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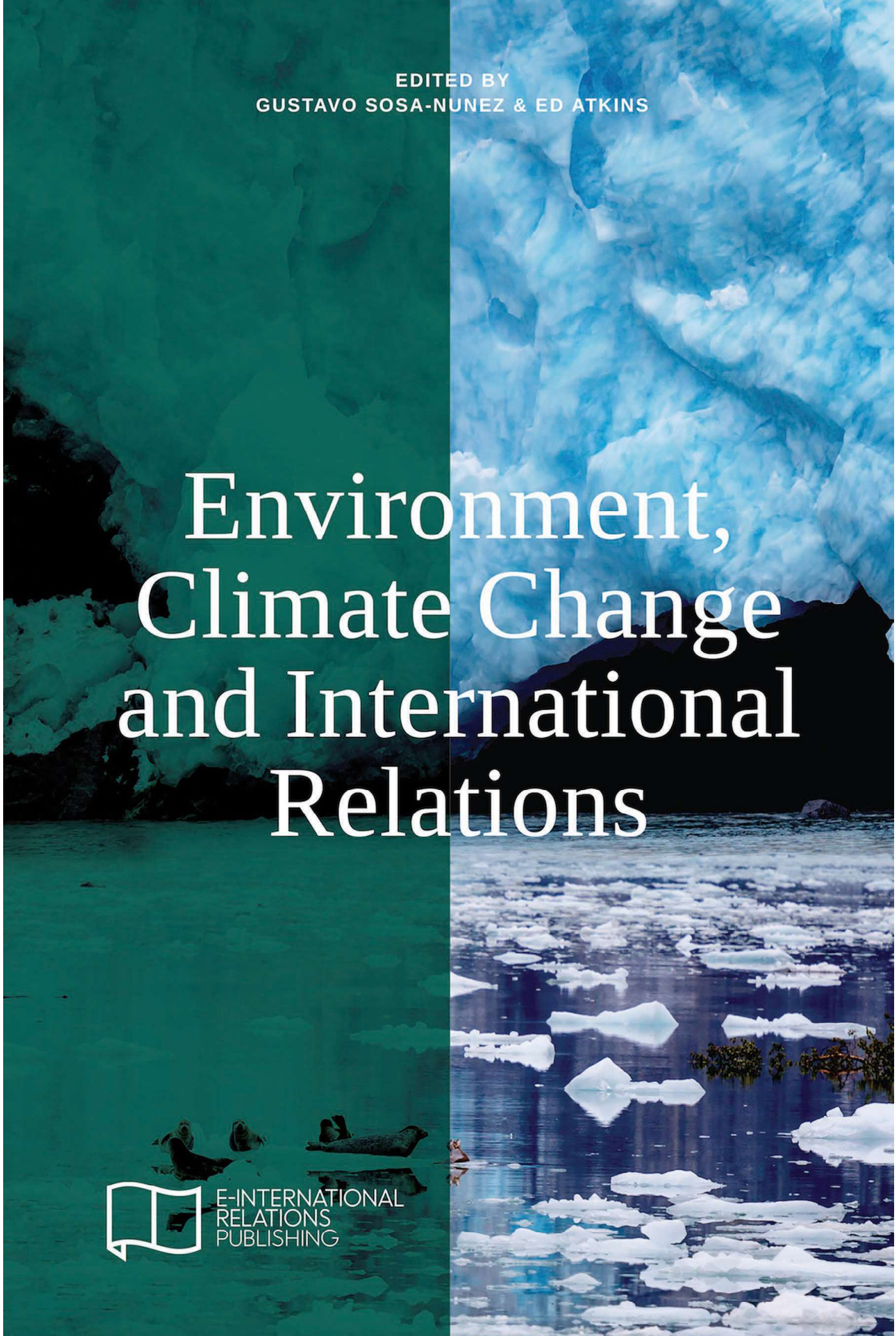

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The Institutionalisation of Climate Change in Global Politics

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'Humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to nuclear war.'
1988 World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere

Today it is commonplace to state that climate change is an urgent global priority. States, and scientists, have highlighted its destructive effects. In fact, scientific studies abound illustrating how climate change will lead to an increased frequency of extreme weather events, triggering more intense storms, melting polar icecaps and glaciers and raising sea levels (IPCC, 2014). It will have major effects on everything from agriculture to the spread of diseases. Yet anthropogenic climate change was once dismissed by many scientists, ignored by heads of state and seen as irrelevant by our multilateral institutions. So how has climate change become a top global priority? And how do we know that it will continue to be so?

