

Countdown to COP27: Feeling the Heat

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/countdown-cop27-feeling-heat>

Recorded on October 14, 2022



Note: Transcripts are generated using a combination of automated software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the actual audio before quoting it.

Greg Dalton: How many climate summits does it take to rein in climate disruption? I'm Greg Dalton.

Ariana Brocious: And I'm Ariana Brocious.

Greg Dalton: COP 27 will be held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

Ariana Brocious: This year's conference is taking place at a time when countries across the world have been experiencing raging wildfires, unprecedented heatwaves, and catastrophic floods and hurricanes. The urgent need for action has never been more clear. And yet, here we are holding annual talks for the 27th time. Today we'll be taking a hard look at the upcoming summit and whether past promises are finally being put into action.

Greg Dalton: The Paris Agreement came out of COP21. That deal requires all signatory countries (pretty much every nation on earth) to declare their own Nationally Determined Contributions — or NDCs — basically each country's voluntary plan for getting off fossil fuels. The plans are supposed to show that their climate targets are in line with the international goal of limiting global warming to under 2 degrees Celsius - and ideally under 1.5 degrees. But as recent reports have shown, most countries are far from actually delivering on their promises. And again, they're voluntary.

Ariana Brocious: As we look forward to this year's summit, we can already see certain issues rising to the fore. The central problem is that everything that needs to be done costs a lot of money. That includes transitioning to clean energy to building resilience and adapting to the temperature rises that centuries of emissions have already baked into the system. It could cost as much as \$5 trillion a year by some estimates. So who's gonna pay for that?

Greg Dalton: The money questions already swirling around COP27 come in two broad categories:

Finance and Loss and Damage. In the context of these international negotiations, finance refers to money for everything the world needs to do to mitigate (that is, reduce emissions) and to adapt to future climate disruption.

Ariana Brocious: Loss and Damage, on the other hand, refers to money theoretically owed by the countries that caused the problem to the countries that are already suffering.

Greg Dalton: Right. If your factory spilled toxic waste on my farmland, it seems only fair that you should have to pay for the loss and damage I suffer. That's the argument here. The world's 20 biggest economies are responsible for 80% of all climate disrupting emissions. But that doesn't mean they are willing to accept that responsibility - especially if it means they have to pay.

Ariana Brocious: So these are the central issues facing the nations of the world as they gear up for COP27.

Greg Dalton: At last year's climate summit in Glasgow, countries that make up about two thirds of the global economy committed to reducing emissions enough to try and limit global heating to 1.5 degrees celsius. The Biden administration and U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry have since been focused on getting the other third on board.

Jonathan Pershing recently served in the White House as John Kerry's Deputy. I asked him what progress has been made in getting that other third of the global economy-China, Russia, India, Indonesia-to raise their ambition?

Jonathan Pershing: I think there's a couple of different things to unpack here. The first one is that these are countries that are significant contributors to the total. China by itself is the better part of 30% of the world's emissions. So if you think about where they are, you need them to move quickly if you wanna solve the problem. The second is that these are not countries that are not acting, or at least not all of them. It's not as if China hasn't taken any steps. China is the world's largest producer and developer of renewable power. China is the world's largest producer and developer and purchaser of electric vehicles. And in fact, if you add up the electric vehicles in China, they are the equivalent of the electrical vehicles in the rest of the world combined. Having said that, China's also developing its coal. China's moving forward on that, partly for near term demand, partly to meet reliability questions that it's got. And unless it shifts away from that, you won't be able to solve this global problem. So you've got this real tension. There are others who are much, much more recalcitrant. Countries that have perhaps taken on a public commitment but have not yet begun to take domestic action. I'd put a country like Brazil in that box, frankly. A country which has indicated its intent to get to zero carbon emissions and yet continues with a radical and rapid rate of deforestation. Now, that might change in the context of the election that's happening, but it might not, and there's an interesting question about whether that implementation is appropriate. At the moment, from a climate perspective, it isn't.

Greg Dalton: And there's other countries, India was one of the last ones to come on board for Paris. What are they doing?

Jonathan Pershing: So, I think India's fascinating. India's put itself with a 10 year lag behind. And China put itself with a 10 year lag behind the US so that means that the US is committed to getting to zero by 2050. China is committed to getting to zero by 2060, and India said we'll get there by 2070. Now, if India actually gets there by 2070, it's probably too late. And that's assuming they do get there. But let's separate now, and this is not just the case for India, but for others, what is their commitment in a public setting, like the climate negotiations, and what kind of actions are they taking domestically and what kind of trajectory are they on? India is actually ahead of itself in some

parts of their domestic work. They're doing more work on renewables. They've committed, for example, for this massive, massive increase in renewable energy domestically. If they meet that number, they probably exceed by at least a decade, their 2070 target. So do you think about the fact that target is wrong, or do you think about the fact that the emissions commitments at home and the policy development is not yet robust enough, but is right? That disconnect shows up in other places as well. Countries are prepared to do more often than they're prepared to commit to in an international arena.

Greg Dalton: When President Obama went to Paris, he had two policies in hand, two pillars basically. He had the CAFE standards and the clean power plan that focused on coal fired electricity. President Biden goes to Egypt with several big laws on the books, The Inflation Reduction Act, the landmark climate and budget legislation combined with the CHIPS Act and the bipartisan infrastructure law. How has that changed the geopolitical landscape?

