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FEATURED Q&A

How Real Are Latin American Leaders' Climate Promises?



Several Latin American leaders, with some notable exceptions, attended the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, making commitments that generated headlines. // Photo: United Nations.

Q Latin American leaders made new commitments at the U.N. Climate Change Conference, or COP26, in Glasgow, but some also have faced criticism over their environmental policies. Brazil vowed to step up its plans for cutting emissions, achieving carbon neutrality and ending illegal deforestation, but President Jair Bolsonaro didn't attend the conference, and environmentalists have said his government's plans lack specific details. Meantime, Colombian President Iván Duque committed to moving up plans to declare land protected, but critics say he hasn't done enough to stop guerrilla groups from cutting down forests. How significant are Latin American leaders' new pledges on climate change, and how valid are the criticisms they face on their environmental policies? To what extent are Latin American leaders backing up their vows to protect the environment with concrete initiatives? How much opposition to aggressive climate goals exists from industries in the region?

A Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, global leader of climate & energy at WWF International and former president of COP20 in 2014: "Few of us have appreciated the fact that under the Paris Agreement, and with the contribution of science, a collective vision of the planet has been agreed upon. No one doubts now that the increase in temperature toward the end of the 21st century should not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius, or that we need to strive toward the goal of carbon neutrality and resilience by 2050 and therefore need to halve our emissions by 2030. This is good, and in this sense, the announcements and commitments of Latin American leaders and nonstate actors count.

Continued on page 3

TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Vows to Help Haiti Amid Violence, Fuel Shortages

The U.S. government pledged to help strengthen the police force of Haiti, which is struggling amid increasing gang violence and fuel shortages.

Page 2

BUSINESS

Colombia's Rappi Seeking Approval to Operate as Digital Bank by Q1

Delivery app Rappi is hoping for regulatory approval to operate as a digital bank by the first quarter of next year, said a top executive.

Page 3

ECONOMIC

Mexico's López Obrador Proposes Anti-Poverty Plan at United Nations

In a U.N. speech, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador proposed a plan that he said would lift 750 million people out of poverty.

Page 2



López Obrador // Photo: United Nations.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Vows to Help Haiti Amid Violence, Fuel Shortages

The U.S. government on Tuesday vowed to strengthen Haiti's National Police as the Caribbean nation struggles amid increasing gang-related violence and fuel shortages that have hit the country's already-dire economic crisis, the Associated Press reported. Todd Robinson, the U.S. assistant secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, said the United States has provided Haiti's police department with 19 of 60 police vehicles it had pledged, and it is set to distribute several hundred sets of protective gear. He added that the United States will work with local police to fight gangs and implement community development and violence prevention initiatives. "Let's be clear. Haiti faces a number of challenges, but gangs are the greatest threat to citizen stability," Robinson said during a two-day official visit to Haiti, the AP reported. Haiti has been struggling amid a spike in gang violence and a political crisis following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7. It is also still reeling from the damages of a 7.2-magnitude earthquake that killed more than 2,200 people in mid-August. The country is also facing a sharp shortage of fuel, as gangs are blocking the access roads to distribution terminals, BBC News reported. Residents of Port-au-Prince are reportedly relying on rainwater to drink as water pumps have stopped working due to the lack of petrol. Meantime, the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden is warning U.S. citizens who are in Haiti "to strongly consider returning to the United States," the Miami Herald reported. In addition to the worsening gang violence and fuel shortages, a group of 17 missionaries from a U.S.-based group has been held hostage in Haiti for three weeks. The 400 Mawazo gang, which is among Haiti's most violent, has demanded a \$17 million ransom for the group, or \$1 million each. Four children and an eight-month-old infant are among the hostages. The

Biden administration's urging of U.S. citizens to leave Haiti came in a security alert last Friday from the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince, the Miami Herald reported. Haiti's commercial banks and other businesses have announced they would reduce their hours of business this week. Grocery stores owners have also warned about potential food shortages, and the United Nations has encouraged employees to stock up on essential items, including food and water, the newspaper reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Mexico's López Obrador Proposes Anti-Poverty Plan

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has proposed a global plan aimed at lifting about 750 million people out of poverty, saying during a speech at the U.N. Security Council in New York that wealthy people and corporations would largely finance the effort, Al Jazeera reported. López Obrador on Tuesday presided over the council, where Mexico is serving a

