



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 10 October 2024

Session 6



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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
23rd Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Bridget Burns (Women's Environment & Development Organization)

Professor Tahseen Jafry (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Ben Wilson (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 10 October 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 08:47]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning. I warmly welcome everyone to the 23rd meeting in 2024 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Our first agenda item is a decision on taking business in private. Are members content to take items 3 and 4 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Climate Justice

08:48

The Convener: Our second agenda item is an evidence session on climate justice, with a specific focus on the Scottish Government's climate justice fund, in advance of the 29th United Nations climate change conference of the parties next month. We are joined by Professor Tahseen Jafry, who is director of the Mary Robinson centre for climate justice at Glasgow Caledonian University; Ben Wilson, who is director of public engagement for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund; and Bridget Burns, who is executive director of the Women's Environment & Development Organization, who joins us stateside in the very early hours of the morning. Thank you for joining us, Bridget.

I will open with a couple of questions, and then we will move to questions from other members. What are your expectations of COP29? What should the Scottish Government prioritise in Baku?

Professor Tahseen Jafry (Glasgow Caledonian University): Good morning. COP29 will be interesting in that it will tally on to the outputs from COP28. The thing to look out for at COP29 will be the new collective goal on climate finance, which is the cornerstone of developed countries' commitment to supporting mitigation and adaptation by supporting national country plans and the delivery of nationally determined contributions. COP29 will also focus on the global goal on adaptation and there will, no doubt, be scrutiny of the loss and damage fund.

It is important that the Scottish Government focuses on how it can contribute to, and play a pivotal role in achieving, the new collective goal on finance, and it should consider how its financial commitments to climate justice align clearly and squarely with the big agendas. COP29 is a finance COP, so all eyes will be on how funding sources will be supported and delivered on the ground.

Ben Wilson (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund): Good morning. I agree with Professor Jafry that the new collective quantified goal is the priority of COP29. The fact that it is a finance COP will dominate all the headlines.

I will give a quick summary. The committee will know that, all the way back in 2009, developed countries set a target of giving £100 billion a year to developing countries to help them to adapt to net zero economies and address the impacts of climate change. That goal has now expired, so there needs to be a new goal by 2025.

There will be huge conflict over the quantum of funding. There was already conflict in June, during

the pre-COP negotiations in Bonn, because some countries in the global south proposed a target of between \$1 trillion and \$1.3 trillion of climate finance being provided annually as part of the new collective quantified goal, whereas countries in the global north did not mention any target whatsoever during the negotiations. A target needs to be achieved at COP29, and there will be a big conflict about that.

The issue of loss and damage, which Professor Jafry mentioned, relates closely to that matter, so it will be closely discussed and scrutinised at COP29. The Scottish Government has a particular reputation and expertise on loss and damage, so its most strategic focus at COP29 should probably be on emphasising the need for the new collective quantified target to have a sub-goal for loss and damage. That is not a gimme. A lot of countries in the global north are arguing that the new goal should focus only on mitigation, reducing emissions and adaptation, and not on loss and damage. Many of those countries are still not entirely satisfied with the progress that has been made on loss and damage in recent years, so they will see COP29 as another opportunity to go back, to some extent, on the commitments that have been made on that issue. The Scottish Government should focus on that as a strategic priority.

In relation to the Scottish Government's presence at COP29, we know that it is not party to the negotiations, but it is important that it has a position on the negotiations and is able to comment on them and use its soft power in that way. However, the value of the Scottish Government being at COP29 is not just about the negotiations. It can have a role in engaging in activities with civil society, other sub-state actors, researchers and experts to build up and deepen its understanding of loss and damage, renewables and the journey to net zero. Those valuable activities take place at COPs, and I hope that, as well as following the formal negotiations, the Scottish Government will engage in them.

Bridget Burns (Women's Environment & Development Organization): Good morning. Can you hear me?

The Convener: Yes, we can.

Bridget Burns: I know that we checked that, but I always want to double-check.

