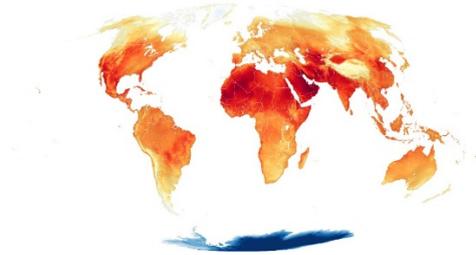


# Special SE London Area meeting on COP26

SE London Area Quaker Meeting held a special meeting on Sunday 13 June to prepare for COP26, which will take place in Glasgow in November.

The moderators were Cherry Simpkin and Sarah Waller.



**COP26, 31 October -12 November 2021, Glasgow**

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## **COP26 Background: Peter Ede**

If we go back over a million years, the world was much hotter than it is now, but it cooled down to somewhat below current temperatures, and stayed there for a million years until 1800. Then the level of carbon dioxide went above 300 parts per million for the first time. The temperature started to soar. The graph is very dramatic. This went almost unnoticed for about 200 years, but we have traced it back now.

In 1986, we had good measurements available, because we had good equipment and places around the world where temperatures could be measured. Also with computers, it was possible to do good modelling and understand better what was happening. In 1988, the United Nations, together with the World Metrological Organization started the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). They have been leading the way and doing research ever since then.

## Enter the UN

In 1992, the United Nations got more directly involved and they started COP meetings. COP stands for conference of parties. The parties are countries of the world, and there are about 190 of them involved. In 1995, they agreed the Kyoto Protocol, which required industrialised countries to cut back their emissions of greenhouse gases. It really failed because it left all sorts of things out. It didn't include the smaller nations and the less advanced economies, and it didn't include lots of things between nations which needed to be agreed.

The meetings continued dealing with all sorts of details, and it was only in 2015 in Paris that a really good agreement was reached. There was no authority. No one could tell nations what to do. They were all asked, and did, state their ambitions as to what they were going to do to reduce greenhouse gasses. They were going to keep statistics so they knew exactly how much they were producing, and they would publish those statistics annually. Every five years, they would meet, re-establish their goals and aims, and see how things were going.

Five years on from 2015 should have been last year, but COVID got in the way. That means that COP 26 will take place in November this year.

## Biodiversity: Wilfred Maclean

I believe we should leave the world better than we found it, and climate change is doing the opposite of that. Extinction is a major problem, and in my opinion is the worst effect of climate change. I don't want the Earth to only have one turtle that is pickled in a jar. This would just make the world dull and there would be no life at all. A lot of human life revolves around other animals too, so this would have an effect on humans.

There would be no polar bears or penguins, no tigers helping to balance life, and no fascinating nature programmes such as Blue Planet and Planet Earth.

Between 1800 and 1950 only 5,000 species disappeared, but between 1950 and today, more than 55,000 species have become extinct. Not extinction rates going up every year, but they proportional to rise in the human population.

*Plastic pollution is one of the main problems.*

Most plastic comes from landfill. The waste is in a large pile and left to be swept away in currents and wind. One of the largest plastic is called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and 1.6 million square kilometres of the pacific.

equal to 3 times the size of France. Consequently, many marine species get caught in plastic waste. They can't escape and as a result, they starve to death.

Most plastic ends up being blown across the landscape and being eaten by animals, which is bad for them and for us.

Deforestation is another threat to animals. Forests and woodland cover 30% of the earth's surface. However, by 2030 there may only be 10% of the earth's rainforests left. Forests are essential to the earth because they take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere; trees alone can produce enough oxygen to support all human needs in the whole of North America.

They also act as habitats for animals like birds and monkeys. Forests are home to 80% of the animals that live on the ground but, at this rate of deforestation, 28,000 species could go extinct in



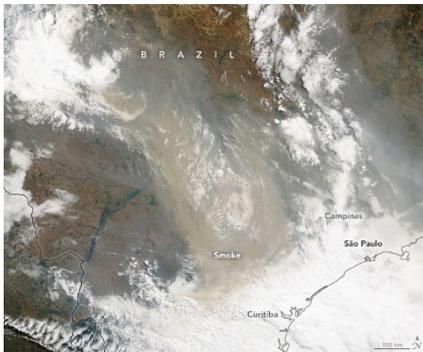
Source: World Wildlife Fund

only are  
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deposited  
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gatherings  
spans over  
This is

the next 25 years. This is bad because taking the habitats of other animals is not leaving the earth better than it was when we found it.

We need to first acknowledge the problem before we can do anything about it.



Fires in the Amazon 2019: Source Earth observatory NASA

### What can we do?

- Donate money, to charities like [Street Trees for Living](#) in Lewisham and the [World Wildlife Fund](#).
- Before you buy something, think if you really need it.
- Try to use less electricity and water.
- Eat less meat or none at all.
- Take public transport, walk or cycle if you can, instead of driving.

