

COP-21 & Developing Countries

In discussions about the UK's energy policy in general and about the proposed nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point in particular, an important consideration is I suggest being overlooked. It's this: under the terms of the text agreed last December at the UN's COP-21 conference in Paris, so called "developing" countries are exempted from any obligation, moral or legal, to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As such countries are responsible for over 65% of global emissions¹ and the quantity of GHGs they emit is most likely to increase (as, for example, they continue to build coal-fired power plants²), it makes little sense for the UK – responsible for only about 1% of global emissions – to regard GHG reduction as an important factor in planning its future energy needs.

This is exacerbated by the probability that two major "developed" countries – Russia and Japan, responsible for about 9% of global GHG emissions – will continue to burn (even increase) their current levels of fossil fuels.³ The USA and Europe are responsible for most of the remaining emissions; but, as that's less than 25% of the global total, there's little they can do, short of closing down their economies altogether, that could make a significant contribution to the reduction of overall global emissions.

¹ Individual country's emissions (to 2014):

² For example see <http://tiny.cc/1eigdy>, Benjamin Sporton's comments here: <http://tiny.cc/uzhgdy> and this: <http://tiny.cc/j0hgdy>

³ See: <http://tiny.cc/jbigdy> and <http://tiny.cc/i1dh6x>

The developing countries' exemption arises from the following:

1. **Two key documents:** last year's Paris text⁴ and its "parent treaty", the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ("the Convention")⁵. (Note: there's nothing in the Paris text that changes or overrides the essential status and content of the Convention.)

2. **The Convention's distinction between "developed" and "developing" countries** – a distinction unchanged since 1992. Developing countries comprised the vast bulk of countries represented in Paris, representing about 82% of humanity including essentially all the world's poorest people, most of whom have either no or inadequate access to the power sources taken for granted in the West. But they also included major economies such as China, India, South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Iran, all of which (except arguably the latter two) are far more powerful than they were when the Convention was enacted.

3. **Articles 4.7 of the Convention and 4.4 of the Paris text:** the former allows developing countries to give overriding priority to "*economic and social development and poverty eradication*", whereas the latter merely encourages them "*to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances*".

⁴ The agreed Paris text: <http://tiny.cc/a3hgdy>

⁵ <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

The West had intended that Paris should have a radically different outcome. Hence this DECC objective:

“... a legally binding, global climate change agreement with emission reduction commitments from all countries”.⁶

But developing country negotiators, led by China and India, ignored the West's (albeit feeble) demands. And Western negotiators, determined to avoid another debacle such as the outcome of COP-15 (Copenhagen, 2009), didn't press the issue. Hence the Paris agreement's failure to achieve the West's most basic aim: that powerful emerging economies should be obliged to share in emission reduction.

Robin Guenier, August 2016

Guenier is a writer, speaker and business consultant – now retired. He has an MA from Oxford and is a barrister. After twenty years as CEO of various high-tech companies, he founded (1995) an independent business consultancy, Guenier Ltd, specialising most recently in project risk; an early assignment was as CEO of the Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency reporting at ministerial level to the Cabinet Office. He was founder chair of the medical online research company, Medix UK. He has been a regular contributor to TV and radio and has had speaking engagements throughout the world. He has various charitable interests and is a Freeman of the City of London. These notes were written in his private capacity.

⁶ Extracted from a UK Department of Energy and Climate Change pre-Paris review: <http://tiny.cc/h4hgdy>