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Letter to the Editor

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**NEED TO GET FACTS STRAIGHT ABOUT PARIS AGREEMENT**

At a public webinar held on climate change in conjunction with Malaysia Day on 16 Sept. hosted by the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA), a lot of good information on climate change that Malaysians needed to know was provided. Leading the panel of speakers was the Secretary-General (SG) of the Ministry, Dato' Seri Ir. Dr. Zaini Ujang.

While most of the information presented were valuable, what was worrying were some glaring errors about the fundamentals of the Paris Agreement (PA).

It was conveyed that the PA has a carbon budget allocated to every country, and each country has to make a declaration, and that since Malaysia is a non-Annex 1 country (of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), we are not given the budget as we are considered small, and therefore, not much carbon is allocated.

This is inaccurate and in fact contrary to the design of the PA. The PA does not allocate a carbon budget to every country. Instead, all countries are only required to undertake and communicate a nationally determined contribution (NDC), as a global response to climate change with a view to achieving the purpose of the PA, including holding the global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit increase to 1.5°C. This essentially means that countries are at liberty to declare what they deem feasible. This is called the bottom-up approach, while the idea of a budget being dictated as was stated in the webinar is a top-down approach.

In the run up to negotiations that led to the PA, there were proposals by some key developing countries for the adoption of an 'equitable access to atmospheric space approach', taking into account the historical and current emissions of every country in a cumulative manner, including on a per capita basis.

Such proposals for a fair and equitable allocation of the remaining carbon space did not see the light of day in the negotiations, due to opposition from the developed world, particularly from the United States, that insisted that there can be no top-down dictation from the multilateral process of how much cuts in emissions a country must do. The developed world was very opposed to taking stock of their historical emissions, as this would mean they would have the major portion of the responsibility to reduce emissions for occupying the atmospheric space beyond their reasonable and fair share.

Instead, the current approach is to get all countries to make an emissions reductions pledge, however limited or insignificant their emissions would be, ignoring their historical emissions.

The US advanced this bottom-up approach which led to the concept of an NDC which is nationally determined, without any reference to equity or historical responsibility between developed and developing countries.

What is then done is to add up all the individual contributions of countries and assess them in terms of their adequacy in achieving the Paris goals. This approach turns the principle of 'common-but-differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' between developed and developing countries to a shared responsibility, which is inequitable and contrary to the UNFCCC and the PA.

Hence, to say that the PA allocates a carbon budget to every country cannot be further from the truth.

Such a fundamental misconception must be corrected urgently, certainly before our Malaysian delegation goes into negotiations at COP 26.

Our officials should know and understand the negotiating history and the North-South battles over the delicate balance achieved in Paris, including as to the various obligations developed and developing countries have and their nuances.

There are so many critical issues being advanced by developed countries at COP 26, such as net zero emissions for all countries by 2050, and carbon market mechanisms with offsets linked to nature based solutions in developing countries which are bound to further exacerbate the inequities between developed and developing countries.

Developed countries have already overused their carbon space and promoting distant net zero targets for themselves amounts to furthering 'carbon colonialism'. They should, by right leave the remaining atmospheric space for the developmental rights of the developing world and aim for full decarbonisation in a far shorter time frame. Instead, if they continue to emit and occupy more atmospheric space for the next 30 years, the PA's global temperature rise limit objective cannot be met.

The Malaysian delegation to COP 26 must go well prepared to counter such moves. This requires understanding the fundamentals of the PA and the need to build alliances with other developing countries to prevent the further shifting of obligations to the developing world contrary to the PA.

In addition, the developed world should also be held accountable in their failure under the UNFCCC in mobilising the USD100 billion per year by 2020, which was agreed to in 2010, so as to enable more climate action in the developing world and in enabling a clean and sustainable development trajectory with technology transfer. A new collective goal on finance has to be agreed to by 2025, with the US100 billion as a floor, based on the actual needs of developing countries. These are important milestones for COP 26.

COP 26 is not going to be a walk in the park. We must be well prepared and be able to stand our ground so as not to be taken for a ride, which would be to the ultimate detriment of all of us.

**Meenakshi Raman**  
**President**  
**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**

On behalf of the following groups who have also endorsed the letter:

1. Sahabat Alam Malaysia
2. Consumers Association of Penang
3. Third World Network
4. Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam (KUASA)
5. Agora Society Malaysia
6. Pertubuhan Pelindung Khazanah Alam (pekamalaysia.org)
7. Persatuan Kesedaran dan Keadilan Iklim Malaysia (Klima Action Malaysia - KAMY)
8. Alliance Of River Three
9. Jaringan Ekologi dan Iklim (JEDI)
10. Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (EPSM)

11. Free Tree Society Kuala Lumpur
12. GRASS Malaysia
13. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM)
14. Greenpeace Malaysia
15. Say No to PJD Link
16. Centre for Orang Asli Concerns
17. MNS Selangor Branch
18. Treat Every Environment Special Sdn Bhd (TrEES)
19. Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN Malaysia)
20. Pertubuhan Lestari Khazanah Alam Pulau Pinang (LEKAS)