Jonathan Pershing: I think we're just beginning to see the changes. But let me back up one step because I think one of the things that's fascinating is to think about the implications of what Obama went with and what's happened since then. So, as you know, he had that CAFE standard and he had that clean power plan. It turns out that America notwithstanding the challenges, has actually exceeded the targets set, particularly in the clean power plan. So if I'm looking at the United States from a perspective of another country, and I say, Well, you're erratic. You come with a regulation and the next administration overturns it. That's certainly true, but you're also consistent. You come with a regulation and five, 10 years later, you've actually exceeded the commitments that you made in it. So from that perspective, maybe not quite so uneven. Now compare that with what Biden's got, and it's a big advantage for Biden. Huge advantage. He's not coming with a regulatory program. He's coming with a congressional mandate. And in that congressional mandate is money and an extraordinary amount of money to implement a US provision, a US program to really reduce emissions. Perhaps helpful to briefly unpack the three pieces. The CHIPS Act, which is called Chips and Science Act, essentially has a big piece on research and development runs into programs for basic science. One of the interesting elements of the climate conversation is that a lot of experts believe that we're still missing some of the technologies that we'll need to have to implement the agenda at a price we can easily afford. It doesn't mean that technologies don't exist at all. It means they're still a bit too expensive, and so a technology focus that drives that price down feels like it's gonna be a critical component of the end use. All right, that's CHIPS. The second is infrastructure. Major, major commitments. Now, it might end up going into pretty conventional things like expanding the highway across the street, but it could also go and it's explicitly designed to open the door to go to vehicle recharging infrastructure for electric cars, to extending grid connections for large scale utilities. That means it's possible to move electric power from renewables into cities and towns where the power is needed. Basic infrastructure provisions and there are literally hundreds of billions of dollars for that infrastructure. Now add the third piece, which is this inflation reduction act, and that has come with the, the numbers that are often cited just under 400 billion dollars for climate change programs in virtually every sector. So it can build on the new R and D. It can build on the infrastructure that's coming, and it can now be incentives for companies and for individuals to purchase the things and make the things that are required. I can now get resources for my electric car, and I've got a charging infrastructure that's gonna be available. I can get subsidies and support for renewable energy, and I've got a grid that'll make that work. I can get policy support and financial support if I'm a city or a state, designing new programs that might help low income communities access some of those capacities. And now on the other two bills, there's infrastructure support for it. I can do school buses and there's support for it. So it's an enormously diverse and comprehensive set of policies. I look at that now from an international perspective, and I say the US is no longer just promising something. The US has put money on the table to deliver it, and that enables someone like John Kerry as our Envoy or President Biden when he goes out at the G20 to

have a very, very different point of departure. It's not a pledge, it's not a promise, It's not a regulation that might be flipped on its end. It's a congressional agreement that gives it substantial standing.

Greg Dalton: right, and kind of protects it against a change in 2024. So it sounds like Biden's in a stronger position for reasons you described. Have any countries raised their ambition since the US passed the IRA?

Jonathan Pershing: Well, it's only been a couple of weeks. Um, so we should be clear that it takes countries a little while to think about things. I think there are a few things that have happened. I would've chosen less the IRA and more Glasgow, because Glasgow, which is last November, ended up setting the stage for really an increased level of ambition. We've seen a few countries act unsurprisingly, in some cases probably most notable is Australia, which had an election, and the election turned the politics, uh, toward a much more ambitious climate agenda. In fact, that's part of the grounds for the change in the government. There was a vision that they wanted to do more on climate. They've now announced a new target which didn't exist in the old government and therefore wasn't being presented in Glasgow. Very few others have moved at a national level. But companies are beginning to move. Investors are beginning to move. We're seeing a change in the banking sector as it looks to profitability. That's beginning to change. That quick shift and quick turnover is where things would start. I think we'll see in Egypt at this next international negotiation, whether other countries might be prepared to add to the formal level of ambition in their public statement.

Greg Dalton: So COP 27 coming up in Egypt is called the implementation summit. Countries have pledged to reduce their emissions and some have produced plans for doing so. But despite all pledges, emissions keep rising. Rebounding from the covid dip and climate induced disasters keep increasing. So what's it going to take to get countries to make good on their pledges and promises?

Jonathan Pershing: So I think there again, here, more nuance is helpful. At the end of the day, the question is not only are we doing enough, we clearly aren't, but are we making progress? And I believe we clearly are. It's extremely difficult to look at what the world would've been like had we not done what we've currently done. But that's an important thing to think about. We spent 25, 30 years now, and I believe the trajectory has come down virtually every year. If you look at the scientific assessment of where we were in the early 1990s, we were looking at temperature increases on the order of five or more degrees. If you look at where we are now out of Glasgow, less than a year ago, but with the work that was done in that 25 or 30 year period, we think that temperatures now will rise at most only about three degrees. Now- Three is too much. It's an extraordinary level.

Greg Dalton: Horrible. Horrible. That's a horrible world. It is. No one wants to. It's horrible. No one wants to live in that world.

Jonathan Pershing: But we brought it down by 60%. So we should be clear that it's not that we have failed, we're not succeeding fast enough. We have more to do, but we should not look at the policies and the initiatives and talk about failure. We should look at rates and talk about what more is still to be done as opposed to castigating ourselves for falling. Having said that, there are a couple of really, really big things, both on the positive side and on the challenges side to look at. On the positive side, we are seeing the prices of some of the critical technologies now cheaper than the conventional ones. In particular, it speaks to renewable energy. There was a very interesting study, which suggests that solar power, even in places like China now, may be cheaper than coal. That changes the dynamics. It is already the case in the US that solar and wind make up the vast majority of every single new power plant installed in the United States. And it's not only because there are some regulatory changes No, no, no. It's because the prices come down and it's cheaper. So I think

those kinds of shifts are beginning to really permeate, and the rate of change is extraordinarily fast. Usually it takes a generation 30 to 50 years for a new technology to move. We're seeing this accelerated into 10 or 20 year horizons. So very much faster to get to net zero emissions by 2050.

Greg Dalton: To get to net zero, the UN estimates the world needs to spend between four and \$5 trillion per year on clean energy. Recent levels have been or below 2 trillion. So that's a doubling of the rate of investment, massive numbers. What needs to be done to mobilize that amount of capital and where will it come from?

