

Qatar in Brussels Special Report

YOUNG Friends of the Earth Europe

Qatar in Brussels, 1st - 8th December 2012, was a European youth convergence for climate justice, organised by Young Friends of the Earth Europe in parallel to the 2012 international climate talks in Doha, Qatar.

This is what happened at Qatar in Brussels from the participants' perspective.

www.qatar-in-brussels.org

Qatar in Brussels Special Report

European youth convergence for climate justice | 1st - 8th December 2012

From 1st - 8th December Young Friends of the Earth Europe organised 'Qatar in Brussels' the third edition of our alternative youth climate justice convergences (which started with Cancun in Brussels in 2010 and was followed by Durban in Brussels in 2011) that ran in parallel to the international climate negotiations in Doha, Qatar.

As the international climate change negotiations unfolded in Doha, we brought over 70 young activists from across Europe, and from a broad range of youth movements, together in Brussels for a week of workshops, discussions, and actions. We followed the negotiations with a live link up to activists in Qatar, and we connected with the local Power Shift Belgium group. We also planned and strategised for future youth cooperation and campaigning.

Qatar in Brussels was organised by a big team of volunteers from the YFoEE Climate Justice Working Group, including members of YFoE groups in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Ireland and the UK and volunteers from UKYCC and Push Europe.



Blog:

www.qatar-in-brussels.org

Photos:

www.flickr.com/photos/youngfoee/sets/

To give you a taste of the Qatar in Brussels experience, collected below are some participants' testimonies, which tell us about the meeting from a number of different perspectives.



1. AT QATAR IN BRUSSELS

Workshops, sessions, skill sharing

personal testimony by *Juliana Okropiridse*,
Global 2000 Jugend

We have a whole week – that is a lot of time. That’s what we thought. Well, it was not enough to include all of the sessions we wanted into Qatar in Brussels (QiB).



(c) Luka Tomac

Susi, the agenda-mistress, did her best to ensure we got the most from each day. This resulted in parallel sessions for participants to choose from, which kept the ball rolling and led to even more exciting conversations during the joint meals, because everyone had done something different during the day.

There were sessions from both external and internal speakers, covering topics such as “History of UNFCCC”, “Climate Politics in the EU”, “What is the COP?” etc. We had very specific workshops about certain campaigns in different countries joining QiB. One room was turned into our “Creative Space”, where we had the possibility to do screenprinting, drawing, reading, dressing up in a costume, or just to let our thoughts go wild. And this was also where we planned and prepared our actions, which was surely the part that bound us together the most.



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An important part of the day was the live link-up with Marco Cadena, our YFoEE contact in Doha. Marco informed us of what was going on at the COP, and we informed him how we planned to react. Often, after those Skype-calls, people stayed for hours to review what they had just heard and discuss what consequences could follow of the decisions in Doha.



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Every day was stuffed with so many impressions and we did so many different things during this week, that I can’t even remember all of them.

But one session that remained embedded in my mind was with the Power Shift Movement, held at the end of the day, after dinner, when everyone was exhausted. Despite this, as soon as the presentation started, you could literally feel the tension, energy and motivation in the room. All the dancing people on the screen and Oleg’s moving words set us thinking. Quite a few people even couldn’t resist from shaking their bodies to the music – Global Power Shift, here we come!

Another highlight of the week was for sure the presentation from Communergy, a project by six Irish pupils and their teachers to save energy in their community and school. It was amazing to see how much self-confidence and motivation these young people (four 15 year olds and two 16 year olds) had. They put so much energy into their project and had so many great new ideas, that every one of us was really touched after their talk. Those pupils were bubbling over with ideas and were so proud of their achievements that I had the feeling it gave all of us a quite intense energy boost.



(c) Nick Beall

Besides all this we still found time to socialize and we partied (a lot), although this meant giving up sleep almost entirely. But this was what turned us into a group with boundless coherence.