This contribution argues that climate change has become institutionalised in global affairs as a top priority issue. First, there is a strong scientific consensus that greenhouse gas emissions are increasing due to human behaviour and this is driving up average global temperatures. In addition, states, including major powers, regularly meet and discuss how to mitigate climate change at global summits. Third, states have committed significant new resources to address climate adaptation and mitigation in developing

countries. Fourth, a wide range of multilateral institutions from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the World Health Organisation (WHO) have institutionalised climate change within their work. In addition, a transnational civil society movement for climate justice has also been critical at keeping pressure on states and global institutions to take action, although this is not the focus here (Hadden, 2015). This article complements our understanding of how environmental issues become institutionalised in global affairs (see Falkner, 2012).

This chapter argues that climate change is now widely recognised by states and institutions as one of the top global challenges. Change has occurred along four dimensions: 1) scientific consensus; 2) political action; 3) financial resources; and 4) institutionalisation of climate change in multilateral organisations. The chapter draws on an examination of G7 and G8 communiqués as well as extensive research on international organisations engagement with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and climate change (Hall, 2015).

Scientific consensus on climate change

In the 19th and 20th centuries, a series of scientific studies made the case that humans, through industrialisation, were affecting climate change. Already in 1859 John Tyndall proved the 'greenhouse effect' by demonstrating that gases have different absorption patterns (Paterson, 1996). In 1938, Guy Stewart Callendar found that increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was linked to an increase in world temperature (Hulme, 2009). Initially other scientists did not take these results seriously, doubting that carbon dioxide levels had increased. Furthermore, Callendar presented his findings just as world attention was on the rising power of Nazis in Germany and the lead-up to World War II.

In the second half of the 20th century scientific evidence for climate change grew. In the 1950s and 1960s, scientists began modelling carbon dioxide levels and found further evidence of anthropogenic climate change (Paterson, 1996: 22; Hulme, 2009). In 1979, scientists met at the World Climate Conference, one of the first international conferences dedicated to climate change. Legislators also started to listen to scientific concerns: in 1988, James Hansen, a scientist for the National Atmospheric and Space Administration (NASA), gave evidence in a United States Senate hearing on the dangers and likelihood of global warming. In 1988, the first intergovernmental conference on climate change was held in Toronto and attended by many scientists and politicians. The conference recommended a 20 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2005 and the

establishment of an inter-governmental scientific body to monitor the issue: the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The IPCC was tasked with preparing a 'comprehensive review and recommendations with respect to the state of knowledge of the science of climate change; social and economic impact of climate change, possible response strategies and elements for inclusion in a possible future international convention on climate' (IPCC, 2015). In 1990, the IPCC published its first report outlining the scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change (IPCC, 1990). Since then, they have issued dozens of additional reports, the work of thousands of scientists who peer review each other's work, and have become the global authority on climate change. The Fifth IPCC Report, released in 2014, emphasised the strong scientific case for anthropogenic climate change, stating that the 'warming of the climate system is unequivocal' (IPCC, 2014). The IPCC previously co-won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 with Al Gore for their 'efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change' (IPCC, 2015).