Jonathan Pershing: So I think, you also have to think not just about the amount is for renewables, but how much is the world investing in energy across the board. Actually, it's the better part of the same number. It turns out that the increment is not 4 trillion. You have to change the current investment into a new investment. So we need less than a trillion of new investment. We just need to shift the existing investment into a friendlier, greener scenario. And we are seeing that one of the more interesting developments in my mind over the course of the last year in the Biden administration has been the work that Janet Yellen and others have done in trying to capture an understanding of risk. Because when I look at risk, and I'm a company and I look at the risk for the physical changes in climate and for the policy, all of a sudden I recalibrate where my investment is going. So if I'm a company looking at making an investment in a fossil intensive sector, I'm rethinking that. That's not a good place to go. So I'm pushing my investment now into a greener alternative, into a lower carbon future. And those are becoming increasingly binding. We're seeing binding commitments in the part of Europe. We're seeing increasingly binding frame in Chinese financial markets, and we're seeing structures in the US, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the SEC to contemplate rule making in the United States. Those are shifts that will lead to exactly this change in where those trillions are going, from what used to be conventional fossil technologies into these new low-carbon alternatives.

Greg Dalton: Youth climate activists are some of the loudest voices at the COP-demanding urgent action to save their own future. But as Rabiya Jaffrey reports, engaging with climate takes different forms in different parts of the world.

Rabiya Jaffrey: For a young climate activist in the US, this is what a typical Friday may sound like

Sounds of climate march

Rabiya Jaffrey: But for Lina Yassin, a young climate activist from Sudan, Fridays sound quite different.

Sounds of Adhan, family having lunch

Rabiya Jaffrey: Lina is 24 and first got involved in climate work more than 10 years ago, when floods hit Khartoum. Lina is easily one of the most influential youth from the Arabic-speaking world involved in climate action but at the end of the week, Lina will not be found at a Fridays for the Future demonstration.

Lina: Friday is a day where I used to go to my grandma's house, with my parents and we spend the whole day at the grandma's house - and the rest of the family would come and we would connect as a family. It's also a day off. No one had to go to school, no one had to go to work. It is a holiday where people pray the Friday prayer and then just go to their families and reconnect.

Rabiya Jaffrey: So for Lina, regular Friday protests just don't make sense in her part of the world.

Lina: I think the Friday for future is, um, a great movement and it has managed to create, um,

global attention towards the climate change issue. It created a global momentum and it really did make a difference on an international level. I don't think that movement specifically can work in this part of the region because, um, it doesn't fit with our cultures and it's honestly tone deaf.

Rabiya Jaffrey: It is not just that those protests occur on the wrong day of the week. Most Arab countries are quasi-state systems and semi-authoritarian governments where protests, even peaceful ones, are prohibited by law. Lina personally experienced the risks of protesting in the Arab world when she was involved in the Sudanese Revolution in 2019.

Lina: I've seen multiple times, people being shot and I've been tear-gassed and just going out every day, knowing that there's a possibility that you might not make it out alive. There's a possibility that you may be shot or there's a possibility that you may be arrested, and tortured, or even more horrible things, that you can't even speak of.

Demonstrations are not- it's not always peaceful. Actually. It's never peaceful in, in many, many countries in many Arab countries due to the political context. And the fact that governments do not allow this - it's a red line that people can not cross and therefore no one - or the majority of people - will not be willing to risk their lives, to risk their futures, or risk their children's future by allowing them to go out and protest.

Rabiya Jaffrey: But Arab youth's involvement in climate action matters. Young people currently account for nearly half of the population in the Middle East / North Africa region. They have historically been agents of change and have the potential to push for policy-reforms and necessary climate action. And this may be why Lina feels so strongly about putting her own energy where it might be most effective.

Lina: When I wanted to do climate activism, I started writing because for me, writing was the way to get to my community. And it was the way for me to get my message out there and do something.

Rabiya Jaffrey: But in a country with a stifled press, journalism is no less risky than a public demonstration .

Lina: Before the revolution in Sudan, whenever I had to write an article where I had to criticize the government or criticize any of their actions, my editors would either cut it out or ask me to leave my name out of the of the article for my own safety. But what I believe in is that these journalists understand their local context. They understand the challenges and they they also know ways around it.

Rabiya Jaffrey: One such journalist is Ahmed El Sabaa

Skype/Zoom dialing sounds

Ahmed: Hi, it has been so long. How are you?

Rabiya Jaffrey: As a young journalist, Ahmed had the opportunity to cover the 2018 UN Biodiversity Conference, which also took place in Egypt. He was hopeful that this opportunity would allow him the chance to establish himself and to bring issues on climate change and nature to the front pages of local newspapers.

Ahmed: I have been interested in climate change since 2018 because it is a humanitarian issue, and because climate change poses a severe threat to societies, and climate change does not have entry visas or passports and does not recognize borders, and affects the large and small, the rich and the poor.

Rabiya Jaffrey: At first, Ahmed was one of the five or so Arab journalists attending the 2018 conference. By the end, he was the only regular one. Editors just weren't really keen on publishing on these issues.

Ahmed: I challenged myself and left working for newsrooms that didn't want to publish on climate.

Rabiya Jaffrey: Ahmed started reporting as a freelancer on climate for whoever would publish. He also took on a lot of climate reporting training opportunities, whenever he could. And then - just months later - he launched climateinarabic.com.

Ahmed: I wanted to support my other young journalist friends. I want to help them be able to write more on climate action. I also wanted to contribute to enriching the available knowledge and information on climate in Arabic. We have been able to work on some important reports in Arabic because of the support of many grants.

Rabiya Jaffrey: Today, climateinarabic.com is one of the most exhaustive sources for climate change news and information in Arabic. It has been read by over a million Arabs and is doing what many young Arab climate activists consider the absolute priority - bringing some much needed media coverage and attention to climate change in a region that doesn't fully grasp the urgency of the issue. And, all of this, stemmed in part from the opportunity to attend a UN Conference and interact with people involved in climate action from around the world. In spite of the challenges, Ahmed and Lina are hopeful that the two upcoming climate conferences will bring in opportunities and access to Arab youth who are interested in climate action, but in a way that fits with their culture and countries. For Climate One, I'm Rabiya Jaffrey.

