

Your Guide to COP
Climate Action Network



#1. Introduction to the UNFCCC

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The UNFCCC

- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an international environmental treaty that was opened for signature at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and came into force in 1994
- **Ultimate objective:** “Stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system”
- Encouraging the process to happen at a pace that considers adaptation time, food safety, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner

The UNFCCC

- 194 countries signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, showing near universal agreement that there is a problem and that action is required against climate change
- The treaty itself however did not set mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries and didn't contain any enforcement mechanisms to compel states to act.

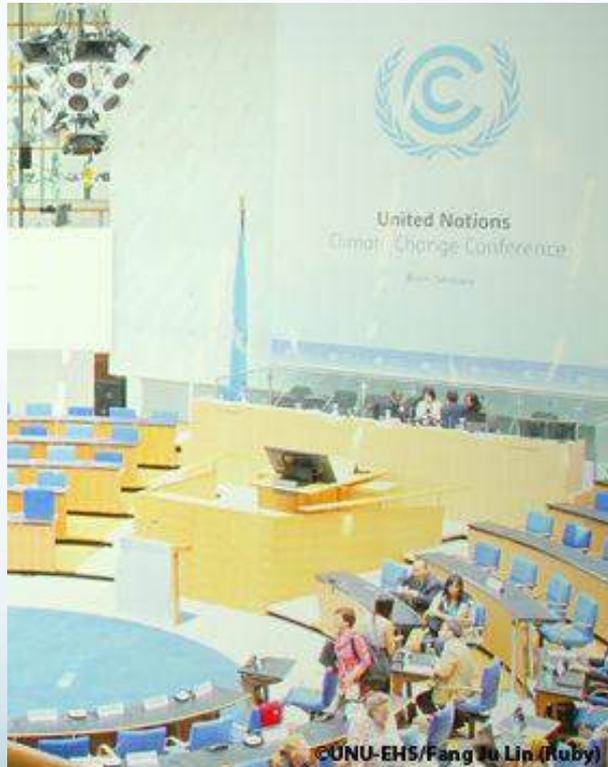


United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change

What is a Conference Of the Parties (COP)

- Parties to the Convention meet every year at COP
- It's the highest decision-making authority of the Convention
- It reviews the implementation of the Convention and examines the commitments of Parties in relation to:
 - The Convention's objective
 - New scientific findings
 - Experience gained in implementing climate change policies
- It reviews national communications and emission inventories submitted by Parties to assess progress made in achieving the Convention's objective

Intersessionals



- Intersessionals are the negotiations that take place during the year prior to the COP, usually at the end of the year. These sessions lay the groundwork for the COPs, negotiating complex details and usually building a draft text for the actual COP.
- Intersessionals take place in Bonn, Germany unless one of the Parties offers to host it. Bonn is the seat of the UNFCCC Secretariat.
- These stages are where drafts of the final document are being negotiated, and the chance to make sure certain policies or measures are included in the text

Who comes to UNFCCC negotiations?

- Governments (the parties)
- UN bodies, agencies and other international governmental organizations e.g. World Bank
- Media
- Observers – civil society, business, faith communities, youth and many more

Party groups

Parties (country delegations) tend to sit in groups in the UNFCCC. These groups could be made up of the parties from the same region or sub-region, or those that hold some of the same priorities. A list of current party groups at the UNFCCC can be found on the [UNFCCC website](#).



Although parties do tend to negotiate in line with their group's positioning, this is informal and they are free to 'break ranks'. The exception to this is the EU, which includes all 28 member states and negotiates as a block.

Party groups

Remember parties can be members of several groups.

- Group of 77 (G-77)
- African States/ African Group
- Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
- Least Developed Countries (LDC)
- European Union
- Umbrella Group
- Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)
- AILAC
- Central Asia, Caucasus, Albania and Moldova (CACAM)
- Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean
- Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

Subsidiary bodies

- The Convention established two permanent subsidiary bodies: the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)
- They give advice to the COP and each has a specific mandate and is composed of experts from party governments

Key issues negotiated at the UNFCCC

Mitigation

- Definition: In the context of climate change, a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. Examples include using fossil fuels more efficiently for industrial processes or electricity generation, switching to solar energy or wind power, improving the insulation of buildings, and expanding forests and other "sinks" to remove greater amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- For more information on mitigation in the UNFCCC, click [here](#).

Adaptation

- Definition: Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.
- For more information on adaptation in the UNFCCC, click [here](#).

Loss and Damage

- Many believe the outcome of the U.N. climate summit (COP21) in Paris cannot be fair and equitable without progress on addressing the loss and damage people are likely to suffer as a result of climate change.
- The concept of loss and damage is increasingly important because we have not mitigated adequately and/ or adapted to climate change in time: whatever we do now, there will still be losses and irreversible impacts.
- Some believe that Loss and Damage should be treated a stand alone issue, whilst others think that this can be encompassed in the negotiations and funding for Adaptation.

Climate Finance

- Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing, which may be drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing. Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because large-scale investments are required to significantly reduce emissions, notably in sectors that emit large quantities of greenhouse gases. Climate finance is equally important for adaptation, for which significant financial resources will be similarly required to allow countries to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of climate change.
- For more information on climate finance in the UNFCCC, click [here](#).

