

# Time is ticking on climate change: we urgently need a new, legally binding agreement with concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gases

Blog Admin

*Ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Durban in November, [Mary Robison](#), President of the [Mary Robison Foundation – Climate Justice \(MRFJC\)](#), writes that now, more than ever, a legally binding agreement on climate change is needed.*



A legally binding agreement on climate change is needed to protect those men, women and children who are most vulnerable to climate change. It is the only sure fire way to ensure that actions are taken to reduce greenhouse gases and to support developing countries to adapt to climate change and benefit from low carbon development.

Without a legally binding agreement we rely on declarations of political commitment – but this is subject to changes in the global economy, local politics and changing priorities. We have too many examples of political commitments being postponed, or even forgotten. [The Cancun Agreements](#) have restored our collective faith in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)) process and has provided a framework from which to develop a comprehensive international agreement. But we are still missing the urgency to act and the commitment necessary to agree to legally binding actions.

Time is ticking – without the [Kyoto Protocol](#) we have no legal imperative to reduce emissions – just a pledge and review system which essentially allows countries to set their own levels of ambition. The pledges on the table do not correspond with the now shared objective of limiting warming to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. In fact they have us on a trajectory towards dangerous climate change with warming in excess of 3°C.

To amend the Kyoto Protocol and avoid a gap in commitment periods, changes would need to be proposed at [COP17](#) in Durban later this year. At the very latest provisional changes can be proposed at COP18 in December 2012. It is looking more and more likely that there will be a gap in commitment periods and this has repercussions on developed country commitments to reduce emissions and on the carbon market.

We also have the LCA (Long-term Cooperative Action) track under the convention where ideas are being proposed and tested with the aim of designing a new climate treaty.

There are a number of options on the table in the negotiations – and outside the negotiations – all, with their own risks and opportunities. These legal, political, incremental, regional, state and private sector approaches all have the potential to take us closer to the legally binding deal we so desperately need to protect those most at risk. What we need above all is a collective sense of urgency which will propel us to take the necessary and appropriate decisions.

Cancun demonstrates that the UNFCCC process is far from dead and that a legally binding deal is still on the cards. It has generated a renewed sense of momentum, and although not as imminent as many of us would wish, a legally-binding deal is once again a possibility. Like [President Nasheed of the Maldives](#), I am willing to go step by step and layer by layer if that is what is needed to secure a meaningful agreement. But we have to be cognisant of time – the impacts of climate change are already being felt, growing seasons are changing, sea level is rising and people in the poorest parts of the world are at risk.

The fundamental question is – how can we marshal the arguments and political will needed to secure a legal binding agreement? What more could we be doing today to make the case for why this approach is so vital to achieving a sustainable way forward?

We need every good idea, every ally and every innovative approach that is available.

My aim and that of the [Mary Robison Foundation – Climate Justice](#), is to contribute to the global effort needed to secure a safe future for the poor and vulnerable, and to amplify their voices and concerns at the international level. 2011 is the year to get to grips with the legal form of a future agreement and to set down

concrete measures for achieving it. Time is running out...and there is a lot of work to be done.

*On 10 March, 2011, Mary Robinson gave the lecture, [Climate Change needs Climate Justice at the LSE](#).  
For more information and on the lecture, including a podcast and videos, please see the [LSE's event listing](#).*