Scientific knowledge by its nature is always open for debate and contestation. For example: the IPCC has not always been correct in its predictions. In a 2007 report they claimed incorrectly that Himalayan glaciers would melt away by 2035 (IPCC, 2010). Modelling the impacts of climate change is challenging, hence it is difficult to predict the exact impacts in a given locale. However, there is now a clear consensus that greenhouse gas emissions (caused by the burning of fossil fuels which is the basis of industrialised economies) has led to an increase in the global average temperature. The increase in average global temperature is having a number of other effects: from the melting of the polar icecaps and glaciers to an increased frequency and intensity of storms and drought in many areas of the world. Furthermore, there are likely to be critical tipping points which can lead to irreversible changes (Lenton, 2011). Over the past 150 years climate change has gone from an issue dismissed by many scientists to being widely accepted as a critical global challenge which national leaders must respond to.

Political action on climate change

Since the late 1980s world leaders have acknowledged the potential disastrous impacts of climate change. In 1988, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher made a speech to the Royal Society of London in which she drew attention to climate change, claiming that it is possible 'we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself'

(Hulme, 2009: 65). In the same year, the foreign minister of the Soviet Union, Eduard Shevardnadze, also called for action on climate change in a speech to the UN General Assembly, and, during his election campaign, President George H. W. Bush pledged to hold a global conference on climate change at the White House (Paterson, 1996: 35). In 1989, the Group of Seven (G7), the Non-Aligned Countries meeting and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting all stated that global warming was a pressing global issue.

However, leaders in the late 1980s and early 1990s predominantly saw climate change as one of a long list of environmental issues, not as the single most important global environmental issue, as it has now become. Leaders – even ones not known for their progressive politics such as Thatcher – who highlighted the impacts of climate change did so in the context of an increased global awareness of environmental problems. In 1992, states met in Rio de Janeiro at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (the 'Earth Summit'). It was the largest global environmental meeting since the Stockholm Environmental Conference in 1972 – when states acknowledged their duty to protect and improve the environment at an international summit for the first time (Falkner, 2012: 513).

In the lead-up to and during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit conference, world leaders highlighted a number of environmental problems including biodiversity, the growing ozone hole, pollution, desertification and climate change. G7 and G8 communiqués reflect the perception of climate change as one of many important global environmental problems. In 1987, for instance, the G7 communiqué argued for 'further action' on 'global climate change, air, sea and fresh water pollution, acid rain, hazardous substances, deforestation, and endangered species'. Climate change was not considered a stand-alone priority issue, but a subset of other major global environmental problems.

This began to change with the establishment of the UNFCCC, which was opened for signature in 1992. The UNFCCC aimed to stabilise greenhouse gas 'concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous interference with the climate system' (United Nations, 1992). The initial goal was to stabilise emissions at 1990 levels by 2000 and the UNFCCC became the forum where states negotiated how to reach this target. The first annual negotiations – or Conference of the Parties (COP) – were held in Berlin in 1995 and state parties agreed that industrialised states would need to make binding commitments to reduce emissions. The UNFCCC institutionalised climate change and ensured that states would regularly meet to discuss how to address growing global greenhouse gas emissions.

At the UNFCCC meetings states staked out their positions on climate change – some such as Saudi Arabia were sceptics (Depledge, 2008) and others, in particular the small island developing states, demanded urgent action. There is a growing body of International Relations scholarship that examines the evolution of states' positions (Torney, 2015); the formation of coalitions predominantly along North–South lines; and negotiations over various agreements (Barnett, 2008; Roberts, 2011). By 1997, more than 150 countries agreed to sign the Kyoto Protocol which binds most industrialised states and economies in transition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (UNFCCC, 2015b). They are known as 'Annex I' countries. The Protocol took a further four years to be operationalised as UNFCCC negotiations collapsed in 2000 over major disagreements between the US and the European Union (EU). Then in 2001, the new US president, George W. Bush, announced he would withdraw the United States from the Kyoto Protocol, which President Clinton had previously signed (Busby, 2010). The absence of the world's largest economy and emitter jeopardised an agreement; however, other states continued to negotiate and, in 2001, finalised the Kyoto Protocol.