### Population: Lesley Bacon

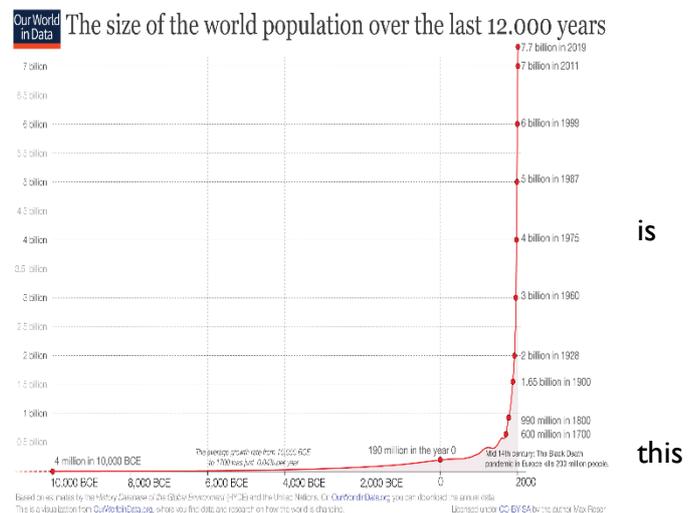
The question of the effect of the world’s population on climate change is a peculiarly difficult one to discuss. On one hand, it seems obvious. We are used to the idea that the earth cannot support indefinite numbers of people, that numbers are rising, and action is urgent. On the other hand, it is a sensitive issue.

It is very easy to get into some very dubious company when raising concerns about population. To help us, [Quaker Concern Over Population](#) has produced a very useful book which addresses many of the arguments – *Difficult questions about population*.

The increase in population has 2 causes:

- People being born
- People not dying – life expectancy has boomed (although there is a limit to this)

There is always talk about enforced birth control, especially in China, but that country now in the situation of having very many old people who need to be cared for and recently announced a 3 child maximum policy. Nevertheless, many Chinese women are not happy with the idea of larger families. Given autonomy, people will probably take care of matter themselves.



### What can we do?

I suggest three main areas for us to focus on:

- **Increase education and liberation for girls and women** – birth rates drop as women become more educated, as societies become more stable and as poverty decreases.
- **Provide reproductive health care** (contraception and termination of pregnancy). There is plenty to do to fill unmet demand without worrying about coercion. Our government’s

decision to cut its contribution to the UN Population Fund (as part of its aid package reduction) is tragic and needs to be reversed. Write to your MP.

- **Make better use of the later years of life.** People over 65 should not be seen automatically as a burden on society who need to be supported by younger people. We have plenty to offer and we can continue to work, learn and help all our lives. Keep onwards and upwards!

**Event: Population Growth and the Climate Emergency: Ensuring a Just Transition,** talk by Jonathan Porritt at Britain Yearly Meeting, Tuesday 27 July at 16.30.

### **Migration: Guy Morgan**

Not surprisingly, climate change is likely to produce increased displacement of people around the world. A lot is written in the press about that, much of it fairly alarmist, so it would be good to get some scientific consensus on this.



*Flooding in Bangladesh Credit: UNICEF Bangladesh/2020/Chakma*

It appears, based on existing trends, that we are not likely to see enormous numbers of refugees crossing borders. What happens already in places like Bangladesh, for example, where there are frequent floods, is that people tend not to leave the country, but to move further inland.

So, as best as can be discerned at the moment, most climate migration is going to be within national borders. What is anticipated will happen is people will move – possibly from more agricultural areas to the cities – but essentially within the country. Unsurprisingly, poorer countries are likely to be affected most by this kind of displacement. They have fewer resources to mitigate climate change and to care for their populations.

## *No definition for climate change refugee*

However, even if displacement is mainly internal, there is still likely to be some increased cross-border climate migration. At the moment, there is no legal definition of a climate refugee. If climate refugees don't exist in law, countries have no legal obligation to help people who are forced to move across borders for environmental reasons.

It is a subject of debate. Some claims for climate asylum, or probably better called climate protection, are already being brought, for example, by some Pacific Islanders. Those claims have been unsuccessful so far, but a positive spin-off has come from them. One of them was a ruling by the United Nations last year that nations have a responsibility not to send back people displaced for climate reasons. That's not legally binding at the moment, but it does open the door to further claims. This will, I think, will be increasingly contentious.

The debate around this area leaves me confused. Some academics and, rather paradoxically, the climate change division at the United Nations Migration Agency argue against the establishment of "climate change refugees". For example, they say that discussion should not be diverted from preventive measures. Their thinking is that if most displacement is likely to be internal, why risk stoking up anti-immigration rhetoric which is already high and rising across Europe, the United States and other places.

Personally, I am not sure that is totally convincing. I think if I were a climate refugee, I would at least like some protection as I cross a border, but I think this needs consideration. I just ask that we are aware of this issue, learn more and make our own minds up.

## **What can we do?**

- Help developing countries build resilience to climate change.
- Keep challenging the government's cuts to foreign aid which will affect these countries' ability to build resilience.
- Support organisations already working to solve the climate crisis. There are many. Some are listed below.

## **Resources**

COP26

[COP26](#) official site

Quakers

BYM Climate & economic justice page: <https://quaker.org.uk/our-work/climate-economic-justice>

Subscribe to BYM's e-newsletter [Quake!](#) for updates from on COP26 and other topics:

A [hub of options](#) for action for Quakers on COP26:

UN Global Issues: [climate change](#)

UNICEF: [Environment and climate change](#)

## **Biodiversity**

World Wildlife Fund: [climate](#)

[Street Trees for Living](#)

## **Migration**

[Climate Migration](#): *what the research shows is very different from the alarmist headlines*, The Conversation, 7 Oct. 2020

[UN Global Issues: migration](#)

## **Population**

[United Nations Population Fund](#)

For a more optimistic view that global pop growth is coming to an end soon, and is indeed irreversibly already on that path:

Paul Morland The Human Tide <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40697556-the-human-tide> and

Empty Planet by Bricker and Ibbotson <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37585564-empty-planet>

SE London Area meeting contact on COP26: [blackheathquakers@gmail.com](mailto:blackheathquakers@gmail.com)