



Publishers Take on Climate Change

Interviews with

- **Sherri Aldis, UN Publications**
- **Michiel Kolman, Elsevier & International Publishers Association**
- **Brian O’Leary, Book Industry Study Group (US)**

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KENNEALLY: When the United Nations Climate Change Conference opens in Glasgow, Scotland on October 31, the international publishing community stands ready for action.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

Government leaders and others planning for COP26 have described a sense of urgency in order to remain in line with the Paris Agreement goal of holding global temperature rise to keep 1.5 degrees Celsius. They have also emphasized the central role of the latest science in informing what must be done.

Today, CCC announces it has signed onto the SDG Publishers Compact, joining stakeholders from across the publishing industry to pledge a commitment to the future and dedication to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

The Compact is a 10-point call-to-action in support of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. CCC has committed to develop sustainable practices and act as champions of the SDGs during the Decade of Action (2020-2030) specifically in the areas of Quality Education; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; and Reduced Inequalities.

Sherri Aldis, Chief of UN Publications, sees obvious common ground for publishers and SDGs.

ALDIS: We’ve really been very inspired by the support that we’ve seen publishers taking over the past months and even years. There seems to be really a natural alignment between the values of the publishing industry and those of the Sustainable Development Goals. Naturally, publishing already contributes directly to SDG number four, of course, on



quality education. And from there, there seems to be a natural transition towards contributing to some of the other goals.

Public education is critical. In particular, when we're talking about fighting misinformation, we want to have an informed public who can make good decisions about their lifestyle, about sustainable practices, and just the daily choices that we all make.

One of the things that we've really focused on at the UN is children. The future does belong to them, and they are the ones that will be the most impacted by the climate emergency that we're currently facing. Educating them now about the issues that they'll have to confront in the coming years is essential. So we created the SDG Book Club for children with the IPA and IFLA, the International Board of Books for Young People, the European & International Booksellers Federation, and the Bologna Book Fair, of course, to engage children on the concepts of the SDGs.

Now, it was very important that we do this in local languages. Children need to be communicated to in their language. So we have produced these book selections in all six official UN languages, and even more, we've branched out into Indonesian and Norwegian, and hopefully soon German and others.

The written word has power to provide reliable information, but also to inspire, and we really do see publishers using the tools that they have at their disposal to communicate about the goals. Publishers are uniquely placed, really, to not only communicate and raise awareness about the goals and educate about them, but also to really take action, to have sustainable business practices. That's something that is quite unique about the publishing industry.

KENNEALLY: How would you rate publishers' responses to this challenge – to the environmental impact of their industry – against those, perhaps, of other industries?

ALDIS: Rating publishers or the publishing industry against other industries is difficult. I don't have any hard data on that or any objective evidence. But what I can say is that I really am inspired and impressed by the efforts that we have seen.

We try and engage with publishers through the SDG Publishers Compact, which is a program that we created about a year ago now at the Frankfurt Book Fair with the IPA to provide publishers with a framework so they can make a formal commitment to the goals. That really is an important component – to actually make a formal and public commitment to achieving the SDGs. So far, we have over 120 members from all over the world, and some members are not just individual publishers, but actually publishing associations, so they actually represent many, many more than 120 publishing entities.



KENNEALLY: At the Frankfurt Book Fair, Sherri Aldis, the International Publishers Association and other associations related to publishing are coming together for the first of a series of conversations on climate, with the aim to release agreed conclusions and actions ahead of COP26, which will occur at the beginning of November. What are the concerns that you would like to see the publishing community themselves bring to COP26 as a result of those meetings?

ALDIS: Well, first of all, it's wonderful that it is happening in such a timely manner. The Frankfurt Book Fair and these conversations really are taking place on the eve of COP26 in Glasgow that starts on the 1st of November, and it's very encouraging to see that this existential issue – because it really is an existential issue – is being discussed at this time.

What we would like to see at this point is some concrete targets to come out of these conversations across the supply chain. It's hard to make progress when we don't have something to measure ourselves against, and we know that across the industry, we do have actors who can put their heads together – and will, I think, during this series of conversations – to decide what are the most relevant things for us to track? Where are we today, and where would we like to be by 2030, or even by 2050, when we need to get to net-zero emissions?