Greg Dalton: Now let's hear from another young person, this time on the inside track of the conference of parties. Omnia El Omrani is a medical doctor in Egypt and Youth Envoy for the COP27 President. She talked with Climate One's Ariana Brocious. Dr. El Omrani says she became a climate activist because she feels an ethical obligation to respond to the biggest global health emergency of the 21st century.

Omnia El Omrani: When we think about climate change and what leads to climate change for example, global carbon emissions that lead to air pollution, which leads to the death of 7 million people every year. And then when we look at food and water insecurities that has been accelerating and becoming more acute as right now in 2020 alone there was an additional 68 million people who had acute food insecurity because of climate change, also because of COVID and conflict. And then this leads to malnutrition for children it leads to the stunting of their growth and it impacts their development. And then when you start to think about the extreme weather events that we're seeing whether it's the flooding in Pakistan, for example, the hurricanes and all the different extreme weather events which leads to people losing their lives getting injured, losing their homes losing their jobs, which means that they also lose access to healthcare services. And then in Africa specifically we also see an increase in infectious diseases because now the temperature is increasing, the vectors are increasing in their capacity and in their livelihood and they're transmitting more diseases. But what I have seen personally now being a doctor in Cairo in one of the biggest public hospital that we have. I work with patients every day, especially in the summer that suffer from acute heat stress, exacerbations of asthma because of air pollution. But also, and most importantly, as a climate activist, I see many young people like myself suffering from anxiety because of their worry about the future, suffering from PTSD because of being exposed to such extreme weather events. And also, depression because of the worry about the future and being you know the most impacted with the least decision-making influence in climate policy.

Ariana Brocious: And we'll get into the climate anxiety in just a minute here because I wanna ask a

little more about that. Taking all of what you just said, how does viewing the climate crisis as a health crisis inform what the response should be?

Omnia El Omrani: As we know there is the IPCC report which is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that is released every year. And this report is the scientific evidence that we use in our negotiations, especially when countries align during COP. And for the first time this year they refer to climate change as a threat to human well-being and human health. And it was said that it was a code red for humanity. And this is what we learned from COVID, for example, when the COVID-19 crisis hit, countries acted with urgency, they put on lockdown and they did a lot of measures in no time. And this is what we need for the climate crisis. We need to see the same seriousness; we need the same political will and we can only do that when there is a health emergency. And climate change is no different, especially climate change is also a justice issue which disproportionately impacts the health of the least developed and the less developing countries who are the least contributors, but also it impacts women more than men. More women are exposed to indoor air pollution than men. And most importantly, when we think about intergenerational justice because children and adolescents are also affected by climate change, health impacts in a disproportionate way similar to also the elderly population, especially when it comes to acute heat stress.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah. So, here in the US when a group of doctors tried to frame gun control as a public health issue. They were basically told to stay in their lane. So, I'm curious what's been the response in Egypt to framing climate as a health issue.

Omnia El Omrani: So the first challenge when it comes to addressing climate change in a health frame is actually from the health community. Because you need to transform the way climate change is seen and bring it closer to the medical community. Once they understand how our health as humans is linked to the health of the environment it is what sustains us. And health is not about treating disease; it's about prevention and it's about the determinants of health, social, environmental and economic determinants. And right now, as I always say that it is an obligation, ethically, not just to treat my patients but to promote and protect the health of our communities. As doctors and as the health community we are the trusted voice and the trusted messengers. And we need to be the advocates for the biggest health threat of our century. In addition, it's not just about the health impacts of climate change. It's also about the health core benefits to climate action. When we promote sustainable solutions or behaviors like for example if I choose today not to take my car, I'm going to use public transport I'm going to walk or I'm going to cycle. Not only is this good for the environment because I'm reducing my carbon footprint. It's also good for my health, my physical health is better the risk of noncommunicable diseases decreases and then my mental health is also better because I choose to do physical exercise. And the same goes for example, investing in renewable or clean energy. This means cleaner air, less respiratory diseases, better physical and mental health.

Ariana Brocious: Yes. So, how have you personally been affected by climate disruption?

Omnia El Omrani: It started when I was doing actually an internship in Miami. I was doing emergency medicine. And it was my first time ever to go to the US. And I was on my own and during the second weekend of my training there was Hurricane Irma. It's the first time for me to be exposed to an extreme weather event and I had to evacuate my home. And then I went to the hospital and I started to see the impacts. We do not have mortalities, we had a lot of injuries coming into the hospital. But what I also saw that many people had their either their houses were lost or were destroyed or they lost their jobs because also their workplaces were destroyed by the hurricane. And this impacted their access to the basic services that they need which also affects their health. And this was the turning point for me because during that year I went to the climate change conference

in Poland because I was really interested to learn how I can contribute and tackle this issue.

Ariana Brocious: I think it's interesting that the example you cite of experiencing climate disruption was in Miami in the US here rather than in Egypt, which is I think for listeners, you know, it just drives home the point that we're seeing this everywhere. It's obviously not limited to any particular part of the world, though, as you said some parts of the world are suffering more right now because of lack of resources and other issues that are gonna be brought up at COP. As you mentioned, young people all over the world are increasingly suffering from climate anxiety and other climate-induced mental health issues. So, as a doctor in Egypt what are you seeing and is this being discussed and addressed by the medical community there?

