
FACTSHEET

The Road to COP21

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UNFCCC

In 1992, the First UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro. However, the groundwork for the summit was laid by the Brundtland report in 1987. The Conference negotiated an international environmental treaty that went on to become the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The objective of this convention was to limit climate change and the emission of greenhouse gases to "a level that would prevent anthropogenic interference with the climate system". However, the UNFCCC did not put any in place any limitations on a state-by-state level. The formal annual meetings to the UNFCCC are referred to hereby as a Conference of the Parties (COP).

COP3: Kyoto Protocol

In 1997, the UNFCCC introduced legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gases emissions. This became known as the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol became effective in 2005 and COP18 ensured its continuity up to the new global deal in 2020. The Protocol is constructed of similar but differentiated responsibilities on a state-by-state level. This structure is known as the concept of historical responsibility for climate change. It enforces differentiated obligatory commitments for developed and developing nations based on their historical responsibility. However, the United States of America never ratified the Kyoto Protocol, and Canada withdrew from the protocol in 2012.

COP15: Collapse in Copenhagen

In the 15th Conference of the Parties, the participating parties agreed to limit the average global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial level. However, the Copenhagen Accord failed to reach an agreement on quantitative limitations of greenhouse gases emissions and financial process, mainly because the multilateral process primarily between USA and China failed.

COP21: Paris Outcome

The 21st Conference of the Parties concluded on a historical deal to tackle climate change. Last month in Paris,

parties unanimously agreed "to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels."¹ Nearly 200 nations have finally consented to putting an end to the fossil fuel era, with the USA taking an upfront role in negotiations. This marks the first universal climate agreement that holds governments accountable in cutting greenhouse gases emissions by the second half of the century.

Furthermore, at least \$100bn a year from 2020 will be raised to assist the developing world fight climate change.²

The 31 page-long Paris Agreement also includes the Intended National Determined Contributions, or INDCs. These are pledges from 186 countries to reduce GHG emissions. However, these pledges aren't legally binding. Moreover, these pledges have shown to only limit global warming to around three degree Celsius.³

The Agreement also sets out a five-year review mechanism to deepen emissions with a progressive process that will enable parties to adjust their targets and raise their ambitions over time.



Dr Laylla Rkiouak

Laylla joins the WANA Institute following the completion of her PhD at the University of Cambridge. Her PhD research was part of the stratospheric particle injection for climate engineering in the UK. Laylla also holds a Bachelor of Science in Engineering and a Masters of Science in Chemical Engineering from Belgium. At the WANA Institute Laylla is working within the Green Economy team. Her work encompasses two thematic areas: the elaboration of an ethics-based sustainable development model for the West Asia-North Africa region and the mapping of challenges and opportunities for deep decarbonisation pathways in Jordan.

¹ UNFCCC, "Adoption of the Paris Agreement," <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/109r01.pdf>, December 12, 2015

² UNFCCC, "Adoption of the Paris Agreement."

³ UNFCCC, "New UN Report Synthesizes National Climate Plans"