

PIEL UK 10th Annual Conference: “Overhouse from PIELClimate Talks After Paris: Beyond the Pledges”

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Kirsty Schneeberger, former advisor to the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, PIEL Conference. Photo credit to Kelsey Ryburn (SOAS).

Public Interest Environmental Law UK’s 10th Annual Conference was held on 15 April, entitled “Climate Talks After Paris: Beyond the Pledges.” The all-day event featured a diverse array of speakers that either participated in the Paris negotiations or currently specialize in climate change law and policy. Focusing on the important, but often overlooked, outcomes of the Paris negotiations, students, academics and legal practitioners gathered at City University’s Cass Business School to critically assess the future of climate negotiations and its impact on the international legal sector. The conference opened with keynote speaker **Kirsty Schneeberger**, who participated in the Paris negotiations as former advisor to the UNFCCC Executive Secretary. She optimistically proclaimed Paris as the inventive and necessary step forward in the international movement to address climate change. Quoting Christiana Figueres, she affirmed that Copenhagen to Paris was the transition from “*the impossible to the unstoppable.*”

Kirsty's thorough and uplifting presentation was followed by three panels: public participation in the Paris Agreement, green technology and its regulatory challenges, and finally the future of carbon markets for post-Kyoto Climate Agreement obligations. The first panel featured moderator **Dr. Emily Barritt (KCL)** and speakers **Alistair McGlone** (Aarhus Compliance Committee Member, Director of Alistair McGlone and Associates Ltd.), **Gita Parihar** (Head of Legal, Friends of the Earth) and **Kurt Winter** (Barrister, ClientEarth). The panel critically assessed the different ways the public can engage in climate negotiations such as Paris through the Aarhus Convention obligations, prevention of NGO public observation and advocacy and finally the legal tool of public environmental litigation. Ms. Parihar concluded that "public participation ensures legitimacy of the process, we are the canary in the coalmine."

Shortly thereafter, **Professor Richard Macrory** (UCL) moderated the second panel, "Green Technology: regulation challenges and future potential". He asked the three speakers to discuss specifically the potential of low-carbon technologies post-Paris. The three speakers were **Linda Siegele** (SIDS Advisor, SOAS and UCL Lecturer), **Angela Francis** (Economist, GreenAlliance) and finally **Martin Nesbit** (Institute for European Environmental Policy). The panel engaged in an interesting discussion from a variety of perspectives, with Angela Francis specifically noting that the UK's energy policy shifts, in her view, will lessen the UK's potential for essential low carbon infrastructure. Martin Nesbit concluded that "we need wider public involvement to assess impact on non-climate elements, e.g. land use."

The final panel was led by SOAS Lecturer **Dr. Feja Lesniewska**, who directed the three energy-expert speakers to look at the potential of carbon markets for post-Kyoto era obligations. Speaker **Navraj Singh Ghaleigh** (Professor, University of Edinburgh) spoke out most critically, highlighting the inefficiencies of the carbon market, lack of linkages, and ultimately failure of actually limiting carbon emissions. Energy consultant **Matt Gray** (International Energy Association) followed with a thorough overview of Kyoto obligations and tracking current carbon markets, while emphasizing that green and renewable technology, and ultimately energy efficiency, will move the decarbonisation movement faster than carbon pricing. Finally, news journalist **Ben Garside** (Founder of Carbon Pulse) closed the panel with an element of humour by highlighting the return of Carbon Markets as mentioned by the Paris Agreement within the metaphor of *Star Wars*, noting the "Revenge of (Article) Sixth" and "Return of JI."

In celebration of PIEL UK's 10th Anniversary, founding member and Barrister **Ned Westaway** (Francis Taylor Building) made closing remarks, reminding attendees and participants that environmental justice inspired the conference and organisation. Overall the conference was deemed a success, spurring important discussion around key issues stemming from the Paris talks and raising awareness of climate change issues in the London and greater-U.K. community.

Sponsors of the event included UCL Centre for Law and the Environment, Queen Mary School of Law, The City University Law School, UKELA, Friends of the Earth, the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, the World Wildlife Foundation, Association of Lawyers for Animal Welfare and Francis Taylor Building.

PIEL UK is a student-run, not-for-profit organisation that plans an annual conference in collaboration with a number of London Universities and organisations in hopes of promoting and

educating students and legal practitioners about an important environmental legal issue. For more information, contact PIEL UK by email at pieluk@googlemail.com or visit their website, piel.org.uk.