Changing the climate? Rather the system

Friederike Hanisch from Young Friends of the Earth UK

Somewhere in between numerous climate justice discussions, updates from Qatar and probably some of the best vegan meals ever cooked, I held a workshop on economic growth. More specifically, we looked at various issues that are wrong with our growth-addicted economic system ranging from ever increasing resource use (don't miss out on the impossible hamster), to social pressure to consume *ad infinitum* and the system's failure to provide for equity and jobs for all.



So why did I bring up boring economics at a rather exciting youth climate change campaigning week? To use Herman Daly's words, a growth-critical economist: Climate change, important as it is, is nevertheless a symptom of a deeper malady. It is an expression of a bigger wrong, interlinked with many other social, economic and ecological challenges we face today. By extension, understanding climate change as a single issue and tackling it by itself, without looking at other fundamental, interrelated problems of equity, poverty and resource exploitation the climate justice movement does this to a huge degree already!

One of the main issues we discussed was ways of how to engage people with the economic growth topic in a positive and effective way. While many people appear to be tired of working too much, having too little fun and not enough friends and family around, as well as constantly consuming to just keep up with the latest fashion and their neighbours, this is a tough issue to communicate in public discourse. "Give up your car - this will make you free" may sound sensible to some of us, but a lot of people would tend

to turn away when it comes to giving something up they've worked so hard for.

This led us to think about the current approach of the fast evolving degrowth movement. This movement seeks to downscale production and consumption in order to increase human well-being and to enhance ecological conditions and equity on the planet. Although the movement focuses on many similar issues that we have discussed in the group, such as the current system's support of senseless consumerism instead of real life-quality, we felt a certain unease with the movement's approach.

We came to the conclusion that trying to persuade people to give up things, even if it is for one's own and the planet's best interests, emphasises the negative and hence doesn't work. What we need is a positive approach, a vision people can aspire to and really identify with.

Lots of people are working on finding economic models that provide space for a healthy consumption, people's well-being and a sustainable use of natural resources, without relying on growth as the sole driver.



continue reading



All of this is not only important for campaigning on issues like climate change, but also on a personal level. I am all against shifting responsibilities on to the individual but we do need to start redefining our role in the economy. What products do you want to use, for what reasons do you want to consume them? Think about these issues, maybe with the use of the New Materialism manifesto. Go beyond thinking about things; think about what you want to get out of the economy and what you want to give back. Doing this individually and collectively, telling different stories (for German speakers read about FuturZwei) and inspiring others, may help us finding a new meaning for our roles in the economy and the economy itself, in which we are not powerless consumers dwarfed by mega-sized H&M posters but empowered and informed individuals that are able to decide how they want to consume and eventually live their lives on this planet.



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OPEN LETTER TO CONNIE HEDEGAARD

On the last day of the COP 18 UN climate talks, European youth at our convergence in Brussels drafted this open letter to Connie Hedegaard, the EU Commissioner for climate action. The strong language reflects the strong feelings of the participants that real action is needed from the EU. This is what it says:

Dear Commissioner Hedegaard,

We, European youth and civil society, are writing to you in these critical final hours of the UN climate talks in Doha to demand that the EU acts now and changes its position at the UNFCCC.

We have witnessed over the past two weeks the EU's consistent refusal to live up to its responsibilities, and we condemn this lack of progress. The EU claims to be a climate leader but it is acting as a blocker.

Inaction for the next 8 years is not acceptable. A 20% reductions pledge under the Kyoto Protocol is simply a smokescreen; this target has already been met so we know that you are pledging zero. The EU has proved it has the capability to cut its emissions quickly and deeply and we need to take the lead on the world stage in cutting further emissions. Your 0% pledge COP-out will subject us to catastrophic climate change. The EU is supposed to protect us and youth around the world. You are not fulfilling your duty.