The three areas that we focus on in the Sustainable Development Goal Publishers Compact could be a relevant framework to focus on, so the ideas of prioritizing sustainability, of raising awareness, and taking action. I think if we can come up with some concrete targets in those three areas, it would be a major step forward. COP26 is all about making commitments and taking concrete steps towards achieving global net zero by 2050, and it's about working together to deliver. That's one of the four major objectives of COP26. The publishing industry is a key player in this, and again, it's uniquely placed to both raise awareness about the goals and the climate emergency and also to adopt sustainable business practices that will actually positively impact and help us to achieve the goals over the next nine years.

KENNEALLY: In a special statement on September 30, the International Publishers Association and other leading organization across the global book sector committed to taking responsibility for the industry's environmental impact and adopting climate-friendly practices across the publishing supply chain.

Dr. Michiel Kolman is Senior VP and Academic Ambassador at Elsevier and former President of the International Publishers Association (IPA) where he now chairs Inclusive Publishing and Literacy. During his tenure as IPA President he launched the SDG Book



Club together with the UN. In October 2020, he launched the SDG Publishers Compact with the UN.

He told me that leading publishing industry organizations have agreed to be part of a series of conversations on climate convened by the International Publishers Association. The first of these takes place this week in Frankfurt Book Fair, followed by virtual sessions, with the aim to release the agreed conclusions and actions ahead of COP 26.

KOLMAN: I think there's an incredible sense of urgency right now among publishers, and the reason is we've seen it in the latest IPCC report, which came out in August of this year, and I think the UN secretary-general really called it correctly – it's code red for humanity. There is now irrefutable evidence that climate change is human-induced, and we must take action now, otherwise it's simply too late.

Publishers across our sector must think about what is their responsibility for our own collective environment? What is their impact, and how can they contribute?

I think publishers can really contribute in two ways. One is to get their own house in order, so to say. And the other is, of course, through what we publish.

KENNEALLY: The question really is if publishers want to address environmental concerns there, how can they go about that? I suppose one step is to understand it – make the assessment first – and then think about the remedies that can be applied.

KOLMAN: If you just take one example, my own company at Elsevier, we completely mapped out what our carbon footprint is. It's called a scope 1 and scope 3 – business and travel – and then the really big one is scope 3. In that, we're going to map out exactly at the end of this year or next year what it's going to be and how we can reduce it. Scope 3 is our supply chain, essentially. That means you have to come up with partnerships with suppliers. You have to work with organizations like the Green Book Alliance and really map out what can you do? I think partnership is crucially important. And for the IPA, we have been partnering with many organizations.

A good example is, for instance, how we're partnering around the SDG Book Club. We worked with IBBY. We worked with IFLA, the library community. This is not something you can do on your own. This is something that you have to do collectively.

KENNEALLY: What can you tell us about publisher support for research into the climate crisis, Michiel?



KOLMAN: First, I have been really impressed by the amount of publishers that say, I want to be involved. I want to take action around sustainability. We launched the SDG Publishers Compact less than a year ago, and today, we have 120 signatories, and I think it also includes a very strong cohort from the STM community. So I think I'm very happy with that, and that's a clear sign how publishers can really support the research into climate change.

KENNEALLY: How important in all of this is public education when addressing climate change? Because clearly, publishers have an important role in educating the public about all of these issues.

KOLMAN: I could not agree more. I think public education is crucial here. It's clear if you are going to address climate change, there will be tradeoffs for the public, and some of them are not going to be easy. Tradeoffs will require things like how do we eat? How do we travel? What kind of energy do we use? So you need a real firm grasp of the basic scientific concepts around climate change. They are, I think, critical. And I think publishers play a very important role there so that there will be acceptance around these changes which will be needed.

If I can put my Elsevier hat on, we also have to strengthen the bridge between science and policy. We need to be honest about these tradeoffs that are coming. But we also need to be able to promote this multidisciplinary scientific approach – science that needs to be explained, all the benefits, all the tradeoffs that are necessary. That means research connections with the social sciences, with economics and things like that, so that we all collectively can achieve this net-zero transition.

KENNEALLY: One of the next steps, is to come together at Frankfurt and in these virtual sessions to begin to unify and to think about the concerns you want to bring to COP26. Any hint at what you think the particular areas to focus on may be?

KOLMAN: I hope that we collectively will say, yes, it's important. Yes, we're going to address it. We're going to map out especially the supply chain. And I hope that many participants will say we are going to commit to a strict deadline, a deadline – maybe not a Paris agreement by 2050, but maybe a deadline by 2040, and that we can really see tangible results already by 2030.

KENNEALLY: The Green Book Alliance, a joint effort led by UK's Book Industry Communications, BookNet Canada, and the Book Industry Study Group, surveyed the current state of sustainability in book publishing between November 2020 and January 2021.



