

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action

Opening Statement by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address it today on the topic of the State's preparation and input to the UNFCCC COP 25 Conference. In my opening statement I propose to focus on the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and to outline the way in Ireland participates in the work of the Convention.

Climate change represents a defining challenge of this generation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's leading body for research and data on climate change, has produced a number of milestone reports, including the 2018 report on 1.5 Degrees and the two reports this year on Climate Change and Land, and on the Oceans and Cryosphere which predict a range of threats from climate change ranging from increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, sea-level rise and ocean acidification, to widespread drought, flooding and extreme heatwaves.

For nearly three decades, the international effort to reduce the extent of climate change and to adapt to its effects has been coordinated by the UNFCCC. Under this Convention, through the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, Parties have committed to action aimed at stabilising greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid dangerous climate change. Ireland participates in UNFCCC negotiations in its capacity as a Party to the Convention, and also as a Member State of the European Union which is, in its own right, a Party to the Convention.

The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, represents a key milestone in global action to address climate change. Ireland is a strong supporter of the Paris Agreement and has played an active role in subsequent negotiations to operationalise the Agreement.

There are two principal negotiating spaces for deliberations on the Paris Agreement and other matters under the UNFCCC – the technical, and the political strand. The two permanent subsidiary bodies of the Convention, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) meet twice a year, generally around May/June and again during each annual Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, or COP. Negotiations under SBSTA and SBI address a range of technical issues related to the implementation of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

The second negotiating space is the political element which takes place during each COP climate conference and provides the focal point of annual climate negotiations. The COP is the overarching

decision-making body of the Convention. All Parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, at which they review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP adopts, and take decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention. The COP also serves as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) and the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA).

The most recent COP, COP24, took place in Katowice, Poland in December 2018, and had two main deliverables – the completion of the set of rules which would enable the full and robust implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the culmination of the Talanoa Dialogue, a global participative dialogue, led by the Fijian COP Presidency which took place during the course of 2018, on the adequacy of global climate actions and ambition.

The COP concluded with Parties agreeing virtually all elements of the Katowice Work Programme, which will enable the full operationalisation of the Paris Agreement. Parties were unable to reach agreement on the discussions regarding Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Negotiations on this topic continued at Bonn in June this year and will be a key focus to conclude at COP25.

As the Committee will be aware, Chile, which had been due to host COP 25 in Santiago in the first two weeks in December, last week announced that it was no longer in a position to host the conference in light of domestic political developments. The UNFCCC Secretariat has since confirmed Spain has now offered to hold the COP in Madrid during the originally planned dates from 2 to 13 December.

I would now like to briefly address how Ireland engages in the work of the UN in climate change. As a Member State of the EU, Ireland works both to develop the EU position and participates in international climate negotiations in its own right and as part of the EU delegation.

Within the EU, the Council of Environment Ministers adopts political guidelines, in the form of Council conclusions, in advance of each COP meeting. These are, in turn, prepared by the Council's preparatory bodies, working parties and Coreper in the same way as other Council conclusions are prepared. The most recent Council of Environment Ministers, which took place on 4 October, adopted conclusions for COP 25 and these are available on the website of the Council.

In terms of the work of COP 25, these conclusions focus on the need to conclude negotiations on the Paris Agreement rules cooperation mechanism under Article 6; the second review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage; the Lima work programme on gender; and advancing technical work on the arrangements under the Enhanced Transparency Framework.

In parallel with these political guidelines, the EU, through the same working party structures, also prepares a set of detailed negotiating positions in advance of each COP meeting. As detailed negotiation positions, these are not published.

Ireland's delegation at each COP meeting is generally led by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. I would add that Heads of State and Government may also be invited to participate in a COP meeting by host country. The Taoiseach, for example, participated in COP 21, which adopted the Paris Agreement.

In the context of Ireland's strong support for the Paris Agreement, a key national priority for the most recent COP meetings has been to make progress on the Paris Agreement rule book and this has been our focus within the EU and in the UN negotiations themselves.

In parallel, Ireland has also sought to highlight and promote the role of non-Party actors in both addressing climate change and in having a voice in international notions. In this respect, Ireland very much welcomes indicatives such as the Talanoa Dialogue and the Global Climate Action Agenda. We have also sought to provide funding support to the UN to enable the participation of colleagues from developing countries, and in 2018 provided a once-off contribution of €300,000 for the purposes over the period 2018 to 2019.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the need for the Paris Agreement to serve the climate action needs of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States. The impacts of climate change will be felt disproportionately by poor and vulnerable people worldwide, with women often the most affected. Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States which have contributed least to the problem are also least able to withstand these pressures. In this context, Ireland provides funding to the Least Developed Countries Fund through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with contributions of €1m annually over recent years.

Another priority for Ireland is to ensure that the needs and contributions of men and women are equally reflected in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. In 2018, Ireland contributed €500,000 to the UNFCCC to support the delivery of its capacity building programmes, with a focus on gender-related impacts of climate change.

At a policy level, Ireland's new Policy for International Development, "*A Better World*", places gender equality and climate action as clear interlinked priorities for our international sustainable development cooperation. The policy indicates the necessary step-change to ensure that gender

equality and climate action are addressed across multiple decision-making bodies and in a more coherent manner.

I have touched on a number of topics in this opening statement but there is of course much detail behind each of these, as well as many others which are relevant to international climate change negotiations and the COP meetings in particular. I am very happy to take any questions the Committee may have.

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