We welcome pledges for climate finance from certain member states and the EU under the Bali Action Plan but it falls far short of what is needed for mitigation and adaptation measures in developing countries. It is especially inadequate if we consider the implications of a weak EU mitigation target. The EU in Doha have blocked discussions on finance; failing to set an aggregate target and refusing to discuss the suggestion that climate finance must be scaled up each year. This is unacceptable. We call on the EU to provide scaled up aggregate climate finance and we demand assurance that this will be new, additional, public funding – not a simple redirection of Official Development Aid as we have seen with the EU's fast-start finance pledges.

Stop using Poland as an excuse for EU inaction. You must move beyond internal differences and take collective responsibility for the sake of current and future generations. By representing the economic interests of a select few, you are betraying us and our right to a clean and just future. By refusing to make meaningful progress under the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Action Plan – as agreed in the Durban Platform – you are betraying the poorest and most vulnerable communities across the world. We stand in solidarity with them and we reject your empty pledges.

There might have been a time when decision-makers could ignore us; that time is now over. We are not one person. We are not one country. We are uniting and mobilising. We are many and the message is spreading fast. There is growing discontent with the way the EU conducts itself on the international stage. The EU is supposed to speak on our behalf, but our voice is being stifled and it is clear that you are not representing us. The deal on the table is simply a suicide pact for the people of the Global South and we will actively resist your decision to condone such an injustice.

We will be watching you in these final hours of negotiations in Doha. We demand that you refuse to sign us up to an unjust deal. We demand that you act to drastically increase your finance and mitigation commitments. This is not negotiable. We will not back down.

Day 7 at Qatar in Brussels

personal testimony by Saara Lotta Pullinen
from Young Friends of the Earth Austria

Qatar in Brussels has now been running for a week. We have held workshops every day and I am learning more and more about the discussions going on at the climate talks. It makes me proud to understand the complicated issues of our society. But the more I understand, the more I feel this anger growing inside me against the people who are responsible for these meaningless discussions and weak words.

Being here in Brussels with all these motivated and positive people is something I am very thankful for. Being together, organising actions and discussing topics that are important for us is giving me the feeling of not being alone. I see that we are not standing in sadness, but constantly working on actions and projects.



Yesterday morning we had another of our regular link-ups with Marco Cadena, the Young Friends of the Earth delegate at the COP in Doha, Qatar. It doesn't seem like the negotiations are moving forward very fast, but still it is wonderful that we can be close to him and the young civil society in Doha. We can see how they put pressure on the governments.

For our action we had in the afternoon, we cut and painted red dots, just like the young activists in Doha. When I think about the distance between Brussels and Doha and how we still work so close together, I am just amazed. So when we were heading to the Christmas market yesterday, where our action took place, it was hard not to dance and shout around, spreading the excitement. We performed our street theatre and everything went fantastically. People were stopping, asking what the reason for our demonstration was. It was very motivating to see how it sometimes takes only a few strong words to awake somebody's mind.



Later in the evening we had another skype chat with Marco. He showed us around the empty conference building. Now I feel even closer to what is happening in Doha. We also watched inspiring videos and live streams of the negotiations.



On my first day here I knew that it would be hard to leave. And even though I still have one day left, I am already desperate to see all these amazing people again. Not only my week here comes to an end, but the negotiations in Doha also need to conclude. We all know that our fight for better targets doesn't stop with the end of this COP or the end of Qatar in Brussels. Future planning is one point on our agenda today which I am very excited about.

This week was a possibility to gather and exchange ideas and visions, but the important thing is not to give up. Like Oleg from 350.org said in one of his workshops about PowerShift:

“the change will come unexpectedly”.



2. ACTIONS

European Youth: We stand with the Philippines

article published on Qatar in Brussels website on 5th of December 2012
written by Jacinta Fay, from Young Friends of the Earth Ireland



red climate
impact dot

As the international climate talks continue, the super typhoon Bopha, which hit the Philippines yesterday, shows the devastating impacts of climate change and the necessity for concrete outcomes from the talks. The death toll has climbed to more than 270 people (now already more than 1,000) with over 170,000 people fleeing their homes. This is the 16th extreme weather event to hit the Philippines this year and this typhoon is yet another example of how the Global South are bearing the brunt of the impacts of climate change.

