

Geneva Reporter

IPCC presents its Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5C

Also in this issue:

Significant
New Standard
Recognizing the
Impact of Parental
Death Sentences
on Children
page 2

Recent
publications
page 3

Testing our luck with
nuclear weapons
page 3

QUNO Q&A
with
Vinay Talwar
page 4

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Lindsey Fielder Cook speaks at the 48th Session of the IPCC in South Korea.

QUNO's Human Impacts of Climate Change programme travelled to Incheon, South Korea for an historic meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In October, QUNO joined scientists, States and civil society in efforts to finalize the *Summary for Policymakers* of the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C. Negotiators engaged with IPCC Lead Authors on what would and wouldn't be highlighted from the 700-page report: a collation of findings from 6000 peer reviewed research papers. Content in the *Summary for Policymakers* is critical, as not all policy makers will take time to read the full report.

The report is a point of reference for wider society, concluding that it remains possible—with urgent climate action and greater political will—to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In addition, limiting global warming of 1.5°C compared to 2°C would prevent: the suffering of vulnerable communities; significantly reduce risks of climate-induced impacts on species extinction and eco-system destruction; help stabilize sea level rise and avoid the irreversible trigger of the Greenland ice sheet melting; and significantly increase chances to achieve sustainable development. Many scientists noted that the greatest obstacle to urgent action was a lack of political will.

We made several interventions that influenced the final summary text; we highlighted important IPCC findings on reducing greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable land use, lower material consumption, sustainable economic models and diets that use fewer resources. These are critical to the most effective and healthy IPCC “pathway” that depends least on geo-engineering technologies (including controversial “bio-energy with carbon capture storage”). QUNO also said “Speaking as a member of civil society, we hear concerns from some countries over headlines which might bring panic, but what can bring panic is when decision makers do not respond sufficiently to scientific findings” and this was quoted in professional reports.

(continued on page 2)

IPCC Summary for Policymakers (continued)

Summarizing a 700-page report in 34 pages was daunting. IPCC scientists worked hard to maintain the integrity of scientific findings despite difficult moments during the negotiation. To help in the challenging task of communicating the report's messages, QUNO compiled key messages into its latest climate change publication: *A Government Official's Toolkit—inspiring urgent climate action*.

This publication has evolved from our previous publication, *A Negotiator's Toolkit*, to include more recent climate research, and sections on poverty and environmental discrimination. The toolkit connects government officials across all levels with the latest research and international action on climate change. You can download QUNO toolkits to help ensure that the legacy of the 1.5°C report brings meaningful change.

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Significant New Standard Recognizing the Impact of Parental Death Sentences on Children

In late October, the Human Rights Committee released its new General Comment on the Right to Life. The culmination of three years' work, *General Comment 36* provides authoritative guidance on the right to life as protected in article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Yuval Shany said, "The right to life is the prerequisite for the enjoyment of all other human rights. The general comment provides a rich and authoritative statement of the obligations deriving from the right to life, which the Committee defines as 'the supreme right.'"

The general comment addresses the use of the death penalty and QUNO engaged with the process as part of our work on the rights of children of parents sentenced to death or executed.

The Committee said that those States that have not yet abolished the death penalty "should be on an irrevocable path towards complete eradication of the death penalty".

They go on to say:

The death penalty cannot be reconciled with full respect for the right to life, and abolition of the death penalty is both desirable and necessary for the enhancement of human dignity and progressive development of human rights.

Such a clear and strong statement is important because when the Covenant was drafted in 1966 it was not possible to include an outright prohibition on the use of the death penalty. A large part of the General Comment is dedicated to stringent limits on the use of the death penalty. We are particularly pleased that these limitations include that:

"States parties ...should also refrain from executing parents to very young or dependent children."

This is a significant step in clarifying that the impact on the rights and welfare of children of a parental death sentence cannot be ignored any longer. Not only does this need to be taken into account but it should halt the execution.