In the 1990s and early 2000s the UNFCCC was the main forum for states to discuss climate change. This changed in the mid-2000s, as world powers made climate change a stand-alone agenda item in the important global economic and security summits. By 2005 climate change was one of the top agenda items at the G8 summit agenda in Gleneagles. The United Kingdom, host of the summit, also invited five 'emerging' states (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa) to attend. They formed a new group G8+5 to build an agreement on climate change and issued a separate statement, the Gleneagles Plan of Action 'setting out our common purpose in tackling climate change' (G8 Chair, 2005). The communiqué stated that 'all of us agreed that climate change is happening now [...] and resolved to take urgent action to meet the challenges we face' (G8 Chair, 2005). Subsequent meetings of the G7/G8 continued this focus on climate change, which was seen as an important issue that warranted discussion beyond the UNFCCC and by heads of the world's most powerful economies.

In addition, states began to see climate change as not only an environmental issue, but also an economic issue. This shift in perception of climate change was facilitated by the United Kingdom's Stern Review. Gordon Brown, UK chancellor in 2006, commissioned Lord Nicholas Stern, a prominent economist, to write a report on the costs of climate change. The report made a strong case for immediate emissions reductions on the basis that the short-term costs of mitigation would be significantly less than the long-term costs of inaction (Stern, 2006). The report had a major international impact as it was the first report commissioned by a government to make an economic case for emissions reductions and Lord Stern, backed by the UK government,

disseminated this message widely in late 2006 and 2007 (Torney, 2015).

Climate change was also seen as a threat to security. Some states and many civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and academics argued that climate change would lead to an increase in conflict, be a new driver of displacement and make some small island states uninhabitable (Myers, 1993; 1997). In fact, the UK successfully campaigned for the UN Security Council to debate climate change in April 2007. A record number of states spoke during this meeting – 55 states; 40 non-members – and outlined the urgency of addressing climate change because of its potential threats to security (United Nations, 2007). In short, by 2007, both the world's premier economic and security forum had made climate change an explicit top priority, singled out and above other environmental issues.

The 2009 UNFCCC summit in Copenhagen was one of the largest gatherings of world leaders ever. All the world's eyes turned to Denmark to see if states could come up with a new fair and binding treaty to mitigate carbon emissions. It was a remarkable moment for global politics: almost every head of state spoke at the negotiations in the Bella Centre. In the final hours, US president Barack Obama drew up an agreement with the leaders of China, India, Brazil and South Africa; but not all states agreed to their plan after hours of negotiating through the night. The conference finally emerged with an agreement that all member states were invited to 'take note of' but was not officially endorsed by all UNFCCC states (UNFCCC, 2009). Copenhagen was widely perceived as a failure. However, negotiations did make more progress the following years at Cancun, Durban and Warsaw. For example, a new global climate fund (GCF) was established to finance mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

Immediately after Copenhagen, interest in climate change ebbed, in part due to disillusionment with the UNFCCC process. World leaders also shifted their attention to the 2012 Rio+20 World Environmental Conference. However, in the past two years world powers have again prioritised climate change at major global summits and made significant commitments to reduce their carbon emissions. In November 2014, for instance, US president Barack Obama met with President Xi Jinping of China and both made new commitments to reduce their national carbon emissions, paving the way for other states to follow suit. Obama announced a new target to cut net greenhouse gas emissions by 26–28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025 and Xi announced targets to peak carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 with the intention of peaking earlier, and increasing non-fossil fuel share of all energy to around 20 per cent by 2030 (The White House – Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). In September 2015 they both reaffirmed their commitments to reach an ambitious agreement at the UNFCCC summit in Paris. The fact

that the US and China – the two major world powers of the 21st century – made climate change a central part of their bilateral negotiations signals the importance of the issue internationally today.

Meanwhile, in July 2015 Germany made climate change a core focus of the G7 Summit at *Schloss Elmau* and the final summit communiqué emphasised that,

> deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required with a decarbonisation of the global economy over the course of this century […] We commit to doing our part to achieve a low-carbon global economy in the long-term including developing and deploying innovative technologies striving for a transformation of the energy sectors by 2050 and invite all countries to join us in this endeavour (G7, 2015: 15).