Technology

- Promoting the effective development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies is critical in enabling developing countries to pursue their objectives for sustainable development in a climate-friendly manner. The Convention therefore urges developed country Parties and Annex II Parties to take all practicable steps to promote, facilitate and finance, as appropriate, the transfer of, or access to, environmentally sound technologies and know-how to other Parties, particularly to developing countries, to enable them to implement the provisions of the Convention.
- For more information on Technology in the UNFCCC, click [here](#).

Where are we now? The evolution of the UNFCCC

1992 – Rio Summit

- In 1992 countries created the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit.
- The UNFCCC had a mandate to “stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”.
- Even though this was the most binding form of international law that had existed on climate, it did not go so far as to get quantified commitments from countries.



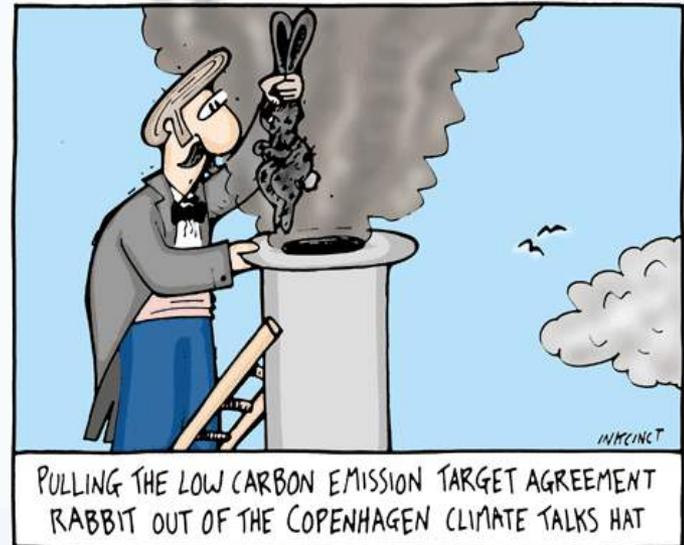
1995 – 1997 Kyoto Protocol

- In 1997 countries came together to sign the Kyoto Protocol, which set out quantified targets for just Annex 1 countries, the developed countries
- It was expected that although developed countries would begin the process of cutting carbon emissions, developing countries would also have to take on commitments in the future.
- Although initially seen as a tremendous victory of diplomacy, the Kyoto Protocol lost some credibility when the US failed to ratify it, resulting in the US becoming an outlier in the negotiations until recently.
- The lack of US ratification was seen by developing countries as symbolic of the inaction of developed countries, and arguably decreased the onus on developing countries to work on setting ambitious targets.



2009 – Copenhagen Accord

- With the Kyoto Protocol set to expire in 2012, the 2009 Copenhagen Summit was tasked with producing a commitment which would involve all countries.
- Rapid growth in developing economies combined with relative stagnation in developed countries due to the economic crisis of 2008 meant the pressure on developing countries to take on commitments was higher than ever before.
- The Copenhagen Summit itself was fraught with difficulties in finding consensus, the issue of Equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibility providing one of the many political sticking points. Additionally, the presence of Heads of States, which civil society originally hoped would allow a more ambitious outcome, meant progress on the complex text was slow.
- In the dying hours a few leaders from key emitting economies agreed on the Copenhagen Accord. However, the Accord was not endorsed by the assembly of negotiators and simply stood as a political agreement of which the COP decided to “take note”.
- **Importantly, the Copenhagen Accord did produce a landmark commitment to limiting a rise of temperature of 2°C above pre-industrial levels.**



2010 – Cancun

- The 2010 COP in Cancun, Mexico, turned out to be the chance for the international community to reach the agreements it had failed to reach at Copenhagen.
- Negotiations at Cancun achieved a detailed set of legal decisions, solidifying the 2°C temperature commitment, providing financial support to countries coping with the impacts and transitioning to the low carbon economy, separate decisions on adaptation, and securing more transparent and accountable reporting of emissions reductions.
- Debate continued over the temperature commitment, with over 100 parties considering keeping temperature increase below 1.5C of warming as a better target to prevent catastrophic climate change.

2011 – The Durban Alliance

- At the Durban COP in 2011 a strategic alliance was formed between the European Union, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to call for a legally binding treaty on all countries to be delivered by 2015.
- The mandate of the ADP is to develop "a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties... in order for it to come into effect and be implemented from 2020".
- They also set up a work stream to look at pre-2020 actions.
- Careful language was crafted to agree that the outcome of 2015 would have 'legal force'.



The lead up to COP21



COP21 • CMP11
PARIS 2015
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

- Climate negotiations since Durban have been carried out along two tracks, one the post 2020 deal (Workstream 1 of the ADP), which must be agreed at COP21, and two, ways to cut carbon emissions in the pre-2020 (Workstream 2 of the ADP).
- The 2015 Paris agreement will be unique because never before have all nations been committed to action under one umbrella agreement.

More Policy Resources

- UNFCCC [Glossary](#)
- The Kyoto Protocol and Finance Mechanisms in [My Little COP Pocket Book \(2012\)](#).
- Mitigation: [A Beginner's Guide to NAMAs \(2015\)](#).
- Climate Governance: IISD (2015, Videos [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)).
- Elements of the Global Climate Treaty: [UKYCC \(2015\)](#).
- Climate Finance, Technology, others: [UKYCC \(2015\)](#).