Brian O’Leary, BISG executive director, discussed the findings with me.

KENNEALLY: Who participated in that survey, and where were they from?

O’LEARY: It actually had answers from about 10 different countries. The most significant responses came from the UK, Canada, and the US, which you’d expect. But we also saw answers from Germany, Australia, and a couple of other countries, as well.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about the key findings – the kinds of responses you’ve had to these questions.

O’LEARY: 90% of the answers that we got said that their companies were either already doing something or planned to do something with respect to policy governing sustainability in their part of the universe. And about half of those responding indicated that they already ask at least some environmental questions of their trading partners and suppliers. So that’s a pretty good basis on which to try and build both momentum and some understanding across the industry.

KENNEALLY: The focus in the industry particularly is around Forest Stewardship Council sourcing – FSC sourcing – which is really key, because of course, that’s about sustainable forest practices.

O’LEARY: Yeah, and interest in paper really goes back a generation. I’ve been in publishing long enough both in magazines and in books to remember the early days of activism around things like Freesheet and the use of chlorine. So it’s encouraging to see significant interest in FSC or certification around FSC or forest-certified papers. But I think that there’s also interest in more process certification, so how do I know I’m doing a good job? How do I know our suppliers are doing a good job? That goes beyond just paper.

KENNEALLY: So what would be involved in developing those kinds of certifications? That would require some research, I would imagine.

O’LEARY: Yeah, top of our list as the Green Book Alliance is to try and both solicit some funding and come to a consensus on what research is of greatest value. I think one of the default ideas we have is to try and map the carbon footprint not just for publishers, where there’s been a lot of attention, but also for the supply chain as a whole. So if you’re working with a printer or you’re thinking about the difference between digital and print as an option, that we’d come up with a comprehensive way to look at it so that publishers can make choices, and they also have a basis on which to, for example, purchase carbon offsets and do other things that will move us closer as an industry to carbon zero.



KENNEALLY: The supply chain is becoming increasingly important to publishers looking at the entirety of that. That really requires asking some hard questions of their vendors.

O'LEARY: It does. They need not necessarily be hard questions in the sense that they're difficult to answer, but rather that you want to make sure that you have a combined and joint commitment to improving our industry's position with respect to carbon and climate change.

The thing is if all publishers did exactly the right things and got themselves to net carbon zero, that wouldn't necessarily move the industry. And our interest is not to make sure that any one company is doing the right thing, but that we as an industry, and ultimately we as a society across the planet, are doing the right thing. So we want to both conduct the research and share that information as widely as possible, not keep it close to our vest, because it's by getting good information into the hands of people who are making decisions that we think we can make a difference in how the book industry fares with respect to climate change.

KENNEALLY: Brian, the Green Book Alliance, including your organization, the Book Industry Study Group, have agreed to be part of a series of conversations on climate that the International Publishers Association is convening in Frankfurt for the first event, at least. There'll be other more virtual programs later. All of that is to come to some agreements and to be able to release those conclusions ahead of the COP26 event in November, which is looking at the commitment to reduce greenhouse gases and reduce or to address climate change. So what are the concerns you would like to see discussed in Frankfurt and then brought to COP26?

O'LEARY: I think COP26 is a good check-in point, but I think the most important thing, ultimately, for us is what we take out of it and commit to do after that. Roughly the month between now and when COP26 occurs is a good time to bring to the fore all the things that various parties, particularly publishers, have been doing over the last year or two.

But I think I'd love to come out of COP26 with a really firm commitment to conduct research in one, two, or perhaps up to three different areas that are of value in shaping decisions about what the industry as a whole does going forward. If we could get that work done, I think it would give us a vehicle to move ahead from the Significant commitments that the Publishers Compact and the IPA have been able to solicit particularly from the publishing community and get us to a point where we then have the tools we need to make decisions and take actions.

KENNEALLY: In 2019 at the UN's Climate Action Summit in New York City, climate activist and high school student Greta Thunberg declared on behalf of her generation, "We'll be



watching you.” Thunberg is expected to attend COP26 in Glasgow. She and hundreds of other luminaries will find the world’s publishing community leading the climate change challenge through research, reading and remediation.

On 10 November, as COP26 draws to a close, CCC’s Executive Director, International Relations Michael Healy will host a virtual panel discussion, “UN Sustainable Development Goals: The Way Ahead for Publishing and the Content Industries,” as part of the IFRRO International Conference. Sherri Aldis and Michiel Kolman join him along with Simone Taylor of AIP Publishing. For details, please go to IFRRO.org

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