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Climate conference in Marrakesh: litmus test for the Paris Agreement

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Climate conference in Marrakesh: litmus test for the Paris Agreement

Bonn, 07 November 2016. The Paris Climate Agreement was hailed around the world as a historic achievement last December. Whether or not it makes history, however, depends on its successful implementation. This is the focus of the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP22) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Marrakesh, beginning today and running until 18 November. Being the first COP after the Paris summit in December 2015, the Marrakesh climate conference provides the first serious litmus test for the decisions reached in Paris. The record time in which the Paris Agreement was ratified is an encouraging sign that the international community is serious about climate policy. As such, the accord has come into effect in international law even before the Marrakesh conference. Yet, this does not make the implementation of its content a foregone conclusion. Its transformative ambitions entail a radical departure from business as usual – not least in key policies like energy, agriculture, transport and construction. If we are still to avert the gravest consequences of anthropogenic climate change, then incremental steps will be insufficient.

Climate change and climate policy have far-reaching implications affecting virtually all areas of human development, from agriculture and energy supply to protection of species and migration. Consequently, the Paris Agreement must be implemented in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And this applies not least with regard to the need to adapt to climate change impacts, which is essential if we are to achieve key goals pertaining to inter alia water supply (SDG 6), infrastructure (SDG 9) and the protection of ecosystems (SDG 15). In accordance with the common but differentiated responsibilities of states for global climate change mitigation and the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) laid out at the Paris summit, each country must now determine its own combination of policies and technologies for effectively integrating the SDGs with its own national development objectives. This requires cool-headed calculation and technocratic planning, but most of all moderation of political conflicts of interest, especially with regard to national implementation. The current debate on the German NDC is a case for that.

In order to provide national and local actors with impetus for the way ahead in successfully implementing the Paris accords, the signatory countries should focus on achieving three things in Marrakesh.

First, they should devise binding, long-term strategies for implementing the different issue areas of the Paris Agreement, not least with regard to financing, technology transfer and the promotion of a climate-sensitive global investment policy.

Second, they should formulate the mechanisms through which they intend to regularly ratchet up their NDCs in order to achieve the overarching objective of stabilising average global warming at 1.5°C or a maximum of 2°C.

Third, they should use the financing roadmap adopted a few weeks ago as a basis for further fleshing out how the pledge already made to provide developing countries with USD 100 billion annually from 2020 can be honoured. In particular, they should spell out how sufficient finance will be mobilised for adaptation purposes and how global financial flows can be brought into line with climate-compatible development.

Under these conditions, the Paris Agreement can be implemented in a way that truly promotes fundamental global transformation. If, at the same time, the SDGs are implemented in a climate-compatible way, then it will be feasible to decarbonise the world economy in a manner conducive to sustainable global development. Consequently, a particularly promising approach would be to systematically combine ambitious, multilaterally negotiated goals with a long term vision, as represented by the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030, on the one hand with the numerous initiatives of non-governmental actors on the other. Many companies and non-governmental organisations, as well as local actors such as cities, are forging ahead when it comes to innovative climate actions. If this bottom-up dynamic could be better integrated in Marrakesh with the cumbersome processes of UN climate policy processes and harnessed in the interests of the SDGs, then this would be instrumental for accelerating the transformation towards climate-compatible sustainable development. The obligation rests clearly with the signatory states here, though they are keen to present non-governmental achievements as accomplishments of national implementation. As host of this year's climate summit, Moroccan Environment Minister Hakima El Haite emphasised back in summer at the Petersberg Climate Dialogue that Marrakesh would be the "conference for implementation and support". The time has come to follow up on words with actions.