Heads of states from major world powers to those most affected by climate change have prioritised the issue, made significant shifts in their positions and committed to taking action on climate change. We saw the most compelling example of this in Paris in December 2015 when states forged a new international agreement on climate change. In the Paris Agreement states agreed to keep average global temperature increases below 2 degrees, with the aim of keeping increases within 1.5 degrees. They also laid out a clear process to reach this goal: every five years they will submit more ambitious plans laying out how they will reduce their greenhouse emissions. However, it is worth noting that states intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) do not meet the two-degree global warming target (for a full list of INDCs, see UNFCCC, 2015a). We still need to see further cuts to stop dangerous climate change.

Financing for climate change

In the 2000s, states also institutionalised climate change as a top priority in global affairs by committing significant new resources to it. The first climate financing was established in Rio in 1992 (Mingst and Karns, 2007: 216). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) channelled grants from developed to developing states to address biodiversity, climate change, ozone layer depletion and international waters (Young, 2002). The GEF enabled the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank (the only three multilaterals who could access it) to expand their environmental and climate change activities (Hall, forthcoming/a; forthcoming/b).

Subsequently, since the turn of the millennium, state parties to the UNFCCC established a series of new and explicitly climate change orientated financing mechanisms. In 2000 at the 6th annual UNFCCC summit, as the negotiations over Kyoto became difficult, the EU agreed to establish an annual climate change fund of US$15 million to target adaptation as well as mitigation. Subsequently at the next COP in Marrakech in 2001, three multilateral funds were established: the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), based on voluntary donations to facilitate technology transfer from developed to developing states; the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) for least developed countries to develop National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA); and the Adaptation Fund, which was financed by a 2 per cent levy on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The establishment of these three climate funds offered new financing opportunities for multilateral organisations. They were also important as they shifted climate change activities from purely focusing on reducing carbon emissions (mitigation) to acknowledging that developing states would need assistance to prepare for and deal with the impacts of climate change (adaptation).

A major windfall of new financing was announced in 2009 at the UNFCCC summit in Copenhagen. Donor states committed to significant 'new and additional' climate financing (UNFCCC, 2009). This financing would come in two forms: first, a new 'fast-track fund' for the 2010–2012 period, totalling up to US $30 billion per annum. Second, states committed to mobilising new financing of up to US$100 billion by 2020 from a range of private and public sources. Some of this financing would flow through the new Green Climate Fund. States have begun to commit significant resources to the GCF. In September 2014, 125 heads of state and government as well as 800 leaders from business, finance and civil society attended a UN Climate Summit and pledged support totalling up to US$2.3 billion for the Green Climate Fund. Subsequently, in mid-2015 Germany announced it would double its climate finance to €4 billion a year by 2020, China declared it would provide US$3.1 billion in climate finance, the United Kingdom announced it will provide £5.8 billion between 2016 and 2021, and France €5 billion a year by 2020 (World Resources Institute, 2015). If all these pledges are fully paid, the GCF will be the largest multilateral climate fund (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2015). However, as of October 2015, the fund was still not fully operational.

The growth of climate finance is an important trend in international relations. It means developing countries have resources to adapt to and mitigate climate change. However, climate finance is not clearly 'new and additional' from overseas development assistance, as originally pledged at Copenhagen (Stadelman et al., 2010). In fact, many donor states are refocusing their existing development budgets to prioritise climate mitigation and adaptation. The growth of climate finance has also enabled multilateral banks, and many

international development organisations, to expand their work on climate mitigation and adaptation. Many international organisations, with no established mandate for climate adaptation or mitigation, have established new departments, teams and projects to target climate change as will be discussed next (Hall, forthcoming/b).

Multilateral institutionalisation of climate change

International development and humanitarian organisations are at the forefront of climate change. They assist the most vulnerable countries to deal with and prepare for droughts, famines and other natural disasters. Yet most of our existing international organisations were established in the first half of the 20th century – when climate change was neither a global priority nor a scientific reality. The World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNHCR and other international organisations thus had no original mandate to respond to climate change. Over the past two decades there has been a remarkable shift as many multilateral institutions have engaged in the UNFCCC negotiations, accessed climate funds and developed new programmes and policies on adaptation and mitigation.