I thank the committee for having me. It is wonderful to be able to build on what my colleagues have said. As has been said, COP29 is critical in relation to finance, as this is the year of finance. My organisation is part of the women and gender constituency, which brings women's rights and gender equality views into the climate change

space and the climate change negotiations, alongside broad social justice asks.

As Ben Wilson said, we want the discussions to result in a new collective quantified goal, and the Scottish Government should show leadership in ensuring that the issue of loss and damage is not lost in the conversations and that there is a sub-goal on it. That feels like a key entry point.

Another issue relates to the quality of how we speak about climate finance. We have been advocating for an ambitious science and needs-based goal that will deliver for people, especially those at the front lines. We know that that will require significantly enhancing and simplifying direct access to grants-based finance for marginalised and disenfranchised groups and centring human rights and gender equality in climate finance, including through the advocacy that we are doing in relation to the decisions and what is contained in them, and the narrative that we have around what climate finance looks like.

A critical point is that, although this is the year of finance, another item that is on the agenda for the upcoming COP is a renewal of the gender action plan, which is, we believe, one of several drivers under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that are about centring climate justice and ensuring that, across all the actions that we take, we think about intersectional human rights and gender equality issues.

Not a huge amount of attention is being paid to that, and there are many challenges in ensuring that we get a strong outcome under the gender action plan at the upcoming COP. That includes a range of parties simply upholding important agreed language on human rights and gender equality that have been achieved, and using the opportunity to showcase what gender-just climate solutions look like and to move the needle on why the gender action plan should be a driver for more sustainable and just climate finance, mitigation, adaptation and action on loss and damage.

As has been mentioned, we have had incredible experiences working with the Scottish Government in what could be described as a soft power role, which involves highlighting understanding of, for example, the critical need for any transition away from fossil fuels to be grounded in justice and the challenges that come with that. There are so many wonderful examples that the Scottish Government is leading on at home that provide an incredible model for other countries. We have had really good partnerships and have held events at which we have been able to share a collective vision of what that could look like. I wanted to emphasise that point, too.

The Convener: Thank you. I have quick questions for all of you. Professor Jafry, you

mention in your submission the role of climate finance in Ghana. Will you expand on what is happening there and why it is of particular importance?

Professor Jafry: The example that I give in the submission relates to doctoral research that was conducted with me by my student at the time, who is now a senior climate expert at the United Nations Development Programme in Ghana. In essence, that research looked at the flow of finance into countries. Ghana was chosen because it was the country of origin of the research and it was where my student was based.

The research sought to get into the depths of finance architecture. To strip it right back, we discovered that only a very small percentage of the finance that reaches a country such as Ghana actually gets to the people who need it the most—the poorest and the most vulnerable. It is incredible that that happens. A lot of the finance gets stuck in administrative processes and procedures. On top of that, there is very little by way of accountability, transparency and transferability. There seems to be no mechanism to track the impact that even that small percentage of finance is having on those who need it the most. The methodology, the architecture and the reporting requirements simply do not seem to be there. There seems to be a flaw right through the architecture of how finance flows.

That goes back to my earlier point about the new collective goal on climate finance and how it relates to the Scottish Government's loss and damage funding. Such funding has a voluntary aspect. Given the considerable volume of money that has gone in—about £40 million in total—it is important that we understand the impact that it has made on the ground. We need to know what our indicators of impact are and what difference the funding has made. Having a robust and consolidated narrative is important to enable us to influence other stakeholders in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations.

09:00

The Convener: Mr Wilson, you mentioned the soft power aspect. How is the Scottish Government promoting its stance on loss and damage? Which other countries are coming in behind that? What benefit is there in the Scottish Government being at COP29, and what influence could it have there?

Ben Wilson: If we reflect on COP26, we will remember that the Scottish Government was very prominent there because the event was held in Glasgow. Most of the delegates were aware of the constitutional situation with the United Kingdom

Government and that it was a UK Government-run COP. To be frank, the Scottish Government played its cards very well by championing the issue of loss and damage. It used its prominence in a strategic way by being the first country from the global north to champion that issue and put money behind it in a way that precipitated the further action that followed. Although the Scottish Government certainly cannot take all the credit for the progress that has subsequently been made on loss and damage, most experts on the issue would agree that it had a significant role by making that commitment at COP26.

