



## **The Long Road from International Environmental Agreements to Global Climate Security**

**Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich**

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### **Abstract**

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Since the historic United Nations summit in Stockholm in 1972 the topics of environmental protection and later of climate change, have been very much on the international agenda. We have also witnessed a growing participation of nongovernmental organisations during these conferences. In the last few years, small island countries most affected by climate change were also able to increase their voice in global climate negotiations. But only recently, the nexus between climate change and security and stability of nations came into the multilateral limelight.

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## Analysis

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This paper will first focus on the history of United Nations Environmental Agreements and on civic society involvement. It will also analyse whether small countries which are on the frontline of climate change can have an influence on multilateral climate negotiations. Next, it will describe how Germany promotes the topic of climate security during its current term as a Security Council member. Lastly, this paper will deal with the question whether the ongoing grassroots protests could result in stricter climate action by governments.

### 1. From Stockholm to Paris: A concise road map of International Environmental Agreements

Names of cities mark the major milestones of the amazing United Nations environmental and climate change road map of the last 47 years: Stockholm, Montreal, Rio, Kyoto, Paris. This paper will take you through these stepping stones and highlight the major achievements of these landmark agreements. It is a story of prolonged and arduous negotiations, compromises, pushes and pulls and of increased engagement of civil society.

- **The 1972 “United Nations Conference on The Human Environment” (Stockholm Conference)** turned out to be a milestone for environmental policies around the world as it was the first global meeting to focus on a single issue, the global environment. Altogether 114 countries were present. One of its achievements was the creation of the iconic UN Environment Programme. UNEP has become a powerful UN institution which coordinates international environmental action. The conference also produced a much publicized Action Plan for the Human Environment and the Stockholm Declaration with 26 principles concerning environment and development.
- The “World Commission on Environment and Development” (WCED) published in **1987 the Brundtland Report** which demanded more sustainable development.
- The “**Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer**” **1987** is considered to be one of the most successful international treaties. It was designed to phase out CFC and HCF gases. As many as 197 countries ratified the treaty in a very short time span (1989). In the case of the Montreal Protocol, scientific evidence about the causes of the depletion, and civic campaigns and governmental reactions as well as UN actions were swift. As a result, the ozone depleting substances were decreased and ozone holes were reduced or stabilized.
- The focus of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in **1992, the so-called Rio Earth Summit**, was on balancing environmental protection, economic growth and social equality. One of its major achievements was the establishment of the historic United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a legally binding agreement which was eventually signed by more than 150 countries. **UNFCCC** was meant as a commitment to reduce greenhouse gases, it went into force in 1994. The other important accomplishments of the Earth Summit were the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, the **Convention to Combat Desertification** and the **Agenda 21** (an action plan to promote sustainable development). The expert management of this gigantic conference by experienced chairpersons after more than two years of preparations also helped in finding unanimous global agreement in the end. (Maurice Strong as Conference Chairman, Tommy Koh as chairman of the Main Committee). Critics have since pointed out the continued support of governments and industry for economic growth and industrialization which ran counter the concept of sustainable development.



- Under the UNFCCC, 150 countries negotiated and established the **Kyoto Protocol (KP)**. It was adopted in **1997**, entered into force in 2005 and was ratified by 127 countries. The KP set binding emission reduction targets. A novel feature was that it placed a heavier burden on industrialized developed countries under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. Countries are supposed to meet their respective targets through national measures. They could choose to reach their targets through either one or a combination of three market-based mechanisms: International Emissions Trading, Clean Development Mechanism or Joint Implementation. These mechanisms were supposed to encourage green investments and help to reduce greenhouse gases. Countries committed to reduce their greenhouse gases to an average of five percent by 2012, respectively 18 percent below 1990 levels. Developing countries (such as Brazil, India, China) were exempted from emissions reductions. A number of compromises were needed to get the climate sceptical countries, among the so-called JUSCANZ group (Japan, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) and Russia on board. The US Senate, however, never ratified it and Canada withdrew in 2011. The UN Climate Change Secretariat in Bonn keeps an international transaction log to verify the transactions of greenhouse gas levels. The KP was an important first step towards emission reductions by individual countries but it had shortcomings. Some issues remained unresolved or incomplete; some were watered down. Also, the global financial crisis came in the way of its proper implementation.
- The KP paved the way for the **Paris Agreement 2015** which was adopted by the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 of the UNFCCC in Paris by 193 countries. It was the first ever globally binding climate deal and set out to reduce “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” Each country has to determine and report on its contribution to mitigate global warming. So far, 195 countries have signed the agreement. The US announced its withdrawal in 2017. The Paris Agreement has been criticised because the commitments are nonbinding and strict enforcement mechanisms are lacking.