“**Today is the time to act against marginalization, addressing the causes and not only the consequences.**”

— Andrés Manuel López Obrador

two-year term and holds the presidency this month. It is the leftist president's second official trip abroad since taking office in 2018. López Obrador said the plan would provide "a dignified life" to the world's poorest thanks to contributions from the thousand richest people, the thousand largest private corporations and the 20 major economies of the world, the Associated Press reported. The president said the plan could generate \$1 trillion annually, which he said should go directly to the world's

NEWS BRIEFS

Former Panamanian President Martinelli Acquitted for Second Time

Former Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli won his second acquittal Tuesday on charges that he tapped phones of opponents and journalists while he was president from 2009 to 2014, the Associated Press reported. Martinelli had been acquitted on charges of espionage and embezzlement in 2019. The court ruled that prosecutors had violated due process, while also criticizing the prosecution's evidence. The government then won the appeal, which led to the new trial. Martinelli reportedly wants to run for president in 2024.

Costa Rican Prosecutors Accuse Water Officials of Ties to Drug Gang

Prosecutors in Costa Rica have accused officials at the country's water authority of helping drug traffickers launder their profits using government public works contracts, the Judicial Investigation Agency said Tuesday, the Associated Press reported. The agency added that the drug gang trafficked cocaine and then used the money to carry out contracts obtained through contacts at the Costa Rican water and sewer authority. The agency said the gang won 17 contracts worth about \$1.2 million, adding that it had arrested 26 people in connection with the case.

Colombia's Duque Opens Trade, Innovation Office in Jerusalem

Colombian President Iván Duque on Tuesday opened a new office of the country's entrepreneurship and innovation agency in Jerusalem, The Times of Israel reported. The office of the Innpulsa agency is the South American country's first such location abroad. Duque's government is planning to open similar offices in San Francisco and South Korea.

poorest people “without any intermediaries, through a card or personalized electronic wallet,” the AP reported. “Never in the history of this organization has something substantial been really done for the benefit of the poor, but it is never too late to do justice,” he said during his address, Al Jazeera reported. “Today is the time to act against marginalization, addressing the causes and not only the consequences,” he added.

BUSINESS NEWS

Rappi Eying Approval to Operate as Digital Bank in Q1: Executive

Bogotá-based mobile delivery app Rappi is hoping to win regulatory approval to operate in Colombia as a digital bank by the first quarter of next year, a top executive told Reuters Monday. With that approval, Rappi is planning to offer financial services through RappiPay, which it operates with Colombian bank Davivienda. The joint venture already offers a credit card, along with an electronic account, Reuters reported. “We want to be a full bank, where we’ll be an ideal bank for all those within the Rappi ecosystem—not just individuals who are consumers, but also Rappi delivery workers and legal entities like businesses,” RappiPay Colombia’s president, Gabriel Migowski, told the wire service in an interview. “We’re primarily focused on creating the best credit card experience so afterward we can offer [services] to small and medium-sized businesses which operate within Rappi.” The company does not already offer full banking services in any country where it operates, but it does offer some financial services in Mexico, Brazil, Peru and Chile, in addition to its home market. RappiPay has approximately 750,000 users in Colombia, and it has distributed in excess of 120,000 credit cards to its users. Rappi and Davivienda have committed to investing some \$100 million in RappiPay, Reuters reported. “Both partners are committed to continuing anchoring the company as it grows,” said Migowski.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

This, however, is insufficient if the announcements are not reflected in concrete actions, or if the announcements do not have transparency and accountability mechanisms that facilitate the monitoring of their progress and the verification of their goals. But at the same time, it should be added that in Latin America the gaps to be filled and the tasks to be undertaken are significantly greater than the announcements that are made. Let us start by recognizing that Latin America participates in the climate debate in a fragmented way. Decision makers have failed to understand that a new global economy demands necessary change with a strong climate component. Those who are irresponsible in their actions will be sanctioned. In this sense, some of the climate plans are weak. Latin American companies’ climate commitments are absent. Also, adaptation plans, which in most cases are nonexistent and have little awareness about transformational change, are worrying. Latin America must wake up, and its citizens need to mobilize their ‘activism’ to insist on their demands.”