Since then, the further that we have got away from the Glasgow event and the more progress is made on loss and damage internationally, many more eyes have been on what the likes of China, the US, the European Union and everyone else will do in that area. However, people still remember that the Scottish Government was the first mover on such issues and it still has a great presence in speaking on them at big international events.

There are two ways in which the Scottish Government has taken that message forward internationally. One is at the policy level, such as through convening events. For example, a few months ago, the Scottish Government, together with the Slycan Trust, hosted an event in Edinburgh on community access and direct access to the UN loss and damage fund, which many people are calling for. The aim of the event was to get experts together in the room with the Scottish Government to reflect on proposals for submission to the loss and damage fund board on how such a community fund could operate.

At COP29, the Scottish Government will host dialogues that will help to draw out lessons from programmes that it has funded on loss and damage that have already taken place. I met officials about that yesterday and we talked about one such event, where partners from Malawi, Zambia, Bangladesh and elsewhere will share their learning.

Secondly, there is the political side of things. It was the political will behind the Scottish Government's initial commitment on loss and damage that helped to make such a splash. I hope and expect that whichever Scottish Government minister attends COP29 will be able to use platforms to raise the negotiation points that I mentioned earlier. Because of the Scottish Government's great presence on the issue, it will be listened to and heard clearly. Some of those platforms are among the small-state actor groups. The Scottish Government has a leadership role in the Regions4 network and the Under2 Coalition. Through those spaces, it is able to get platforms to

comment on the negotiations, which I hope will have a political impact.

The Convener: Ms Burns, years ago, I read a book called “If Women Counted”, by Marilyn Waring, which challenged the financial and economic outlook on what counted as work. The example that I remember was that a commute to work is considered to be economic activity, but collecting water from a well for a family is not. Are you confident that the evaluations that will happen as a result of something that is completely focused on finance will reflect the impact on the duties that are recognised as gendered in relation to things such as caring, or do you have concerns that there will be a bias in what is evaluated?

Bridget Burns: I love that question. I am not at all confident. In discussions under the new collective quantified goal on finance, I do not think that we will hear about what counts financially from the perspective of a care economy, for example. Unfortunately, those discussions and negotiations are in a very political space, as Ben Wilson said, when it comes to how far apart countries are on the overall quantum. Part of our concern is that we will lose nuance about the challenges in the current finance mechanisms that we engage in quite heavily—the green climate plan and operationalisation of the loss and damage fund, for example. There is recognition that, even if the money is flowing into those mechanisms, it is not necessarily reaching the groups that most need those resources on the front line, because people are not shifting their thinking on what counts and what is important.

There are a lot of barriers, even in the systems themselves. We speak a lot with countries about their role in helping us to shift our understanding of what mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage look like, and what an assessment of risk really means. That is because, in the climate mechanisms, we find that folks evaluate risk as being higher for investments in programmes that support women’s livelihoods than it is for large-scale infrastructure programmes, because those are what people think of as climate action.

We have therefore worked with the Scottish Government on centring the understanding of a just transition. We run the gender-just climate solutions programme, which is about lifting up community-based solutions to adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage that are strengthening capacity or are focused on community-based renewable energy systems. We need to understand the barriers to increasing the scale of those things.

It is often about changing the nature of what needs to be invested in. It is not just about shifting energy systems within a community or in a country, for example; it is about understanding

what is currently undervalued where we do not have the resources to invest in healthcare infrastructure or education infrastructure, and seeing that as being part of the green transition, as well.