The role of **nongovernmental organisations (NGOs)** during the more than four decades of environmental negotiations is worth focusing on:

The Stockholm conference 1972 was a catalyst for the engagement of environmental NGOs. Three parallel NGO conferences took place outside the official UN negotiations.

During and after the Montreal Protocol 1987, NGOs lobbied governments, raised public awareness and endorsed the use of environmentally friendly alternatives. Activist global environmental NGOs such as World Wide Fund for Nature, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and others played a more active role in the follow-up conferences in London in 1989 and in 1990 when the Montreal treaty was finetuned and sharpened. This time around, NGOs were active participants and able to influence the resolution text.

Civic society played an even more important part in the 1992 Rio Earth summit than it did in Stockholm, Montreal and London, but only after political battles had been fought to maintain the level of their participation at previous UN conferences (*Peter Willets*). In the end, 2400 representatives of more than 650 NGOs participated in the summit, and 17 000 people attended the NGO Fora which ran parallel to the conference. The strong involvement of environmental NGOs was an important factor in the constructive outcome at Rio as political momentum was gained.



During and after the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, NGOs played a key role due to their strengthened global information network. They put pressure on negotiators and lobbied their respective governments to ratify the Kyoto protocol.

The COP 21 in Paris in 2015 witnessed a record number of over 7000 NGO and IGO (Intergovernmental Organisation) participants. During the Paris negotiations and in the following COPs in Marrakech and in Bonn, NGOs aimed to provide “inputs to moving these agendas forward, calling governments to account and pressuring them to act with their highest ambition” (Gillian Nelson). It also became imperative for NGOs to acquire the detailed and highly complex and technical expertise necessary for the environmental negotiations. They were thus able to “attain influence by working closely with negotiators and governments by providing policy solutions and expert advice.” (*Lars Gulbrandsen, Steinar Andresen*)

## **2. The role of small countries in multilateral climate negotiations: The example of South Pacific Island States**

It has been questioned whether small countries which are most affected by climate change but which do not have much political influence on the global stage, can exert influence on environmental negotiations.

Let’s take the case of the 15 South Pacific Island countries. They all share similar problems such as small populations, limited resources, limited access to international markets, vulnerability to rising sea levels, lengthening droughts and increased cyclone intensity. Climate change is threatening the livelihood of these island populations. We also observe an overdependence of these countries on fossil fuels and exploitation of natural resources by foreign powers. These developments pose developmental, environmental and safety problems for these small countries.

It was the former President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, who became an international celebrity on the effects of climate. Tong told the UN General Assembly in 2012: “Climate Change threatens the existence and livelihood of our population”. Tong also called for “a paradigm shift where the Pacific needs to chart its own course and lead global thinking in crucial areas such as climate change.”