In one of the negotiations' plenary sessions yesterday, a negotiator from the Philippines said "instead of getting ready for Christmas, we may be counting our dead". This illustrates the reality faced by countries in the Global South who are suffering the impacts of climate change while developed countries block progress at the climate talks. The working groups on Long-term Cooperative Action and Kyoto Protocol are closing with no agreement on many integral issues. It is not totally clear what happens with the issues that have not been negotiated. This would condemn developing countries to even more severe impacts in the future.



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This morning, youth from all over the world signed on to a statement in solidarity with the people of the Philippines issued by the Canadian Youth Delegation. This statement highlights the ignorance and arrogance of developed countries and fossil fuel corporations who put the interests of profits ahead of the needs of people. It demands real action at the COP18 to address the climate crisis.

Throughout the talks youth delegates alongside other civil society groups have been running a

climate justice campaign called Climate Legacy which uses red dots which symbolise climate impacts.

Here in Qatar in Brussels we are preparing an action in solidarity with the people of the Philippines and the millions of people around the world who suffer the impacts of climate change. It will also support the action by the youth delegation at the international climate talks today.

As European youth, we stand in solidarity with the Philippines. We stand in solidarity with the countries of the Global South. We stand in solidarity with young people across the world, who demand action, who demand equity and who demand ambition.

This cannot be another decade of inaction.
We demand a just outcome from Doha.

We demand climate justice now.



Read the full story here:
www.qatar-in-brussels.org/european-youth-we-stand-with-the-philippines/

The Power of the Youth Movement

Tara Clarke, People&Planet, UK



What brings a group of young people together? A story? A passion? Inspiration? You wouldn't be mistaken for choosing all three. Being at Qatar in Brussels has given me, as a young activist, a sense of pride for my generation: we have the power to make real change.

Qatar in Brussels has defined how important it is to work as a network. Attending workshops with Young Friends of the Earth members all over Europe made it possible to share ideas, experiences and most importantly, skills to take action against powerful lobbying organisations. These organisations are jeopardising the progress of the negotiations happening at the climate talks in Qatar.

Taking the lobby tour with the Corporate Lobby Observatory (CEO) was a defining moment to kick start the week in Brussels. CEO walked us through the city of Brussels pointing out buildings where large companies such as BP and Shell held their offices. They told us about how much money the oil industry is pumping into protecting their brand and stopping any regulations that could potentially damage their business. The entire oil industry will continue to use its vast wealth to escape regulation, restriction, oversight and enforcement.

Read the full story here:
www.qatar-in-brussels.org/the-power-of-the-youth-movement/



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Power Shift Belgium and Qatar in Brussels activists occupy BusinessEurope office

Tina Rumenović from Power Shift Belgium

On Monday 3rd December a group of 40 activists occupied the office of BusinessEurope for 90 minutes. BusinessEurope is Europe's largest lobby group representing more than 20 million companies from 35 countries. The activists were participants of the "Power Shift Belgium" event and from the Qatar in Brussels youth convergence, and were demonstrating their strong disagreement about the role BusinessEurope is taking in the climate debate.