However, the thing that I am confident about—and the reason why I linked to the gender action plan—is a newly established work programme on a just transition, under the UN climate change convention. That gives me hope and optimism, and I see Scotland as having an opportunity to be a strong voice and a political power in that space. It feels as though the global community has started to shift the conversation from, “Should we shift away from fossil fuels?” to, “We must do so”, so how do we ensure that the transition is just, and how do we understand the shift to a care economy—a shift away from harm to care? Through things such as the gender action plan we are able to have more substantive discussions about what that shift in communities looks like.

The other aspects of the climate negotiations are important so that we embed social and climate justice. In that respect, we have certainly found that the ability to partner with Scotland and local authorities and municipalities has been important in giving voice and visibility to how folks grapple with a just transition.

The Convener: Thank you. I move to questions from the committee.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning. You said that the Scottish Government has a part to play when it comes to the COP, which is about access and understanding.

However, although Scotland continues to have a role as a voice for climate justice, and it leads the campaign in some ways, it is failing to meet its own targets. That creates a potential conflict with regard to our credibility, given where we are. It would be good to get a view from you on where you think that fits in with aspects such as the sustainability of current levels of spend on climate justice.

Professor Jafry: That is a great question, as the issue of credibility will come up in the context of the Scottish Government missing its targets. It is important that we take stock of what we have achieved so far and focus on the positives. Although the whole picture seems to be very negative, we need to make sense of it and to consider how much Scotland has achieved relative to other nation states in reaching the targets, thus far.

Scotland, through the Scottish Government, has a strong voice and has championed climate justice since Paris, when the term was first coined. There is an opportunity here to connect the issues of

climate justice and just transition both domestically and internationally.

To try to move forward in scope would perhaps involve taking a whole-society approach, whereby the Scottish Government would be seen to be taking society with it on the journey to net zero. Rather than the traditional “Leave no one behind” approach, that would be a purposeful and meaningful direction of travel. There is a role for the Scottish Government to play in how it does things domestically.

In the bigger scheme of things, climate justice is about supporting the people in the poorest countries in the global south—that is where the mantra comes from. However, given how our climate is changing, people in the global north who have contributed the least to climate change are also on the front line. We are seeing that all over, including in Scotland and in the US. Members will have seen all the news reports.

I wonder whether there is a way in which the Scottish Government can pivot, somehow, its championing of climate justice domestically, and try to bring the arguments together to show that we are committed to climate justice both at home and overseas. That will be important when we look at the business of a fair and just transition. It is about not just the journey to net zero, but about how we do it in a manner that is fair and equitable. Unpacking that will be a critical part of our approach.

Ben Wilson: That is a very good point. It is important and, to be frank, the situation makes me feel uncomfortable, at times. At SCIAF, as a member of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, we have campaigned for the Scottish Government to take a very positive stance on climate justice—to have a climate justice fund and to make a commitment on loss and damage—and for it to set bold targets and achieve them. It has not achieved those bold targets, which causes us a great deal of concern.

The reality is that the more the targets are missed in Scotland, the more loss and damage will be caused overseas, probably to the tune of many more millions of pounds than the Scottish Government has pledged to address that. That absolutely needs to be addressed.

One thing that the Scottish Government could do in terms of its international credibility would involve its being honest about the failings that have led Scotland to miss its targets. Scotland could go to COP29—although that may be too soon, now—with a document that says, “This is what we got wrong. We’re taking it really seriously, and this is how we’re going to address it.” It is my understanding that ministers have not done that, thus far. When ministers had to respond to the missed targets that have most recently been

reported—I think that that makes it nine out of 13 targets having now been missed—they brought forward what was basically a number of rehashed policies that had already been announced for how they were going to get there.

If the Scottish Government were to go to COP29, and to own that and be up front and honest, and say that it is committed to being as bold and ambitious as possible and is still committed to net zero 2045, and say how it is going to do it—I am talking about how we achieve climate targets not only in policy terms, but through overall governance—that might go some way towards improving its potentially damaged credibility on the issue.

However, I reaffirm what Professor Jafry said. From the public point of view, with regard to the failure of Scotland to reach its targets and subsequently, therefore, to change the law, it would be dangerous if the public saw that as an indication that meeting climate-just targets is unachievable. It is not unachievable—those targets could have been achieved if the right things had been put in place at the right time, but they were not.

