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THE PARIS AGREEMENT

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What is

The Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international climate change treaty adopted by 196 nations on December 5, 2015, during the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21)¹ of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris France. The agreement became effective and legally binding on November 4, 2016.

It represents a global effort to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and limiting global warming to below 2°C, with an ideal goal of 1.5°C.

World leaders have stressed the significance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C by the end of the century. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has cautioned that exceeding this threshold will result in severe climate change impacts, including heatwaves, droughts, and altered rainfall patterns. To limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must decrease by 43% by 2030.

The Paris Agreement is a significant milestone in the fight against climate change, as it is the first time a binding agreement has united all nations to combat the climate crisis.

¹ Conference of the Parties (COP): COP is the highest decision-making body of the Convention where all Parties review and take necessary actions to promote its effective implementation.





Pre-Paris Climate Efforts

The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 during COP 3. Due to the insistence of the United States, the agreement incorporated a market-based mechanism that allowed developed countries to use various forms of emissions trading to achieve their targets more cost-effectively. However, President Clinton never submitted the protocol to the Senate for ratification, and after his election, President George W. Bush announced that the U.S. would not ratify it. Additionally, several developed countries refused to participate in negotiations for the second round through 2020. Although the Kyoto Protocol is still in effect, its targets now only cover a small fraction of global emissions, and there are no expectations for its continuation in the future.

The Copenhagen Agreement

The Bali Action Plan was launched in 2007, where they aimed at creating a new agreement for the UNFCCC's "full, effective and sustained implementation." The implementation was to be adopted at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Over 100 leaders joined the summit where negotiators couldn't overcome differences. This caused President Barack Obama along with other leaders to step in and hammer out the Copenhagen Accord. A handful of countries objected which didn't allow it to be adopted at the COP.

The Cancun Agreement

The following year, in Cancun, COP 16 was held, where the Parties adopted the Cancun Agreement. This agreement marked a turning point in the international climate negotiations as it rebuilt trust and confidence among countries. It also formalized the essential elements of the Copenhagen Accord under the UNFCCC. The Cancun Agreement laid the foundation for subsequent climate conferences and contributed to the successful adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015.



Key Highlights of the Paris Agreement

At COP 21 in Paris, nations reached an agreement to fight climate change and accelerate the investments needed for a sustainable future. Here are some of the key aspects of the agreement:

Long-Term Temperature Goal

The Paris Agreement's central objective is to hold global warming below 2°C and strive to limit it to 1.5°C. This historic agreement was reached during COP 21 at the UNFCCC in Paris, with the collective effort of the international community.

Mitigation

The Paris Agreement institutes binding commitments by all Parties to contribute, prepare, and maintain the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)². Every 5 years, the Parties must communicate their NDCs and provide transparency and clarity if necessary. To build a better groundwork for higher ambition, every subsequent NDC will represent a step forward from the previous one, demonstrating the utmost level of ambition achievable.

Adaptation

The Paris Agreement aims to strengthen national adaptation efforts, which include support and international cooperation. Adaptation refers to strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change. All Parties must engage in adaptation by formulating and implementing National Adaptation Plans and periodically updating an adaptation communication describing their priorities, needs, and actions.

Loss and Damage

The Paris Agreement acknowledges the significance of reducing loss and damage caused by the adverse impacts of climate change, encompassing extreme weather events and slow-onset events. Moreover, the agreement highlights the role of sustainable development in mitigating the risk of such loss and damage.

² Nationally Determined Contribution: NDCs form the core of the Paris Agreement, representing each country's endeavors to decrease national emissions and address the effects of climate change.



International Collaboration

The Paris Agreement establishes a comprehensive framework that includes provisions for technical, financial, and capacity-building support for countries in need.



Technology

The Paris Agreement aims to enhance climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through technology development and transfer. It sets up a comprehensive framework guiding the Technology Mechanism, fostering cooperation in adopting sustainable technologies to tackle climate change challenges. By utilizing this framework, countries can collaboratively address the urgent issues of climate change by implementing sustainable technologies and promoting global cooperation.

Finance

The Paris Agreement reiterates the leading role of developed countries in providing financial assistance to vulnerable nations. It also encourages voluntary contributions from other Parties. Climate finance is crucial for both mitigation and adaptation efforts, requiring substantial investments to reduce emissions and address the impacts of climate change.

Capacity- Building

The Paris Agreement emphasizes climate-related capacity-building for developing countries, urging developed nations to increase support for these initiatives. This aims to enhance resilience and preparedness in developing countries to tackle climate change impacts.



Monitoring & Assessing Progress

Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF)

Under the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF), countries will report transparently on their climate change mitigation actions, adaptation measures, and the support they provide or receive. This reporting will be subject to international review procedures. The Katowice Rulebook, established during COP 24 in 2018, strengthens the transparency framework by offering comprehensive guidelines and requirements for reporting and reviewing countries' climate actions. These guidelines encompass emissions reporting, mitigation efforts, adaptation measures, and financial support reporting.

Global Stocktake

The Paris Agreement introduced a global stocktaking process that takes place every five years to evaluate the collective progress toward its goals. During this assessment, the combined impact of all countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) is reviewed to determine if they are collectively on track to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, with efforts to further limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Independent Assessments

Independent organizations and research institutions also assess countries' progress in meeting their climate commitments. They analyze data, review policies, and provide assessments on whether countries are on track to achieve their targets.

Initiatives by Non-State Actors

Apart from the NDCs submitted by countries, non-state actors, such as cities, businesses, and civil society organizations, also play a crucial role in climate action. Various global climate action initiatives, such as the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, track and support the efforts of these non-state actors in contributing to the Paris Agreement's goals.



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