BusinessEurope is known for its aggressive lobbying to block effective climate action in the EU while claiming to support action to protect climate. When Europe announced it was considering the 30% emission target, BusinessEurope said going beyond 20% would send a wrong signal. The influence of companies represented by BusinessEurope doesn't stop at the EU borders. Their respective trade associations oppose climate action in countries such as the US as well.

check out: www.worstlobby.eu/2010/nominee/businesseurope

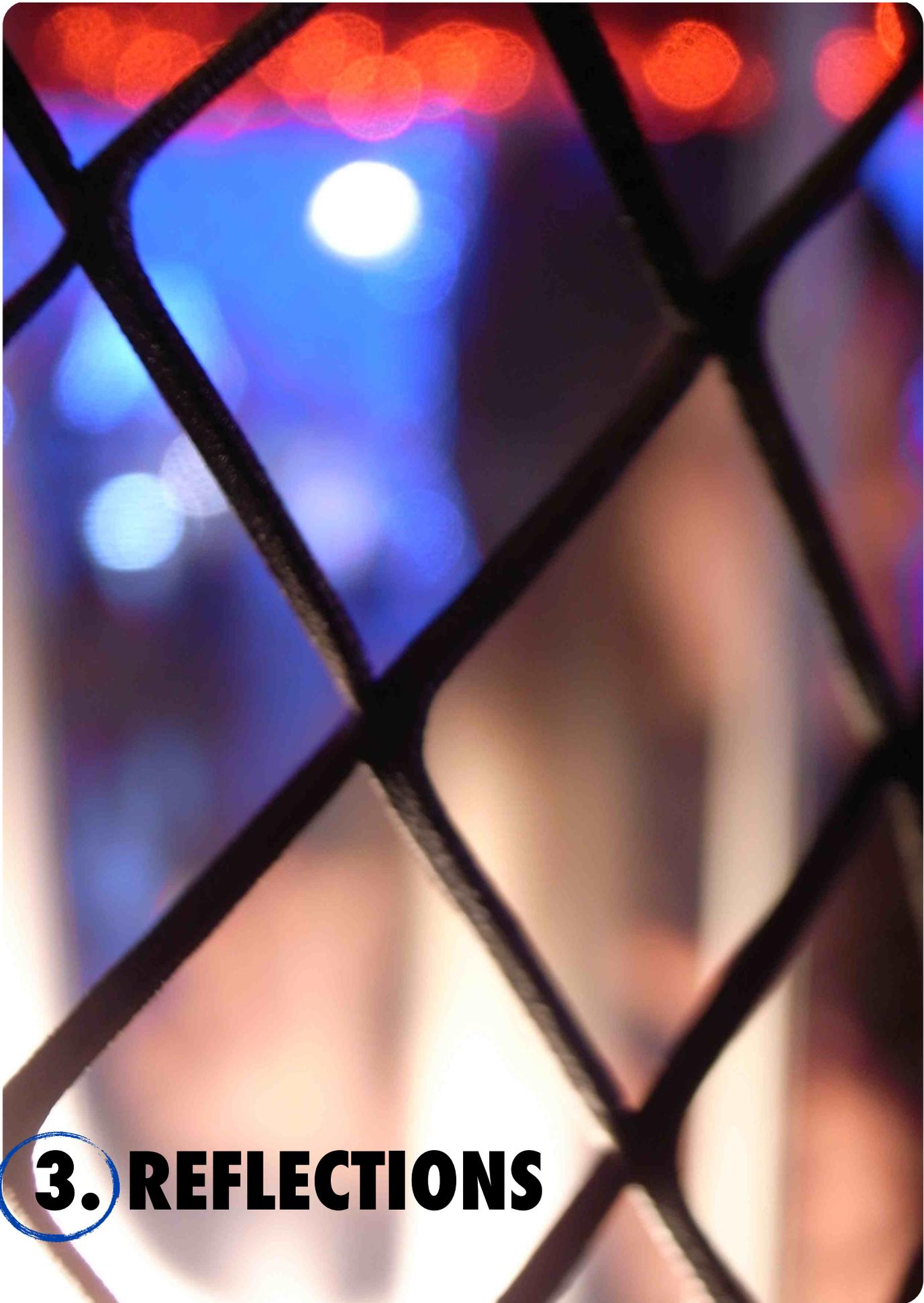
There are estimated to be between 15,000 and 50,000 established lobbyists in the European district of Brussels. Representing large companies and industrial federations they make up the majority of 'expert groups' whose role it is to advise the EU's legislative process. In the lobbying sector it is estimated that 70% defend commercial interests, 20% public authorities (cities, regions, ...) and only 10% represents civil society such as trade unions and non-governmental organisations. These are all really good reasons for choosing this target in our action.