Omnia El Omrani: So, I remember when I started working on climate change the very obvious thing that we all address is always related to air pollution or food and water insecurity. And it was very challenging to talk about mental health because there was not enough scientific evidence or research done to explore how climate change affects mental health. And then in Egypt specifically, young people learn about climate change. They learn about its impacts through how interconnected we are with social media and how we talk to one another. But then it's very uncommon to see climate solutions being discussed and what they can do on an individual level, what they can do with their community, with their friends, with their families. And that is why climate education is so important to address eco-anxiety because, A, you empower children and adolescents and young people to understand what this climate change and their role in this crisis and then what they can do together to address the climate change and this really helps them cope. And now because COP is happening in Egypt, which is an amazing momentum for every host country where there are so many grassroot initiatives being led especially by the health civil society organizations, youth-led organizations. Right now, we are organizing the conference of youth which is going to happen right before COP. We have organized already six local conferences over six cities in Egypt that look at climate change across all disciplines. And they are going to have the conference of youth which is COY, right before COP in Sharm El-Sheikh in collaboration with the Youth Constituency YOUNGO. And this really brought in a lot of interest and personally my university has reached out to me to work together to integrate climate change in the curricula of doctors and healthcare professionals. And we have already started developing the course and we had another opportunity to integrate this course across all African universities.

Ariana Brocious: So, you're talking about there being lead-up events to COP 27 how much space is going to be given do you think to youth and other members of civil society during the conference in the lead up in the weeks leading up and maybe after in Egypt itself for climate concerns to be addressed.

Omnia El Omrani: This year one of the key priorities that we had as the presidency is to bring in a transformation shift when it comes to the engagement of, A, civil society organizations, B, youth-led organizations. Because we believe that it's not only about their presence or their participation; it's about their meaningful engagement and the delivery of their inputs into the negotiation process. And that is why, for example, I myself it's the first time ever, the presidency creates a position for a young civil society representative to be part of the team as the first ever envoy on youth to be the link. And to bring in the perspectives the solutions and the calls to action of youth both in Egypt, Africa, and globally, and feed it directly into the work of the presidency. Because normally during each COP, there is the conference of the youth and then there is a statement being developed and then the statement goes to the presidency. And that is the only way where young people engage with the presidency. But this year in Egypt we wanted to bring in a new and a consistent and a meaningful shift in how youth perspectives are integrated for future COPs to have future envoys. And this is what we want to promote the concept of intergenerational dialogues where it's not young people speaking to one another and policymakers speaking to each other. It's a conversation that

goes back and forth on adaptation, mitigation, and so on. We have also collaborated with civil society in Egypt and our ministry of youth has launched a caravan that is going right now to 26 cities all over Egypt. In each city the caravan works with all the different UN agencies in Egypt and young people and together we build that capacity. We do a lot of capacity building initiatives, activities, creative thinking, arts, performances to really build climate awareness and understanding and mobilize the climate advocacy with the civil society, government and the communities including youth leaders all over the 26 cities in Egypt.

Ariana Brocious: That's a lot. How important is it that this year's summit is being held on the African continent?

Omnia El Omrani: So, it's the first time in six years that COP is in Africa. COP 26 had an incredible achievement when it came to the goals of mitigation. But it was not the same for adaptation for example, and this is what we want to bring in is to have commitments and implementation mechanisms for the goal of adaptation and climate resilience as well as loss and damage. Because in Africa also the continent with the most youthful population where we have over 400 million young people, but we also have one of the greatest you know vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change. And we need to have and to mobilize climate finance not just for mitigation but also for adaptation because until now only 2% of climate finance from the private sector is allocated for adaptation.

Ariana Brocious: So, in your role as a youth ambassador, how do you plan to help put finance and loss and damage at the center of the COP 27 agenda this year?

Omnia El Omrani: So, what we're doing first is to build the capacity of already the young delegates who are going to COP but also youth in Africa, especially. So, that if they're not going to COP, they will be able to influence the position of their countries who will be there. And then during Africa climate week I did a consultation with the African youth. We had around 100 young leaders and we started discussing how can we have a meaningful role in driving our priorities, which also includes increasing investment and increasing commitments and implementation mechanisms for loss and damage for adaptation and the issues that impact our continent most. And then what I'm planning to do with the presidency team is to utilize all these inputs and feed them into the global youth statement which will be presented at the conference of youth and then presented to the presidency, which is going to be the key advocacy tool that the young delegates who will be there at COP will use with their heads of delegations with the different organizations parties nonstate actors to drive the agenda towards adaptation, towards increasing climate finance and loss and damage.

Ariana Brocious: You've participated in past COPs and Greta Thunberg has famously described them as "blah, blah, blah." What do you think of that assessment by her that these annual summits are basically just talk and not enough action?

Omnia El Omrani: I understand how negotiations and the climate policy making space is very slow. And you have to be very patient, persistent. But I believe that as young climate activists and advocates we have to be part of this agenda and this conversation and these conferences. Because what countries agree on at the conference they implement when they go back. And even if they do not implement, we as young advocates we can hold them accountable. We can ask them, and we can work with them to implement their own commitments. Being at these conferences you will not see instant change but you need to be part of the policy change and contribute to you know seeking, A, the evaluation of the progress. B, the implementation of the commitments. And it's very important to acknowledge that it's not just about COP it's about what happens before COP where all the decision-making where all the consultations that countries do on a local level then translate into their position at COP.

Ariana Brocious: You're 27 years old. This is COP 27 this year. These UN conference of parties on climate have been going on for your whole life. How do you feel about that?

Omnia El Omrani: For me personally I always love; you know, I recognize that there are many challenges that we face. But for every challenge there is a solution. And for every solution we need to be patient to see the impact that we do, especially in the climate space. I understand how you know the political inaction and how slow policies are especially in the climate space are moving is also challenging especially that I work as a doctor and I see the health impacts and I understand how it's such an emergency to address. But then with the COVID-19 pandemic I saw, I felt that there is hope because I saw the political will that the climate crisis can have. And now the narrative is shifting and I am very inspired to see that one of the reasons why the climate movement was completely changed and amplified was because of grassroots youth efforts. Climate space is an example of how youth can be meaningfully engaged in the policymaking process but also being you know, leading their communities. And this is so important for me and this is why I love advocating for climate change because I see that I worked in different areas my whole life but climate change for me is the biggest challenge of our time, but also an opportunity for a healthier world for me for my children and grandchildren. And it's an obligation we need to give them the world that they deserve and to really promote and protect their health, so that they can live in prosperity with the future that they deserve.