09:15

We need clear pathway towards the bold targets that will be set in the new law, but we also need a sense of optimism that delivering net zero is good not just for the climate and for the countries where SCIAF works, but for people in Scotland. It is good for people in cities and for people who want to use public transport more, and it is good for our air quality and so on. It would be good to hear that message coming strongly from ministers.

Bridget Burns: Thank you for the question. I agree with everything that has been said.

We should not underestimate the importance of what Scotland has already done in terms of its political leadership on climate justice in the global landscape, and how important that leadership has been, both in moving the needle on loss and damage and in the work on creating the climate justice fund.

In the grand scheme of where we are in the global landscape, other countries are pushing and moving towards it. We match that with what is happening domestically by doing exactly what has just been described, through willingness to engage with the fact that transitioning our social systems and our economies, when it is done with intent and thinking about justice, is not easily achievable. Being humble with those learnings is a gift to the global community, because many countries are not at the same level in their overall acceptance that we need to transition away from fossil fuels.

When we look at the grand scheme of where folks are, I think that Scotland still has a lot to offer the global community in terms of where it is in trying to meet, and pushing towards, its targets, as well as in its humility and honesty with regard to the challenges that are involved in actually being able to do that.

Alexander Stewart: To follow on from that, how should we monitor and evaluate the Scottish Government's existing climate justice projects? Those projects are receiving funding and they have support, and many of them are achieving a reasonably balanced approach, but they are not necessarily getting over the line in what they are trying to do. What needs to happen next?

As we have discussed, COP29 will be all about finance. However, it is not just finance that is required, but momentum, and how that is evaluated and monitored will give us an indication of what is needed for the future. The data that is transmitted will give us an understanding of where we are, but we need to have some way of evaluating that and monitoring what will happen. If we do not do that, we will continue to fall behind, and we will not progress.

Professor Jafry: That is an important point to raise at this committee. It is important that we take stock of the volume of funds that have gone in, and that we really understand the benefits that that level of funding has delivered on the ground.

I will strip it back quickly to how we monitor and evaluate. What is important is that we get the story correct. We need to look at the baseline for what it is that we want to achieve. What is the purpose of all the collective funding that has gone through various avenues such as advocacy, humanitarian assistance, climate-just communities and so on? There are so many different moving pots and parts to this, and it is important to get a baseline, with a collective vision of where it all sits.

We understand that research and evidence on monitoring and evaluation are currently lacking. That has an impact downstream, with regard to whether progress will be sustainable after the funding comes to an end. Development of those metrics and indicators is not there yet, as I understand it, although I have not looked into that in any great detail. From what I know from looking in from the outside, I have not seen anything that would help me to articulate what the collective goal for all the work is. It is important that that is done now, because that in itself will shape the very strong narrative that the Scottish Government needs in order to be able to position itself on the global stage and influence others to be on the journey with it.

That goes back to the loss and damage funding, which is voluntary in nature. How do we convince

other donors to voluntarily pay into that loss and damage pot, over and above the new collective goal on climate finance? It is a big subject, but I hope that that has summarised it a little.

Alexander Stewart: Yes—thank you.

Ben Wilson: I very much agree with Professor Jafry. Looking at the papers for this meeting, I reflected on the fact that a thorough review of Scotland's climate justice fund was last done in 2021. You do not want to do such things too frequently, but I suggest that, after the projects that have been funded in the current session of Parliament have concluded, another comprehensive review of the climate justice fund would be a good thing to do. It could consider all the various projects that have been funded, in order to extract some of the learning that Professor Jafry has talked about, which cuts across funding to various agencies.

SCIAF has received £800,000 from the climate justice fund this year for loss and damage work, and we are implementing the £8 million grant in Rwanda as part of the climate-just communities programme. We currently do our own monitoring and evaluation, and write our own concluding reports when projects come to an end. We engage closely with other recipients of climate justice funding. That collaboration with other grant holders has been encouraged by the Scottish Government, but it is still relatively ad hoc and loose, so a comprehensive review would be good.