First, many more international organisations are engaging with the UNFCCC. The number of international organisations attending the annual climate negotiations has more than doubled between 1994 and 2009 (see Hall, 2015). Peak attendance was at the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009, when over 100 intergovernmental organisations attended, compared with 42 in 1994 at COP1. The range of international organisations has also expanded beyond development and environment organisations, to humanitarian, refugee, migration, and health organisations (Hall, forthcoming/a).

Take the UNHCR as an example. This organisation was established in 1951 to assist refugees, defined as someone with 'a well-founded fear of persecution based for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside his country of nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (UNHCR, 1951). It had no mandate to help those displaced by natural disasters such as floods or droughts (Betts et al., 2012). Yet there have been calls for this organisation to expand its mandate and encompass people affected by natural disasters and forced to flee across borders due to climate change (Biermann and Boas, 2010). Although it does not have a mandate to respond to the latter, it has broadened its focus in the past decade. UNHCR often assists internally displaced persons (IDPs) after natural disasters; such was the case in Pakistan after the 2010 floods and in

2009 after Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. International organisations are adapting their tasks and mandates to meet new demands.

Other humanitarian organisations have also become more engaged with climate change as the UNFCCC negotiations broadened their focus from mitigation to adaptation (Hall, 2015; forthcoming/b). In the 1990s and early 2000s, when climate change was primarily about how to reduce emissions; humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR, IOM and the International Committee of the Red Cross did not engage with climate change. However, when it was acknowledged that climate change was already having a major impact on the most vulnerable countries and likely to lead to more humanitarian (natural) disasters, the humanitarian community became involved. Humanitarian organisations established a special task force under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to explore how to address climate change in humanitarian situations and wrote a number of submissions to the UNFCCC (Hall, forthcoming/a).

In another telling example, Margaret Chan, director general of the World Health Organisation (WHO), now identifies the climate deal in Paris as the 'most important health agreement of the century' (Climate Change Policy and Practice, 2015). This is because there is 'overwhelming evidence' that climate change endangers human health and we need 'decisive action' to change the trajectory of increased emissions and thus reduce costs on the health system and community. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), announced in September 2015, have also entrenched climate change as a core priority for all development organisations. Goal 13 is to 'take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts' (UN General Assembly, 2015).

Crucially, in the last decade there is an awareness of how climate change spills over into other many other issue areas. It can no longer be dealt with in the UNFCCC alone, and we are seeing the emergence of a 'regime complex' (Keohane and Victor, 2011), in which many global institutions are involved. These institutions will continue to act on climate change because of humanitarian and development needs. In addition, there is vast financing being set aside and many multilateral institutions have established new teams, programmes and some have reprioritised climate change as a central focus within their mandate (such as UNDP) (Hall, 2015: 84).

Conclusion

Climate change is a major political, economic, and social issue that has become institutionalised in global affairs. This has happened because of an increased scientific and political consensus. We now see climate change

being discussed at major forums from the G7 to the UN Security Council on a regular basis. This was not the case twenty years ago. Major powers have made it a priority in their bilateral discussions – such as the November 2014 summit between the presidents of China and the US. They have also committed significant financing to address mitigation and adaption. There is a growing awareness that climate change is impacting many states now, particularly the most vulnerable developing countries and low-lying island states. Multilateral institutions from the UNHCR to WHO are also prioritising it within their mandates and assisting developing states cope with its effects. Climate change will not go away from international relations because it is institutionalised at this level.

So why we have not yet resolved climate change, given the high political attention and resourcing it has received in recent decades? Unfortunately, reducing greenhouse gas emission requires great political will and profound transformations in our global economy and we are just at the beginning of this process. We need continued action on all four fronts – financing, multilateral organisations, heads of state and scientific research – as well as concerted action from civil society to decouple economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris agreement was a positive step-forward in this direction.

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