Ariana Brocious: Omnia El Omrani is a medical doctor and the official COP 27 President Youth Envoy. Thank you so much for joining us on Climate One today.

Omnia El Omrani: Thank you for having me.

Greg Dalton: At this year's climate summit the issue of who should pay for loss and damage caused by climate change is expected to be a central focus. Just 20 countries are responsible for 80% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. By and large, these wealthy large emitters are better positioned to weather the impacts of climate change than the poor countries who haven't contributed to the problem. In my conversation with former Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Jonathan Pershing, I asked him how he views this larger question of what is owed to nations facing the brunt of climate impacts.

Jonathan Pershing: I think it's useful to think about a spectrum. John Holdren, who used to be President Obama's science advisor, I think really put it beautifully. He said, There are a series of ways to look at climate. You can mitigate. That's what you do if you're trying to reduce emissions. You can adapt, that's what you can do to successfully manage the increase in both temperature and associated climate risks. Or you can suffer. Suffering is what happens to the stuff you can't mitigate, and to which you cannot adapt. I would put Pakistan into the suffering category. I would put Florida right now into the suffering category. What do you do? There's two timeframes. There's the timeframe of the immediate catastrophe. In as a hurricane is a perfect example. Immediate recovery is clear and the US and other countries in Pakistan, and these examples of mega droughts and deep crises actually come to the aid in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. The problem comes longer term. In three months how much resource will be available? If we look back at Hurricane Katrina, how much is available today as that region is still recovering from a storm that's the better part of a decade ago, and we have resources. We're a wealthy nation. What does it do to a country in the Caribbean after the third storm in 15 years comes through and every five years it's wiped out? What does it do when 30 million people are displaced in Pakistan and there'll still be displaced in enormous numbers five years from now? That's where this thing comes in. But now you have a problem. Because most countries that have resources don't think to make scaled transfer of resources from their own coffers to those of someone else. Our development assistance is relatively small in the context of these damages. All development assistance is measured in numbers that are

around a hundred to 200 billion a year. The Pakistan example, one country is between 30 and 50 billion just for this one event. There isn't a resource scaled appropriately, so we'll have to find new ways to think about managing these crises. I don't think that the meetings in Egypt or the conversations so. Have moved into these practical solutions. I don't know even what they all are, but the problem now is it's very much in the red here and the kind of advanced space of, we need help, we need money. And not in the space of here's how we can think about this creatively to find long term workable solutions.

Greg Dalton: Yeah, it's a really tough thing. Politicians are not usually inclined to send money to people who can't vote for them. John Kerry got a little testy on this subject of loss and damage at a recent New York Times event when an audience member challenged him to "step up and actually put money into loss and damage." You worked for John Kerry. Let's hear a little bit of his response and get your reaction on the other side.

John Kerry: And you can't just set up a facility in six weeks. Let's be serious about this. We got to talk about how we're going to do it, how do you measure it, how do you allocate what do you allocate, where's the money coming from? you think this Republican Congress where we couldn't get one vote for this legislation is going to step up and do lost and damage good luck. so I'm in the zone of reality. If we don't lower our missions we're croaked. Absolutely croaked and if we don't adapt starting now the things that we can adapt to a whole bunch of people are going to be hurt. 15 million people die every year right now because of the air quality that we have today. 5 million people are dying every year because of extreme heat. That's going to get worse. So I want to mitigate. And there's plenty of time to be arguing, pointing fingers and doing whatever but the money we need right now needs to go to adaptation, it needs to go to building resilience, it needs to go to the technology that's going to save the planet.

Greg Dalton: Jonathan Pershing, as John Kerry's former deputy in the White House. What's your reaction to that? Is loss and damage on the table? Should it be a topic of discussion?

Jonathan Pershing: Well, we should be clear. It is on the table. I think the question, the right question to me to ask is how do we cope with it? And I think what John Kerry was saying is one of the ways you cope with it is you think about putting into context. It is one of a set of things. If it is the exclusive thing about which we are having our conversation. I don't think we'll succeed. Now, it doesn't mean that you don't do anything. You're gonna have to figure out some way to manage these damages to which you cannot avoid and which you can't mitigate. So what do we do with some of those really catastrophic circumstances? I've heard a couple of interesting ideas that are beginning to percolate in the system over the course of the last few. So, for example, uh, one of the ideas that's there is as a country tries to recover from one of these massive catastrophic events, could you suspend its debt payments? Well, that's an interesting idea. Maybe you could, Here is a model that says you don't forgive them because ultimately you want the country to come back and be part of the dues paying global society, and you can't borrow money and expect just to never have to pay it back. But is there a mechanism where you could suspend it for a year or two while they recover from a catastrophe? That's actually plausible. Could you imagine a model in which you look at recovery in a somewhat different way, not just the immediate post-disaster recovery, but are there insurance kinds of funds that could be scaled up, perhaps in part underwritten by government, perhaps underwritten in part by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, where those kinds of instruments and institutions could create some scaled capacity? We do this from time to time. We've done it in the debt crises that we've seen over the last several decades where the IMF does step forward and help countries manage those debt issues. They're gonna go into debt to recover from these crises again. Maybe this is an intersection that we could explore. It is gonna be a discussion that will be contentious. It is tied up in so many issues of historic interest and concern that make it a fraught conversation at best. But we're gonna have to start thinking creatively. We're not yet there. I

don't think we'll be there at the Sharm el Shiekh meeting in Egypt either.

