

UN climate conferences have become a pointless waste of time

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Here's a cheery thought: the annual United Nations climate change conferences have become a colossal waste of time and money.

Sorry, but it's true.

Most people don't even pay attention to what happens at them any more. The last one to truly grab the world's attention was Paris in 2015, which produced a landmark environmental treaty the following year.

That pact established the goal of holding the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2 C above pre-industrial levels. It also committed the 195 countries who signed the accord and the European Union to attempt to limit temperature increases to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels.

I remember the optimism that once surrounded the Paris agreement. If ever there was a high-water mark for the [climate change](#) movement, that was it. It's been downhill ever since.

Today, worrying information around our warming climate is met with yawns. The UN this week released a report showing that three-quarters of the Earth's surface has become [permanently drier](#), a development that has profound implications for human and animal life. Meantime, the Copernicus Climate Change Service last month announced that 2024 will almost certainly be the [warmest year on record](#), and the first above the 1.5 C global warming limit.

That news came out in the wake of [Donald Trump](#) being elected president of the U.S. More than 77 million Americans cast a ballot for someone who has called climate change a hoax. The U.S. is the second-largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world and this is who they chose to be their next president (again).

Even in a "progressive" country like Canada, concern for the health of our planet seems to be waning. Support for the carbon tax has collapsed. Even the NDP in B.C. is saying it will get rid of its consumer carbon tax - the first in North America - if Ottawa gets rid of theirs. At one time that would have seemed unthinkable. But that's where we are.

Federal Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre doesn't seem to care about the environment. At least, it's not a subject he spends a lot of time talking about. His whole reason for being, it seems, is to "Axe the tax." The carbon tax, that is. And he seems to have a plurality of the country behind him.

I'm not sure when the UN climate conferences lost their appeal but their credibility certainly took a hit when they started being hosted by oil-states, like the United Arab Emirates. And when it was revealed that COP28 in Dubai had turned into something of a trade show for the oil industry, well, that was it for many people. The same thing reportedly happened at COP29 in Azerbaijan this year. COP has become polluted with oil money, while failing to block even a single fossil-fuel project worldwide.

The conferences have a couple of huge problems.

The first is timelines. Most agreements tie countries to goals that are often decades away - so far away, in fact, they are meaningless. It would be far more effective for these gatherings to produce treaties that force countries to act in a much shorter time frame - within five years, or even sooner. But someone committing their country to deadlines that are 20, 30, or 40 years off is ridiculous. The government doing the committing will be long gone by then, so there is little accountability built into their promises.

The second problem are the rules that govern decision making. That is, all 197 signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must agree on any decisions that affect it. So, any change to the Paris treaty, for instance, has to be approved by all parties. All it takes is one holdout, who might be motivated by any number of factors, including money, to scuttle any alteration regardless of its merits.

As Michai Robertson, negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, [told Euronews](#): "It's generally frustrating because ... you have to really go at the pace of your slowest person."

The Earth is on track to warm to 3.1 C above pre-industrial levels this century. That should scare us all, but it likely doesn't. People have more immediate concerns, such as putting food on their table or paying for the gas they need for their car. That's the enemy the climate movement is really facing now - the difficult, day-to-day realities of life, which seem to become harder by the year.

The UN climate conferences need to re-evaluate their purpose. Their work is important, without question. But unless they are bringing the rest of the world along with them, they are pointless.

And right now, that's exactly what UN climate conferences have become.