Meetings like this, and further scrutiny from Parliament, are good and are very well received. The Scottish Government recently published its "Contribution to International Development Report 2021–2023", which includes a summary of all its international development spending. As far as I am aware, the publication of the report was not accompanied by a debate in Parliament, and I am not sure whether the report has been scrutinised by the committee.

Although the levels of funding from Scotland to international development and climate justice might be relatively small in comparison with other budget lines, it is very important work for Scotland's international reputation. We would very much welcome increased parliamentary scrutiny of the spending, with regard to good practice and improving the quality and transparency of all the work.

Bridget Burns: For us, one of the major indicators that we are moving the needle towards climate justice is whether resources are actually getting to the front lines. We need to look at the projects that are receiving investment, and not just at the communities that are involved in those projects, but at whether control is ceded to those communities over resources, choices around

climate, sustainable energy systems and so on. Again, that is about where and how the money is being channelled.

As Professor Jafry said, one of the challenges in broad-scale climate finance as a whole is that, when we start to drill down into where money has gone, we find that less than 1 per cent, or less than 3 per cent, for example, is reaching the community that it needs to reach.

One of the ways in which that analysis can be done is by understanding the impact of the mechanisms that Scotland has been creating and operating through the climate justice fund in reaching communities that are at the front lines of climate impacts, and by understanding how sustainable projects have been and are. In the work that we have done with the Scottish Government, that is—as has just been said—one of the key indicators that we measure. For example, we measure how we continually invest in sustainability and upscaling of the projects that we have identified as part of our gender-just climate solutions programme.

That relates to the point about the broader political leadership that Scotland can bring, because it is about the exact type of advocacy that we are doing within, for example, the loss and damage fund board and the Green Climate Fund board. We need to shift those mechanisms to create windows for more simplified direct access for front-line communities. The learnings from something like the climate justice fund, including what it is funding and the mechanisms and ways by which it is doing that, can serve as important lessons for the broader mechanisms, and that will have an impact on moving us towards more climate-just finance.

The Convener: Mr Wilson, I do not think that the committee has looked at the report that you mentioned, but I believe that another climate or justice committee did. We will look into that, and see whether there was a response to the report and whether a committee did any work on it.

I have one question, which is about a phrase that you used. When you talked about what the Government was doing on climate targets, you said that it should be honest about what it had got wrong. Do we know what we got wrong? Is it about the general direction and whether we are moving the right way, or is it about other things?

Ben Wilson: In terms of policy, the best place to look is the UK Climate Change Committee's series of advice to the Scottish Government on achieving its targets. From when those targets were set in 2019 to this day, the CCC has been producing regular reports on that. I am not an expert on the technical detail, but I know that the CCC made further suggestions with regard to heat

in buildings, agriculture and land use, transport and—I am sure—other areas of policy.

In terms of governance, there has essentially been a failure of the law. Why is it so easy to put targets in law that can be so easily missed or broken? Ultimately—as I understand it from the legislation—the only consequence if a target is missed is simply that the minister has to say why they have missed it and produce plans to get back to the target. However, we have seen that those plans to get back to the target have often not been robust enough.

There needs to be a wider exercise, perhaps carried out by Parliament rather than by the Government, to consider how such legislation can have such holes in it, as it were. That would help to ensure that the new legislation—the stage 1 debate on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill will take place later today—is much more robust and that targets are not missed in the future.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

I call Patrick Harvie.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Okay—where do I begin? I would happily offer a list of the reasons why I think that Scotland has got it wrong, but I will perhaps save that for the debate this afternoon on the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, which is, finally, an acknowledgement that we are years behind where we are supposed to be on reducing domestic emissions.