Greg Dalton: So Jonathan, I have the privilege of talking to lots of different people from different perspectives. And yesterday I spoke with a woman from the global South, from American Samoa. And you know, if I were to anticipate how she would respond. Answer about the north saying, We will suspend your debt payments, the rich countries' loaned money to a developing country, and we'll suspend your, your interest payments, et cetera. Someone from the global south or Pakistan might say, What about the debt that's been inflicted on us, the costs of climate change that we didn't cause and where is, you know, how is that measured? That's not on the balance sheet of the IMF and the multilateral institutions. People in the South have, are suffering something? Where is that accounted for? Is there, um, a moral obligation for us to recognize the cost that we have inflicted on the global south? My lifestyle, yours, everyone listening to this, our lifestyles have inflicted cost and damages on people, but it's not showing up on the balance sheets.

Jonathan Pershing: So listen, I think that there's always two sides of every argument, and I think that's one of the sides of this argument. Uh, and one of the real issues around assistance is how to think through support for countries that had virtually no contribution to the problem and bear so much of the impact. Having said that, the other side is the political reality of the unwillingness of countries to make transfer payments.

Greg Dalton: Yeah, yeah.

Jonathan Pershing: And it's not as if by saying we wish it were different, that it becomes different. It doesn't mean that we excuse it. It means that we have to recognize the space in which we operate. And so what I've often tried to do is to find the practical places that you can make. I believe there is progress to be made on all three of these buckets. I believe there's progress on mitigation. We're beginning to see it. There's less on adaptation, but I think people are beginning to think that through. And there is now some interesting thinking on this suffering piece. And that suffering piece directly speaks to this moral question, as well as the practical realities of managing in the aftermath of what are gonna be more frequent. More regular and more severe consequences,

Greg Dalton: in his opening remarks at the most recent UN General Assembly, Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, accused oil companies, quote "of feasting on hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies in windfall profits while household budgets shrink and our planets burn." He called for developed countries to tax the windfall profits of fossil fuel companies and redirect it to countries suffering loss and damage caused by burning their product. What do you think of that idea?

Jonathan Pershing: I think it's got both an appeal and a set of problems. There are very clear indications from the economics community about much better ways to pass revenues around. If you really wanted to offset the cost for low income communities, you wouldn't subsidize oil and gas. You'd subsidize renewables, you'd subsidize local access. Yet we don't because there are political power systems in place that preferentially treat certain kinds of outcomes. So I think we can wish this and we can push for this and we can fight through power of the streets and through our elected representatives and through pressure to try to shift some of the power dynamics. But we also need to be clear about what else we might do that would have a better chance of longer term successes. I think there are a few. I think we ought to be pushing back on these same companies to have regulation that requires them to decarbonize. There's an enormous amount of money in the decarbonization agenda. These companies, in some cases, are the right ones to move things around. I'm gonna have to move hydrogen around. These companies can do that for me. I'm gonna actually have to move carbon around and sequester it. These companies can do that for me. I'm gonna need to think about renewable options at scale and supply chains that are global in nature. These companies could do that for me. So I think we wanna think about opportunities. I think the sticks,

while they're very attractive politically, have very seldom been implemented, and we might wanna find some other models for more success.

Greg Dalton: So yeah, encourage the positive rather than punish the negative. Uh, The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol was recently ratified by the US Senate. This is huge on so many levels. Didn't get as much attention as I think it deserves. First, the international treaty phases out the production and use of hydrocarbons or HFCs. These are chemical refrigerants and powerful greenhouse gasses, so powerful that if Kigali Amendment were fully implemented, this would reduce global warming by half a degree celsius. That's huge. It's also big news because it's the first time in 30 years the US' Senate has ratified an International Climate Treaty and it was done in a bipartisan way with 21 Republican votes joining Democrats. So what does this tell you about the potential for more bipartisan and multilateral action on climate?

Jonathan Pershing: So, I think it's fabulous. I think it's extraordinary. Um, a few things about this. The first one is that the bill itself required domestic legislation. The domestic legislation was actually passed in 2020. It was passed under a Republican controlled Senate. It was passed under a Republican president. We're now ratifying a treaty, which is, requires the domestic implementation, and that was ratified under a Democratic controlled house with a Democratic Senate and a Democratic president. What you've got is this fascinating model in which both parties have agreed you can do this. It's not the only one. The act itself was not just about Kigali in 2020, it included some of the precursors to the infrastructure bill. The infrastructure bill itself was passed with bipartisan agreement, and the science and CHIPS act was passed with bipartisan agreement. So clearly we're in a place where now you can move on a bipartisan basis going forward. The other piece which I would take note of is that a treaty has enormous standing. It is startling and quite disappointing that it's taken 30 years between the last climate agreement, which was in 1992, and this one in 2022. And yet I think it does begin to show that the US could be an active partner, a successful partner in a multilateral regime, a multilateral system; that gives me quite a lot of hope.

Greg Dalton: How are you feeling right now about climate momentum and what do you personally hope and expect will come out of COP 27?

Jonathan Pershing: So I think that I look for the pragmatic. So to me, the question is not what would I love to do if the world were perfect, but what can I do in this world as we have it? And in that context, I am seeing progress. I think the tension is not just are we moving or not, the tension is are we moving fast enough? And the clear answer is no. We are not moving fast enough. If we had 50 years instead of 25 years, I'd be incredibly optimistic about the progress we're making. That 25 or 30 years of difference in time means we're probably going to face much greater risks than I would like to see. So the question for me now is where are all the steps that we could take to do that next thing that would move us in the right direction? How do I incentivize companies to make more investments in zero carbon options? How do I get people to make those choices? What am I doing for the farm community, not just in the us? But globally, how am I thinking about how I recover from damages that are likely to get more severe and continue to enable our economies to advance on a zero carbon trajectory instead of taking all of those resources and paying for the damages? Here's a very narrow case. Look at the consequences now in Europe, because of the Russian invasion. One of the things that we're seeing is that development assistance that had been available to go outside of Europe is now turned to refugee crises and economic constraints inside of Europe. That's an immediate crisis in Europe that is gonna slow down what might have been a rapid transition to zero carbon globally. And yet, with that, Europe is also using this war as part of its rationale for accelerating its transition, because in fact, security and energy supplies is lower if you're on a renewable trajectory than if you rely on gas from Russia. So here is how the complexity plays out. It's both good and bad. Let no crisis go to waste, right? No opportunity should be foregone. But deploy those moments, use those moments, accelerate wherever you can.