The action started at 16h (CET) and was led by CEO (Corporate Europe Observatory) in the form of a lobby tour. The tour started at the European Commission and ended at the BusinessEurope office. Other stops included: BP, G+ and BASF. No arrests were made, although the police arrived following a call from BusinessEurope. Activists left the building after ninety minutes of occupation.



Have a look at this powerful short video showing the atmosphere of the Power Shift Belgium event where a big part was a joint action of the 2 groups:
vimeo.com/55607647



3. REFLECTIONS

Doha reflections

Marco Cadena, Young Friends of the Earth UK

In Doha, thousands of officials and civil society representatives came together to attempt to make progress on how to curb greenhouse gas emissions to prevent catastrophic climate change.



But what we've got is this: Todd Stern, top US climate diplomat, praised the 'sufficient' action on climate the USA has done, and Connie Hedegaard, EU climate commissioner, billed the failed conference as a 'success' for which she was gifted with proud tweets from people like @ExxonMobil_EU – odd 'friends' in a fight that's actually against their very existence. This bizarre 'tweet-friendship' perfectly describes what's happening at climate conferences: developed countries are defending business as usual. More so, these countries who caused the climate crisis are putting their long-term love affair with elite corporate power to its heights and are completely ignoring what people need at home and worldwide – leading the world to global devastation.

As 2013 dawns, we are facing more extreme weather events all over the world than ever before. Climate change is wrecking our planet and ruining livelihoods already. We are on the edge of a climate catastrophe, but there's only frightening ignorance by the most responsible countries.

As Toddie and Connie sat and applauded themselves at the conference, the Philippines were ravaged by the 16th extreme weather event this year. The next day, their lead negotiator could barely hold his tears back when making an urgent appeal to all governments, asking for serious action. Leading environmental NGOs have released an emergency appeal to expose developed countries' efforts to slow down progress while attacking the convention's fundamental principles. Youth groups worked tirelessly on doing actions inside the conference centre in Doha, and Qatar in Brussels brought together people to build the movement in Europe.

Rightly so, as we are building the movement in Europe and worldwide – in the coming years we will be more visible than ever before. We will have to take these issues in our own hands as our governments are failing us.

Climate activism is at its waking stage yet again, with grassroots resistance to fossil fuel expansion all around the globe. There is a stronger, shared voice uniting the movements as campaigners and activists realise that all fights – from environmental and human rights to economic and social justice – come together in one single fight in the next few years: the full scale fight for our climate.



We need to take on this fight, as no one else will.

We have only a few years to make significant changes and that won't happen by only changing our lightbulbs. We need a bit more. We need to stop our governments' addiction to fossil fuels and extreme capitalism that ruins lives and the planet.



We had an amazing Qatar in Brussels, we will have a Global Power Shift, and we will come together at the end of the year in Warsaw at COP19 to show our power here in Europe - and we will grow our movement from then on even more.

2013 is going to be about building our networks at home, training our skills and developing our public exposure internationally.



There is a global movement growing for climate justice. We are coming, and you are part of it. Join us.

To find out how, email hello@pusheurope.eu or contact your regional coordinator on www.pusheurope.eu

We are many, but we are ONE!

Personal reflection on QiB by Maruška Mileta
(FoE Croatia/Zelena akcija Activist group)

Where do I even begin? Perhaps by saying what a pleasure it was to meet so many different and inspiring young people from all over Europe; to learn from them and with them.