- **Pacific Island Forum (PIF)**

The PIF, founded in 1971, is the key regional grouping for the Pacific Island countries. It provides a forum for cooperation on political, trade, fisheries, development and environment issues. After decades of focusing on regional integration, PIF has now become a strong advocate for climate change topics. Its new focus is now on the “Blue Pacific”. During its annual meetings it has raised the climate change issues with its 18 Forum Dialogue Partners (among them Indonesia, US, China, Japan, Canada, India, Korea, Germany, UK, etc.). A large part of last year’s PIF Head of Governments’ meeting in Nauru was devoted to climate change, disaster resilience and the viability of the region’s fishery resources. At the end of May 2019, the PIF hosted the UN Secretary-General Guterres Guterres in Fiji. Gueterres told the PIF leaders during the visit: “the Pacific voice is loud and clear. Climate change cannot be stopped by small island countries alone, it has to be stopped by the rest of the world. ... It is enlightened self-interest from all decision-makers around the world because it’s not only the Pacific that is at stake, it’s the whole planet.”



- **SIDS (Small Island Developing States)**

Some 52 countries (among them 20 South Pacific Island Countries and territories) are members of the UN agency SIDS. The third SIDS Conference in Samoa in 2014 resulted in the adoption of the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (called SAMOA Pathway) and the announcement of 300 multi-stakeholder partnerships. Seven of the fourteen goals refer to climate change and environmental problems.

During the July 2019 session of the UN Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) the SIDS countries presented their national reviews of progress for sustainable development goals (SDGs).

- **Fiji Presidency of COP23**

The Presidency of Fiji of the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the UNFCCC in 2017 was a highlight of South Pacific Countries' engagement. In a unique cooperation, Germany assisted Fiji in the organisation and hosted the over 30 000 participants in Bonn. Fijian PM Bainimarama effectively presided over the COP and was effective in projecting the concerns of the other South Pacific Countries. Fiji was also behind the establishment of the 'Talanoa Dialogue' (*Talanoa is a traditional word used in Fiji and across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue*). Talanoa provides input from stakeholders and expert institutions during the preparatory phase of COPs. Other outcomes of the Bonn COP and Fiji's presidency were the further development of the rules for the Paris Agreement and an agreement on how to conduct the first post-Paris stock-taking of climate action.

- **United Nations Security Council January 2019**

Climate change has become more prominent on the agenda of the **Security Council**, with a focus on vulnerable Small Island Developing Countries (SIDS). In January 2019, it held an open debate on security implications of climate related disasters. Improved early warning systems, climate risk assessments and management and mitigation measures were the main issues debated.

- **The upcoming 2019 UN Climate Summit**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has convened a summit of world leaders in September 2019 with the motto: **'A Race We Can Win. A Race We Must Win'**. Guterres: "I am calling on all leaders to come to New York in September with concrete, realistic plans to enhance their nationally determined contributions by 2020." Guterres wants to challenge states, cities, companies, investors and citizens to step up action.

Guterres' visit in May this year to Fiji and other South Pacific Island Countries was one of the stepping stones for this initiative. South Pacific Island Countries played a decisive role in the lead-up to this special UN summit.

**To sum up this new "Pacific Diplomacy" (Fry/Tarte):** South Pacific Island countries have, to some extent, managed to overcome some of their internal regional and sub-regional divisions and conflicts. They have coordinated their respective positions in the Pacific regional institutions, especially the PIF. They also cooperated with like-minded countries within the UN institutions (SIDS, Security Council) and thus created new alliances and support groups. Thereby, they were able to increase their voice in global negotiations in the last few years.



### 3. Germany and its support for the Climate Security problem

Germany has made the **nexus between Climate Change and Security** one of its main priorities during its Security Council tenure. German Foreign Minister Maas told the UN General Assembly last year: “We want to ensure that the Security Council makes the devastating effects that climate change can have on the security and stability of entire countries and regions an even greater priority.”

Germany has been one of the long-time supporters of the Pacific Island countries with its bilateral and EU assistance (2011 – 2018 overall German **bilateral development assistance** to Pacific countries: appr. **Euro 83.9 million**, Pacific Aid Map). The German Development Cooperation (GIZ), with its regional Pacific headquarters in Fiji, has assisted the Island Countries with adaptation to climate change projects and other environmental programmes, often in cooperation with the Pacific’s technical agency SPC. On top of this, Germany is the main contributor to the EU’s European Development Fund which, in the Pacific countries, has a special emphasis on climate change.