Greg Dalton: Jonathan Pershing is former Special Envoy for Climate Change with the US Department of State and now program director of her environment at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Jonathan, thank you for that fascinating walk around the world.

Jonathan Pershing: It's been a great pleasure. Thank you.

Greg Dalton: COP 27 is being framed as “the implementation COP” where the stated goal is to move from negotiations and planning to action. Negotiations are notoriously slow, because the COP follow a consensus process, where every country has a voice – and therefore essentially veto power.

Wael Aboulmagd is Egypt's ambassador to Brazil and the Special Representative of the COP27 President. He joined us from Cairo. I asked him if the shift in focus from negotiation to implementation means that the process will be even slower this year, because implementation is hard.

Wael Aboulmagd: No, actually I'll surprise you with some good news. We need to have a lot of good news coming up. The pace that which multilateral negotiations go forward is the slowest imaginable simply because the fact I just mentioned. Essentially that you're seeking the lowest common denominator that will enjoy these 190 sovereign states with varying interest and understandably so. So, we're not kidding ourselves we're part of this and we know how it works. The action agenda the implementation side doesn't suffer from that ailment because you don't require every single entity or government come on board. So, with the methane pledge for example, which is an implementation tool, obviously, and other initiatives that we'll be watching. You're welcome to join, if you don't like it, don't come but we like everyone to come on board. So, you're not waiting for the 190 disparate voices to come on board. You're willing to start with the few who are convinced that this is something they're willing to commit to. And you can use that and compare with a number of the initiatives that we're launching. We're launching something on agriculture. Something on water resource management. We have something dedicated to Africa, you mentioned that earlier on. We have a very successful social security kind of program for industries and multiple people that are affected by climate change that we're scaling up. It's been implemented that is called decent life. And this is being scaled up for Africa and we're presenting it. There's a waste management initiative. Waste management is of course an environmental issue but also has emissions sides to it. So, and that's for Africa as well. So, there are a number of initiatives these are all action oriented. That's why we call it the action agenda and that is the definition more the implementation of the implementation narrative that we're talking about.

Greg Dalton: That action costs money and yet investment tends to go to countries that need at least because they're perceived to be less risky. So, what could be done to encourage private capital flows to be directed to fuel that implementation you're talking about?

Wael Aboulmagd: You're spot on on the finance side. But in tailoring all of our action agenda aspects we did nothing alone. We held workshops and seminars in Cairo in our building here for the MDBs, for private sector and for governments from around the world. We had two or three rounds of these talks and we tweaked and fine tune some of the narratives that we were creating to ensure the broadest buy-in by as many partners from outside governments. Of course, we have the beneficiary governments but you want the development partners and the developed world to come on board. We want to the MDBs to be there and you want private business to come in. But to your point, there is a problem with global climate finance. And the reality that you just pointed to is fully accurate in private business is defined by seeking profit. So, there are opportunities and the overwhelming percentage of private business goes to be invested, A, in developed countries and, B, in mitigation efforts which is fine, that is good. We need to reduce emissions. But what is the flipside of that is that adaptation is completely starved of private investment. And this threshold or

yardstick of bankable projects that everyone is preaching to the world just doesn't apply to adaptation or a very, we need to stretch your definition of adaptation to find a project in protecting Egypt's delta from the rise of sea level where there's a profitable project. So, we need to find the formula that ensures that whatever non-profit driven monies are focused more on the adaptation side. I had this conversation a couple of weeks ago with philanthropists. The world's largest philanthropists were there and I told them you guys are not there in it for profit. You're benevolent, you are noble, you want to make a difference. Yet, A, and these are figures from the US in particular, about 2% of all US giving is going to climate, okay. That's number one. Number two, whatever money is going to climate is going to climate in the US in the country of source. C, or three, it's not going to adaptation. I looked at charts that are identical to those of the private sector and I thought, you know, you guys should be the flipside of the private sector. You should be going to where the need is most and no one else is going and say I'm making a difference. But if you're philanthropy money goes to where the private money goes, it's a drop in an ocean because you're a fraction of what is being becoming available from the private sector. So, why not increase the impact by going where they can unlock technologies, we didn't mention technology finance is important. But to move to renewables or to adapt technology is key. And you mentioned it with the price when the price dipped of renewables, that's when Egypt started building our one of the world's largest solar farms. If the prices had not dipped, we wouldn't have been able to set those targets. So, philanthropists' private money that's part of the finance.

Greg Dalton: Wael Aboulmagd is the Special Representative of COP27 President. Find our full interview with him on our podcast feed. Climate One will be on the ground in Sharm El Sheikh. Subscribe to our podcast to catch all our episodes from the climate conference.

Climate One's empowering conversations connect all aspects of the climate emergency. To hear more, subscribe to our podcast on Apple or wherever you get your pods. Talking about climate can be hard-- but it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review if you are listening on Apple. You can do it right now on your device. You can also help by sending a link to this episode to a friend. By sharing you can help people have their own deeper climate conversations.

Brad Marshland is our senior producer; Our managing director is Jenny Park. Our producers and audio editors are Ariana Brocious and Austin Colón. Megan Bisciegia is our production manager. Our team also includes consulting producer Sara-Katherine Coxon. Our theme music was composed by George Young (and arranged by Matt Willcox). Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, the nonprofit and nonpartisan forum where our program originates. I'm Greg Dalton.