

# UN Mechanism to Handle Climate Change and Global Warming

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Climate change and 'global warming' are the defining issues of our times. From shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding, the impact of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Industrialization and diverse human activities contribute to the concentration of green house gases in the atmosphere, leading to a gradual rise in global temperatures. As populations, economies and standards of living grow, so does the cumulative level of green house gases (GHSs) emissions. The concentration of green house gases has been steadily rising and the mean global temperatures along with it, since the time of the industrial revolution.

The most prominent green house gases, accounting for about two-thirds for GHSs is carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>, which is largely produced by burning fossil fuels.<sup>1</sup> Industrialization, and deforestations contribute sufficiently increasing carbon dioxide to a alarming level. According to the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC), global temperatures will rise by about 1.4 and 5.8° centigrade by 2100. Between 1880 and 2012, the average global temperature was increased by 0.85 °C. Oceans have warmed the amount of snow and ice have diminished and the sea level has risen. The Arctic and Antarctic are becoming warmer. Between 1901 and 2010, the global average sea level rose by 19cm as ocean expanded due to warming and melting of ice. The sea ice extent in the Arctic has Shrunken in every successive decade since 1979, with  $1.07 \times 10^6$  km<sup>2</sup> of ice loss per decade.<sup>2</sup> Average sea level rise is predicted to be 24-30 c, by 2065 and 40-63cm by 2100 relative to the reference period of (1986-2005).<sup>3</sup> The brutal effects of climate change will persist for many centuries even if emissions are stopped.

There is sufficient evidence that important tipping points are leading to irreversible changes in major ecosystems and the planetary climate system may already have been reached or passed. Ecosystems as diverse as the amazon rain forest and the Arctic tundra are already in the thresholds of dramatic

change through warming and dying. the retreating mountain glaciers and the down stream effects of waters supply in the driest months will have serious repercussions.<sup>4</sup>

To counter global warming, the 1992 United Nations framework convention on climate change was developed and signed in Rio de Janeiro. Under this convention, developed countries agreed to reduce carbon dioxide and other green house gases they release into the atmosphere to 1990 levels by 2000. These countries which together account for 60 percent of annual carbon dioxide emission, also agreed to transfer to developing countries technologies and information to help them respond to the challenges of climate change. By may 2004, 189 countries had ratified the convention.

United Nations negotiation on climate change are supported by intergovernmental panel on climate change. (IPCC) which was organized jointly in 1988 by UNEP and WMO. The panel, a worldwide network of 2500 scientists and experts, reviews scientific research on the issue. By 2001, with access to new and more powerful computer models, the panel found that there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities. The evidence presented by APCC scientists made it clear that the 1992 target; even if reached on time, world not prevent global warming and its associated problems. Additional reduction of harmful gases would be necessary.<sup>5</sup>

In October 2018 the IPCC issued a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 C, finding that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, and unprecedented changes in all spheres of society. The report found that limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society.<sup>6</sup>

The report also highlights a number climate change impacts that could be avoided by limiting global warming to 1.5°C. For instance by 2100, global sea level rise would be 10 cm lower

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.UN.org>

<sup>2</sup> [www.un.org/m/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/index.html](http://www.un.org/m/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

with global warming of 1.5°C compared with 2°C. The likelihood an arctic ocean free of sea ice in summer would be once per century with global warming of 1.5° c compared with at least once per decade with 2°C. Coral reefs would decline by 70-90 percent with global warming of 1.5°C. Where as virtually all would be lost with 2°C.<sup>7</sup>

The report finds that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require "rapid" and "'far-reaching" transitions in land, energy, industry buildings, transport and cities. Global net human caused emission of CO<sub>2</sub> would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050.<sup>8</sup>

### United Nations Mechanism and Legal Instruments

The United Nations plays the pivotal role to save our planet. In 1992, its "Earth Summit" produced the United Nations Framework convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as a first step in addressing the climate change problem. Today, it has near-universal membership. The 197 countries that have ratified the Convention are Parties to the Convention. The ultimate aim of the convention is to prevent" dangerous human interference with the climate system.<sup>9</sup>

### Kyoto Protocol

In 1995, countries started negotiations to strengthen global response to climate change, and two years later, adopted the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto protocol legally binds developed countries Parties to emission reduction target. The Protocol's first commitment period started in 2008 and ended in 2012. The second commitment period began on 1 January 2013 and will end in 2020. There are now 197 Parties to the Convention and 192 parties to the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>10</sup>

### Paris Agreement

At the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the member countries in Paris in 2015, Parties to the UNFCCC reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. The Paris Agreement is strictly based on the Convention and for the first time brought all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. By doing so, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.<sup>11</sup>

