhagen Accord), COP17 (Durban Platform) and COP21 (Paris Agreement). Venues rotate to minimise delegate travel and COP25 is scheduled to take place in Madrid in early December. Attendances have generally grown with time and at the last meeting in Katowice attendance exceeded 22,000 of which 14,000 were registered delegates.

Within the UNFCCC Countries are divided into two large negotiation blocks: Annex 1 (Developed) and Non Annex 1 (Developing). The former includes the EU and an Umbrella Group comprising other developed countries (including Russia and the USA). The latter has one large grouping (G77 & China) within which sub groups operate (Less Developed Countries, Oil Exporters, Africa, Latin America & Caribbean). A separate group within the Non Annex 1 category is the Small Island Developing States. The purpose of such groupings is to enable spokespersons for each to represent the views of the group as a whole. Some countries change their groups depending on the issues involved.

The COP is intended to be guided by the science, and both receives and requests reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Following the Paris COP21 it requested a Special Report on the impacts of 1.5°C warming above pre-industrial levels. This, together with two other reports (Land, Oceans and Cryosphere), were published in the last 13 months. The COP traditionally welcomes these reports formally, though this did not happen in 2018 when the US, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait objected.

COP24 in Katowice last December heard that the IPCC identified that, based on the remaining carbon budget, emission reduction pathways to avoid 1.5°C warming entailed a *global* emission reduction of about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. The principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) is part of the UNFCCC and acknowledges that, while all states have a shared obligation to address the climate problem, developed states should take the lion's share of responsibility for tackling it. Some recent work by Irish scientists based on equity and the remaining carbon budget suggest that Ireland will have used up its fair share of the remaining global carbon budget within 5 years and will enter into 'carbon debt' to the rest of the world within the next 5-10 years.

The Paris Agreement reached in 2015, which comes into force on January 1st 2020, requires countries to communicate their first NDC, or update their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, by 2020. After 2020, the Paris Agreement's five-yearly stocktaking cycle will provide a regular cycle for increasing ambition. The first stocktaking cycle will start in 2023. Every five years the NDCs must be updated, with each successive NDC representing a progression in ambition beyond the previous one. This means for Ireland that 2 stocktaking cycles will occur before 2030 on which current climate mitigation actions are focussed. In what amounts to an anticipation of

increased mitigation requirements, Vice-President Designate of the EU Commission, Frans Timmermans, has stated in the EU Parliament that he would be “extremely surprised” if the new Commission does not decide emissions need to be cut “by at least 55% by 2030”.

At COP24 last year 27 countries resolved to step up their ambition by 2020. These included: Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Luxemburg, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, St. Lucia, Spain, Sweden. United Kingdom and the EU Commission. Ireland refused to sign. More recently, 8 member states of the EU wrote to the Commission last week urging an increase in the EU’s 2030 target from 40% to 55%. The signatories did not include Ireland.

Issues of climate finance will be addressed by my colleagues, but suffice to say Ireland has not distinguished itself as generous to the Green Climate Fund which was established at COP16.

Some countries to the COP register civil society groups and NGOs as members of their Party delegation. Ireland has traditionally registered a small number of individuals and NGOs as ‘Party Overflow’. While this does enable such individuals to gain access to plenary halls and side events, they are excluded from observing any actual negotiations. In the absence of national transparency, information is transmitted through informal contact with delegates from a variety of countries and occasionally with EU officials. Traditionally, a short meeting with the Minister and Irish officials is held in the second week of the conference. Prior to receiving accreditation, an undertaking is required of civil society groups and individual scientists that they do not engage at any event in a manner contrary to Irish Government policy. This has been interpreted as including critical questioning at side events and has resulted in the withdrawal of accreditation. Civil society accreditation is only received very late (none has yet been received for COP25 in four weeks) resulting in difficulties for travel and accommodation. All NGOs and individual scientists travel at their own expense.

The 5 years since the Paris Agreement was reached in 2015 have largely been wasted and not delivered on the intentions for increased efforts prior to 2020. This has been partly as a result of political regime changes in key large emitting countries. It has also become apparent that NDCs have been less than forthright concerning their intentions for absolute reductions in emissions. Pledges based on per capita emissions, different baselines, political and economic conditionality, accounting rules for forestry and land use change - these have not enabled finalisation of the Paris Rule Book on which future accounting must be based. To maintain the Paris targets will thus entail more stringent reduction requirements than before.

The EU NDC drives the Effort Sharing Regulation at Member State level. In a progress report issued on 31st October the European Environment Agency projected that the EU as a whole would achieve its 20% reduction target for 2020 with total emission reductions by last year of 23.2% below 1990 levels. Malta, Germany, Ireland and Austria are unlikely to meet their emission targets. Ireland is currently projected to achieve 5-6% reduction and has exceeded its annual binding limits since 2016. It is likely to be identified again as a climate laggard at COP25.