I was going to start on this theme, but it has been covered to a certain extent, so I will not go into it in much detail. Bridget Burns said that nothing about the transition is easy. To go back to when Scotland first bought credibility, domestically and internationally, at COP15 in 2009, that was done easily—it was done simply by setting targets. Agreeing the destination, without agreeing the steps that were needed to get there, was the easy bit.

Mr Wilson is probably right to say that it is a little too early to ask for honest self-reflection from the Government, because if it were to offer that now, I think that it would just say, "Parliament set too high a target and we didn't get anything wrong." Next year's COP is probably the time when the Government will have to show that it has a new climate plan, after the bill that is currently before Parliament is passed, and try to demonstrate some credibility.

I want to link that to the issue of climate finance more broadly, specifically in relation to Scotland's track record in financing the energy sector. Scotland has been a fossil fuel producer for a long time, and it hosts not only the companies that

continue to extract fossil fuels but the companies that finance that activity. Despite a very clear signal from the United Nations and other agencies that new investment in fossil fuels cannot be justified, that is still happening.

What role and responsibilities can a country such as Scotland, with both the energy and the finance parts of that industry still operating, undertake in a soft-power sense? I am thinking of something a little bit like those early actions of setting targets and showing that we can earn credibility as a non-state party by doing so, or the early work on both the language and money behind the idea of climate justice and loss and damage. What can we do in that space to say that the fossil fuel finance industry is what needs to be challenged and changed if we are to have a global economy that finances climate action and does it justly?

09:30

Professor Jafry: I will start. It is important that Scotland positions itself carefully in the context that you have described—on what we can do and how we can move forward. That chimes with the just transition aspect. Scotland needs to show that it has an incredibly clear plan and a framework, which it will adopt and implement, for how it will move away from the fossil fuel industry. That relates to using the language of COP, which is about the “phasing out” or “phasing down” of fossil fuels. It needs to articulate its approach and put itself in the correct position. We need to connect the conversation about just transition with the Scottish public to show that we are committed to achieving it. At the moment, there is not as much of a connection as there should be.

Which approach to adopt is a challenging question. We could look at the transition aspect of the equation and say, “This the journey to net zero”. However, the “just” aspect needs to be unpacked in much more detail, because it is not clear at the moment. The Government needs to say how it will achieve a just transition and which framework it will use. Will its approach concentrate on securing skills and upskilling the people who will be affected by the closure of fossil fuel companies? I stress that it also has to be about society—the people who will be left to pick up the pieces. For example, not everyone will be able to adapt by buying electric vehicles, because it will not be within their means.

What should the approach be? Where is the inclusivity aspect in the “just” part of the transition conversation? The approach needs to be properly debated and thought through, and those two aspects need to come together and be aligned much more clearly. At the moment, “just transition” simply feels like a fancy term that is out there—it

will be used at COP29, as well—but the padding around it needs to be better articulated.

Ben Wilson: In the very near term, we need to see, in the energy strategy and just transition plan, a reaffirmation of the Scottish Government’s commitment to the presumption against granting new North Sea oil and gas licences. Its publication has been much delayed, but I hope that it will be forthcoming soon. I am not quite sure why it has been delayed—I do not know who does.

Patrick Harvie: You are anticipating my supplementary question.

Ben Wilson: Would not it be nice if the Scottish Government could show the same courage on fossil fuels as it showed on loss and damage? It was courageous of it to commit the money that it committed. For many years, countries in the global north had felt that giving money for loss and damage funding would open the door to legal liabilities, so Scotland really went out on a limb in making its commitment. However, it did so because it was the right thing to do. Now, all of a sudden, loss and damage is not as taboo as it was before, and there is a UN fund for it.

The Scottish Government could show the same courage on fossil fuels and the just transition. It could be brave and continue to commit to having no new licences, and perhaps be even braver and support calls for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty at international level. It should be realistic about the fact that pretending that there is a future for North Sea oil and gas is good for workers, when it is not. What is good for them is having a reliable alternative in the form of renewables in the north-east.