The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise this century well below 2° C above pre-

industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degree Celsius.<sup>12</sup>

On Earth Day, 22 April 2016, 175 world leaders signed the Paris Agreement at United Nations Headquarters in New York. This was by far the largest number of countries ever to sign an international agreement on a single day. There are now 184 countries that have joined the Paris Agreement.<sup>13</sup> It said "urgent, action is required now as any delay in climate action increases the cost of achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement."<sup>14</sup>

### Climate Summit in 2019

In September 2019, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will convene a Climate Summit to bring world leaders of governments, the private sector and civil society together to support the multilateral process and to increase and accelerate climate action and ambition. He has named Luis Alfonso de Alba, a former Mexican diplomat, as his Special Envoy to lead its preparations. The Summit will focus on key sectors where action can make the most difference – heavy industry, nature-based solutions, cities energy, resilience, and climate finance. World leaders will report about their activities and what more they intend to do when they convene in 2020 for the UN climate conference, where commitments will be renewed and new commitments will be made.<sup>15</sup>

The Swedish Academy of Nobel prize is also contributing significantly to supplement the efforts of The United Nations. In 2007, it awarded the "Nobel peace prize jointly to former US vice president Al Gore and the IPCC for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change and to lay the foundations for the measures that needed to counteract such change.<sup>16</sup>

### Sustainable Development Summits

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), also known as the Earth Summit, it was agreed that environmental protection and social and economic development are fundamental to sustainable development, based on the "Rio Principles". To achieve such objective, world leaders adopted a global programme entitled Agenda 21.<sup>17</sup>

In Agenda 21, governments outlined a detailed blueprint for action that could move the world away from its present unsustainable model of economic growth towards activities that will protect and renew the environmental resources which are the basis for growth and development. The blueprint also recommends ways to strengthen the part played by such major

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Times of India, March, 14, 2019

<sup>15</sup> <http://unfccc.int/files/pdf/conveng>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> *Basic facts about the United Nations* (New York, Department of Public Information United Nations, 2004), p. 207

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> <http://unfccc.int/files/pdf/conveng>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

groups as women, trade unions, farmers, children and young people, indigenous peoples, the scientific community, local authorities, business, industry and NGOs, in achieving the goal of sustainable development.

In 1997, the General Assembly held a special session (Earth Summit + 5) on the process of implementation of Agenda 21. Member states grappled with differences among themselves on how to finance sustainable development globally, but emphasized that putting Agenda 21 into practice was more urgent than ever. The session's final document recommended measures to achieve the objective, including: adopting legally binding targets to reduce emission of greenhouse gases leading to climate change; moving more forcefully towards sustainable patterns of energy production, distribution and use; and focusing on poverty eradication as a prerequisite for sustainable development.<sup>18</sup>

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) reviewed progress since the 1992 Earth Summit. Its "Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development" and 54-page "Plan of Implementation" reaffirmed the central importance of sustainable development and paved the way for addressing its most pressing challenges. New Commitments were made on specific time-bound goals, including new targets relating to sanitation, chemical use and production; the maintenance and restoration of fish stock; and reducing the rate of biodiversity loss. The special needs of Africa and the small island developing states were specially addressed, while new issues such as sustainable production and consumption patterns, energy and mining were brought into sharper focus.<sup>19</sup>

#### Action for the environment

The entire United Nations system is engaged in environmental protection in different ways. The leading agency in this area is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). As the environmental conscience of the UN system, UNEP assesses the state of the world's environment and identifies issues requiring international cooperation. It helps formulate international environmental law, and also helps to integrate environmental considerations in the social and economic policies and programmes of the UN system.<sup>20</sup>

UNEP, with its motto of "Environment for Development", helps solve problems that cannot be handled by individual countries. It provides a forum for building consensus and forging international agreements. In doing so, it strives to enhance the participation of business and industry, the scientific and academic communities, NGOs, community groups and others in achieving sustainable development.<sup>21</sup>

One of UNEP's agenda is to promote scientific knowledge and information on the environmental issues. Research and synthesis of environmental information, promoted and coordinated at the regional and global levels by UNEP, has generated numerous reports on the state of the environment. Reports such as the 2002 Global Environment Outlook have created worldwide awareness of emerging environmental problems. Some reports have also triggered international negotiations on environmental conventions.<sup>22</sup>

UNEP acts to protect oceans and seas and promotes judicious use of marine resources under the Regional Seas Programme, which now covers more than 140 countries. This programme works towards the protection of shared marine and water resource through 13 conventions or action plans, the most recent one dealing with the north-east Pacific region. UNEP provides the secretariat cover for regional conventions and action plans. East West and Central Africa, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the East Asian Seas and the North-West Pacific regions are parties to this programme.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*