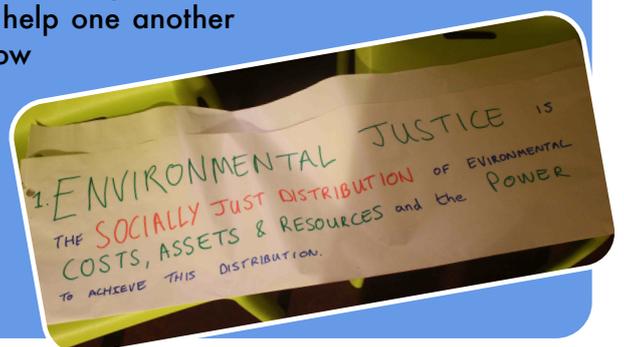
I have to mention that this was the first time I helped organise an event like this; and what an incredible experience it was. It's not a very easy thing to do, but it really pays off in the end. One of the things I was excited about was finally meeting some of the people from the organising team in person, after months and months of skype meetings, and of course seeing some old faces again. Overall, the (short) journey with Young Friends of the Earth so far has helped me evolve, and it's the people and events like these that just keep you going, not wanting to give up. The thirst for knowledge and hard work. The longing for change.

I strongly believe that what we did at Qatar in Brussels was a start of something very special. It was something bigger than friendship; the beginning of a united and strong bond between youth all over Europe. Most importantly - we now know that we're not alone. We are many, but we are one. One idea. One vision. One dream.

Even though the UN climate talks were once again a huge disappointment and didn't end in a good climate deal, we shouldn't give up on it. We can't! Because it's up to us what the future will look like - a world with dangerous climate change or a world based on climate justice and equity. There is still time. Time to help one another create a brighter future. We have already started. Now it's YOUR turn to join us. And we especially call on every young person throughout Europe.

Mobilize. Unite. Act.

And tell everyone: we won't back down!





4.

LOOKING AHEAD

Push Europe and Qatar in Brussels – what next?

As European Union negotiators begin to overtake their national counterparts in importance during the international climate talks, it is imperative that we, as European Youth, don't let European negotiators off the hook by concentrating solely on our national governments. We must ensure that we build a movement across Europe to let the European Commission and its negotiating team know that we will follow their every move. Qatar in Brussels was the perfect moment to open the Push Europe movement up and invite all European young people to get involved; to build a true European Youth Climate Movement that will be so crucial in the build-up to both COP 19 in Warsaw this year and following up into 2015.

We are excited that so many of you want to be involved and this year has the potential to be a watershed moment for young people across Europe, many will participate in Global Power Shift this Summer and will return with the tools required to hold national Power Shifts and strengthen this movement. This year will also see the beginnings of the discussions on Europe's 2030 emission reduction targets and the world desperately needs Europe to show a far greater degree of ambition. We will be telling the European Commission exactly how important it is for our generation that Europe steps up to the plate.

Ideas for campaigns this year include continued pressure on Poland to stop blocking more EU ambition on climate change, campaigning for a more effective fuel quality directive, a focus on 2030 and 2020 climate targets and campaigning focused around movement building. Early this year we will be outlining priorities for the year and we would like input from all across the European Youth Climate Movement.

We would love to have you or your group involved whether it is holding actions using our action kits or being represented on the coordinating team, get in touch with us by emailing

hello@pusheurope.eu or visit our homepage pusheurope.eu.





5.

GET INVOLVED

2013 will be a busy year for **Young Friends of the Earth Europe (YFoEE)**. Next in line is the Network Gathering in April in Croatia, a Climate Justice working group meeting in June in Bonn, Germany and a summer camp for 60 people on the theme of fossil fuel extraction, in the Lofoten Islands, Norway. We are also encouraging our members to get involved with the big Climate Justice training event in June in Istanbul, organised as a **Global Power Shift** event.

globalpowershift.org

pusheurope.eu

Finally, we are inviting you to get involved with the **Push Europe** campaign.

Website:
www.youngfoee.org

Facebook:
facebook.com/YoungFoEE

Email:
youngfoe@foeeurope.org



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Impressions ...

