



Preparing for Paris 2015

Paper 3: Questions to Ask Policy Makers

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) seeks to promote multilateral cooperation for a fair and peaceful world. We have held consultative status through our world Quaker body since 1948, and have offices in Geneva, New York, and a meeting space in Bonn. Our areas of work include the Human Impacts of Climate Change, Peacebuilding and the Prevention of Violent Conflict, Food and Sustainability, and Human Rights and Refugees.

Our work is often done behind the scenes to help facilitate a constructive outcome to negotiations such as the development of the Human Rights Council (2000s) and the Landmine Ban Treaty (1990s). Our previous work in UN environmental processes includes support for negotiations on the Convention on Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1992 Earth Summit preparations. QUNO also chaired the NGO Committee for the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment.

The international climate negotiations are among the most complex and profound in human history. Countries with different economic, political, social and environmental circumstances seek an agreement that can address present concerns and protect future generations. It is an extraordinary, and necessary, agreement to achieve.

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Credit: UNFCCC

The following paper is from a series of four short briefing papers, “Preparing for Paris,” which QUNO has developed for the upcoming climate change conference, or Conference of Parties (COP) 21, to be held in Paris in December 2015.

Paper Three proposes questions which concerned individuals and communities may wish to ask their policy makers.

For our personal witness:

First, we begin with questions to ask of ourselves, so that we can offer a personal witness when addressing our decision makers.

- *What am I willing to do for the most vulnerable now and for all future generations?*
- *What choices can I make in my own lifestyle, to live more sustainably and justly?*
- *Can I do more; can I inspire others?*
- *If I have fears about climate change, how can I transform these into hope and action?*

For our governments, and other policy makers:

General questions

- How are your policies helping to protect our fellow citizens and all our future generations from anthropogenic climate change?*
Most national governments would agree that one primary responsibility is to protect their citizens. Our human (anthropogenic) activities are creating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at a rate that could lead to catastrophic climate change, thus seriously endangering the wellbeing and safety of citizens now and in the future, while urgent action could avoid this.
- Are you committed to respect human rights in climate change action?*
Human rights can be violated in climate change action, both in reducing GHG emissions (mitigation) and building resilience to change (adaptation). Are we protecting human rights while facing the challenge of climate change? And are we mitigating our GHG emissions sufficiently, to avoid anthropogenic climate change that would threaten the human rights of the most vulnerable populations and our future generations?
- What steps have you taken to ensure citizens are aware of, and have access to, the latest climate science, such as reports provided to all governments through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 5th Assessment Report (AR5)?*
While these scientific reports are available online, do your leaders discuss the seriousness of the situation with civil society?
- How much does our government spend on military armaments, for example, and how much on decarbonizing the economy so that future generations can thrive?*
This raises the question, what is true “protection”?
- What is your government doing to support citizens’ initiatives to live more sustainably?*
In many countries citizens are leading the way. Policy makers should be encouraged to be aware of their efforts and support them.

Leadership:

- Is our country taking responsibility for our share of industrial GHG emissions?*
Developed countries can be leaders in higher mitigation (reducing GHG emissions) ambition. They also have a critical role in committing predictable financial support, capacity building and technology transfers, which not only strengthen developing countries’ ability to mitigate and adapt effectively, but also build trust. These actions help to balance fairly the economic benefits developed countries have had arising from longer periods of industrialization. **(This question is particularly for developed countries.)**
- Does our government promote development policies regardless of environmental and social cost, or do they seek sustainable development, including sustainable agriculture policies?*
- Does our government prioritize the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people, including our future generations?*
- What decisions are our leaders taking to decarbonize our economy and ensure economic development is sustainable?*
- To what extent is our government supporting renewable energy (RE) investment (including converting existing energy sources to RE), including access of the poorest to RE, and tax and budgetary reforms for RE investment?*
- To what extent are we as a country decreasing our reliance on coal, oil or gas (including fracking), or increasing nuclear technologies which may emit less dangerous GHG, but lead to other profound environmental pollution?*
- To what extent are our taxes supporting the fossil fuel industry extraction of new fossil fuels, including tax breaks, and to what extent are my taxes funding nuclear waste disposal?*