This timely clarification will be useful in our ongoing work on children of parents sentenced to death or executed. Next year is a significant year for us with the triennial World Congress Against the Death Penalty in February and a focus on this issue for the World Day against the Death Penalty in October. We are currently working on a publication containing analysis of the existing applicable legal standards, such as that expressed in the General Comment, to be launched at the World Congress. Combined with our earlier publications which focussed on the impact on children, this legal analysis will underpin our work ahead of the World Day. We hope that these events coupled with the clarity in the General Comment will mean that fewer people can tell us it is an issue that they have never thought about and, more importantly, that it is something fewer children have to endure.

QUNO Q & A with Vinay Talwar



Vinay Talwar, during his posting in Mauritania last year.

In QUNO Q&A, we feature interviews with alumni about their perspectives and experiences. For this issue, we spoke with 1999 Summer School participant, Vinay Talwar. Since 2003, Vinay has worked as a UK diplomat, with postings of various lengths to New York, Geneva, Brussels, Guatemala, South Sudan, India, Burma (Myanmar), and Mauritania.

Vinay, you recently returned to summer school as a guest speaker. How did that come about?

As soon as I arrived in Geneva to start my new diplomatic assignment, I tracked down QUNO and offered to be a speaker. I thought it might be useful to share the insights gained as a diplomat and also the transferable skills needed to develop an international career in public service. All the things I'd wished I'd known when I was doing unfulfilling jobs.

And how was the experience?

It was fun! It brought back fond memories, but also gave me hope for the future that there will be people committed to making the world better for other people. This year's participants seemed just as engaged, inquisitive and reflective as my cohort. The main differences were

technological rather than personal: social media and smartphones didn't exist in 1999, so in some ways it's probably easier for current summer school participants to stay connected.

Have you kept in contact with your fellow 1999 summer school alumni?

Some of my closest pals now are the ones I formed at QUNO. I don't encounter summer school alumni professionally though. I'm not sure if there's an alumni network, but it would be good to initiate one and run into one another. We'd probably identify each other by surreptitiously flicking our fingers in a peace symbol in the corridors.

What first attracted you to QUNO summer school?

I'd been curious about the UN, diplomacy and global issues, but all these issues seemed quite impenetrable to someone from my background. So this seemed like a great way in which to educate myself in a lovely setting. It was as much about *summer* as it was *school!*

What do you remember most?

19 years on, I mostly remember the friendships. I loved the way in which we all came at the same issues from different angles. I loved discovering new ways to view a familiar topic, and having my views broadened, strengthened and sometimes challenged on issues that I thought I'd understood. Summer school was a great example of how diverse thinking can help you learn. Most debates took place in the garden just after or between the more formal sessions with speakers. I also remember meeting a Canadian diplomat who was working on disarmament issues—the first diplomat I'd ever met—and thinking how much I'd love to have a job like that.

And what was your path into diplomacy like, after summer school?

After QUNO, I was stuck in a rut. I couldn't break out of the Catch-22 situation whereby, to get overseas work with the Red Cross, you needed to demonstrate overseas voluntary experience. I couldn't afford to work unpaid overseas, so it felt as though that line of work would be for people from a more socially affluent background. But I decided I did want to pursue an international career which helped others, so I fundraised to get a place as a Project Manager to run a community project in Chile for four months for Raleigh International. It was my first experience running a team and delivering a project.

That then built up my confidence to work overseas, so I got working visas for Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I left with a one-way ticket and a week's wages, and returned to the UK two years later, having worked as a waiter, dishwasher, office temp etc. But with a much clearer head about a career and a more confident approach to life. I then applied to join the Foreign Office and got a place.

Now, after 15 years in diplomacy, has the job matched your expectation?

It's been hard work, but intensely fascinating, and I've developed lots of new skills along the way (including a couple of languages) and helped positively change things for people in a few places.

And I view the world differently; it's not quite as opaque to me as it was in 1999. QUNO first helped me open that door, to give an insight into the power structures in the world and how they can shape things from the grassroots to the global stage.