Germany’s **financial and technical support to Fiji** during its COP 23 Presidency has already been mentioned.

Germany also assisted the Marshall Islands with organisational and financial help when the PM of the Marshall Islands, Hilda Heine, convened a **'Virtual Climate Summit'** last year. 48 climate change affected countries and their counterparts of the developed nations stayed at home and sent video messages instead. Thus, they set an example how to reduce their conference carbon footprint. The results of this South Pacific inspired ‘Talanoa dialogue’ fed into the UN climate round in Poland in December 2018.

The German Foreign Office hosted a side-event with Small Island Developing States (**SIDS**) in December 2018 during the last COP in Poland to highlight the **security risks arising from climate change**.

In August 2018, Germany and Nauru co-initiated the ‘Group of Friends on Climate and Security’. As a follow-up, a **'Climate and Security Conference'** in Berlin was opened in June 2019 by German Foreign Minister Maas and the President of Nauru. Its “wake-up call”, the ‘Berlin Call for Action’, increased the momentum for climate action ahead of the upcoming UN Climate Summit in September. (*adelphi, German Foreign Office*)

This year, Germany was one of the first countries to pledge to double its contribution to replenish the **Green Climate Fund** (GCF) to 1.77 Billion US \$. GCF is a UNFCCC instrument to finance low emission and climate-resilient projects.

It has to be emphasised that the EU has become the leader in global environmental topics. The EU is a member of all the major environmental conventions and one of the main proponents of climate action. Germany, as a major EU country and contributor, has been an active driver of this EU process. It is also a strong partner of the **EU Green Diplomacy Network**.

### 4. International Climate Policy: possibly a failure?

We are looking back at almost half a century of global environment conferences, climate conventions and NGO engagement. However, various UN Agencies (IPCC, UNEP, UNFCC Secretariat in Bonn, WMO, FAO, etc.) and global NGOs have recorded and published the latest environmental data which are testimony to rapidly developing realities: an increase in greenhouse gases, a rise in ocean temperatures, pollution of oceans, melting of glacier ice, an ever growing deforestation and the massive loss of biodiversity. IPCC Scientists have recently warned that the targets might not be reached with the present pace of environmental policies.



As one of the consequences grassroots protests and civil disobedience movements have recently come up, such as the recent #Fridaysforfuture or the #Extinction Rebellion civil disobedience campaign. With their grassroots activism they represent a different approach from that of NGOs and IGOs. It is a fundamental protest against the lack of action by governments in view of the climate crisis. Another new development is the unexpectedly high number of votes for environmentally friendly Green parties during the recent European Parliament elections in May 2019. Green parties were able to double their votes from 10 to 20 %.

We are observing a mounting public discontent and impatience about insufficient actions of national governments. It is a wakeup call for governments and for the UN institutions to act. As UN Secretary-General Guterres recently said about the climate activism: "My generation has failed to respond properly to the dramatic challenge of climate change. This is deeply felt by young people. No wonder they are angry....Momentum is building and there is a new determination to unleash the promise of the Paris agreement."

The UN Climate Summit in New York in September might provide the opportunity to act upon the challenge that young people have presented the world.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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### About the Author of this Issue

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Most recently, Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich was the German Ambassador to New Zealand and seven Pacific Island States from 2012 to 2016. Before that she was the German Consul-General in Melbourne, Australia. She had previously served in Singapore, Bangkok, Islamabad and London. Besides other positions, she has also headed the Directorate for International Environmental Policies at the German Foreign Office. Since her retirement, she has been a speaker at several international conferences and a guest lecturer at the National University of Singapore. She has also written a number of articles on geopolitical developments in Asia.



*Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich*



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