The Government could start to own taking a progressive position on building a more prosperous future, which at the same time would help to make the public case for the net zero transition. That work would need to be done in partnership with the UK Government. The early signs of greater collaboration between the Scottish Government in Edinburgh and the new UK Government in London are positive. If it could be done in close collaboration with the UK Government, that would spell a good opportunity for Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: Given that Ben Wilson has raised the issue, perhaps I could ask him to confirm one point before I ask Bridget Burns to speak.

Professor Jafry said that we need a clear plan. The energy strategy and just transition plan is currently with the Government and waiting to be published. If the Scottish Government was able to publish the plan before it went to COP29, with it supporting a presumption against new fossil fuel capacity, that would be a symbolic position and an

example of soft power, because decisions on such licences are not taken here. That would be within the scope of the Scottish Government's role at COP29, and it would be an important step in rebuilding and restoring Scotland's credibility in that area.

Ben Wilson: Absolutely. I remind folks that, as Professor Jafry mentioned, one of the big agreements at COP28 was the agreement to transition away from fossil fuels and, as part of the negotiations at COP29, people will be asking how we are ensuring that we do that. The Scottish Government needs an answer to that question.

Patrick Harvie: That is helpful.

Does Bridget Burns want to add anything?

Bridget Burns: I will make two quick points. I fully agree with the comments that have already been made. We whole-heartedly advocate countries stepping up as leaders in relation to what is now, in our opinion, the globally accepted position that we have to shift urgently away from fossil fuels. We want countries to focus not on the "if" or the "when", but on the "how". How can we do that in a just way? From my understanding of public polling in Scotland, there is an opportunity for Scotland to be a real leader in that regard. How do we create Government policies that invest in renewable energy over fossil fuel extraction? Who will be the leading voice in the transition? Perhaps it should not be the oil and gas industry. Those are critical points in relation to improving Scotland's credibility as a leader on the issue.

The other important element, from a global climate justice perspective, relates to a report on critical minerals that was published in September by the UN secretary general. In relation to climate justice, when countries think about how, domestically, to shift away from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy, it is critical that they understand that any resource can be extracted to the point of exploitation and environmental degradation. That applies to the green economy as well as to our current economy. Over the past few years, folk have been pointing to the huge finding that there are communities—including communities that we work with, from Chile to Zimbabwe—that are sitting on land that is filled with lithium and other critical transition minerals and that, if we do not take into account what it means to centre human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples in the transition, and if we do not take a justice approach to what it means for those communities to transition, we will do harm. We should not transition to a green economy on the backs of communities in the global south. That feels like an important point to include in this conversation.

We should think about how Scotland can be a leader on the issue and, from a climate justice perspective, how it can show the same political leadership as it showed on loss and damage, by leading the conversation in a way that takes account of the reality of our critical minerals.

Patrick Harvie: That is a very important point that was well put.

Professor Jafry: It is important to flag up a couple of issues, as we make sense of the conversation about a just transition. We must be mindful of ensuring that people understand what "just transition" means. In relation to the language that is used to describe a just transition, a lot of organisations and stakeholders just do not understand what it is all about, including climate justice, so it is really important that we try to capture that.

As part of the big picture, we need to look at who is benefiting from a just transition. Is it the global north or the global south? Our transition will depend on extraction and mining of minerals and so on, and a lot of that will be in the global south. On one hand, we might transition to a green and clean economy but, on the other, that could come at a significant social and environmental cost to the global south. We need to be mindful of that in our day-to-day business.

It is really important that we understand what a just transition means and how climate justice fits neatly into that. We have talked a lot about Government policies and so on. How do things fit together in Government departments in different parts of the world? How are things aligned? How can others adopt principles and policies on climate justice and a just transition? Which Government departments do those things sit in? Does all that sit outside, or do those things align squarely? We need to be mindful of those broader questions.

Patrick Harvie: Thank you very much.

The Convener: That has exhausted our questions. I thank the witnesses for what has been an enjoyable session. I particularly thank Bridget Burns for getting up so early to join us online from New York. I thank everyone for their attendance.

09:41

Meeting continued in private until 10:25.

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