A **MK Vereen, program assistant for the Energy, Climate Change & Extractive Industries Program at the Inter-American Dialogue:**

“Although several countries in Latin America updated their climate commitments in 2020, most states’ current climate policies and actions are more aligned with a catastrophic 3 to 4 degrees warming scenario. Across the region, political instability, regime change and heavy debts from the pandemic have stymied climate progress, with leading economies such as Mexico and Brazil backsliding on climate action. On top of these crises, extreme droughts and hurricanes have revealed the region’s high vulnerability to the effects of climate change. With climate adaptation absorbing an increasing percentage of these countries’ budgets in the future, the salience of international climate aid has begun to overshadow country-level

mitigation commitments. President Joe Biden announced at COP26 that the United States will begin to provide \$3 billion each year by 2024 to help the developing world adapt to climate change. However, this pales in comparison to the actual costs that adaptation already entails. Overall, Latin American countries are not doing enough, but neither are their wealthier counterparts, which are responsible for most of the world’s historical emissions. Despite these challenges, during the first week of COP26, a dozen Latin American countries signed on to the Global Methane Pledge, which aims to limit methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030 as compared to 2020 levels, as well as the Declaration on Forests and Land Use, which aims to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama launched a new marine protected area called the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor. Boasting climate mitigation and adaptation benefits, this ‘marine highway’ will be a fishing-free corridor covering more than 500,000 square kilometers of biodiverse ocean. Given the current challenges facing Latin America, as well as historical challenges such as enforcement of regulations, whether these agreements will actually be implemented remains to be seen.”

A **Mirza Castro, consultant and specialist in climate change from Honduras:** “The Latin American leaders represented by the presidents of the UNFCCC member countries are only political figures who know very little about the subject. Behind them are teams of advisors and technicians from different disciplines who prepare their speeches and country documents on climate change issues. When there is no knowledge, empowerment or commitment, these initiatives remain on paper and in beautiful speeches. The challenge for all Latin American countries is development planning that considers the issue of climate change as an

Continued on page 4

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 3

axis around which all other issues revolve in order to achieve climate-compatible sustainable development. Countries must implement these plans in an inter-institutional, comprehensive and intersectoral way. All the criticisms that leaders face against their environmental policies are not just valid but also necessary. It means that other sectors are interested in protecting our livelihoods, ways of life, food security, biodiversity, water, air quality, soil and the oxygen we need to live. Hopefully, these large groups of critics will continue to support and protect the environment, as well as influence more and more young people to take interest in protecting future generations. In my country, Honduras, Green Cross UK awarded the Climate Positive Award to Nasry Asfura, the mayor of Tegucigalpa, for filling the streets of the capital with concrete, eliminating trees and green areas and allowing urbanization in La Tigra National Park, a source of water for the capital's residents. This is ironic and a bad example for those who are really acting in favor of the environment, including private companies that are entering the post-pandemic green recovery."

A **José Luis Samaniego, chief of the Sustainable Development and Human Settlement Division of the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean:** "Latin America and the Caribbean requires great efforts for adaptation, as it is highly vulnerable to climate change. As of August, of the 17 countries that had updated their nationally determined contribution (NDC), 11 had a guiding policy framework for adaptation. There is ambition in the region. The serious insufficiency is that of the large emitters, particularly the developed countries, whose laxity compromises the

global goal. The NDC Synthesis Report (by the UNFCCC) affirms that the NDCs of 192 parties together imply a 16 percent increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as compared to 2010. Being such a vulnerable region, inaction or insufficient global action puts us increasingly at risk. We are

“**Latin America is the region of the world with the highest number of murders of environmental defenders...**”

— José Luis Samaniego

concerned that Latin America is the region of the world with the highest number of murders of environmental defenders. These are crimes with impunity. Of the total spending for 2020 announced in the region, a very low percentage is oriented to green investment (0.4 percent), and it is only 2.3 percent of the specific spending on economic reactivation. Achieving the emission reduction goals requires a structural economic change, and that requires aligning public policies to change investment incentives. For this, we must align our policies and investments. The economy associated with the reduction of emissions generates economic growth and greater employment and promotes new sectors in our region. There is much work to be done to show the benefits of climate action in both mitigation and adaptation and to realign incentives for investment in the enabling and green sectors."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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