



PARIS 2015 UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE Towards a Global Agreement on Climate Change

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Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are scheduled to meet in Paris, France, in December 2015, with the goal of reaching a new global climate agreement that will have "legal force" and be "applicable to all" countries.

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The UNFCCC is an international treaty aimed at stabilizing greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." It was opened for signature at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and entered into force March 21, 1994. There are currently 196 Parties to the Convention -- 195 countries and the European Union (EU). Under the treaty, countries have differentiated responsibilities and obligations according to their levels of economic development and are classified accordingly: Annex I, the most developed countries -- including a subset of highly developed countries (Annex II) and countries with economies in transition (EIT) -- and non-Annex I countries.

Conference of the Parties (COP)

The signatories to the UNFCCC, known as *Parties to the Convention*, meet annually in the Conference of the Parties (COP), the supreme decision-making body of the Convention. The COP (1) assesses the impact of the measures taken by the Parties and the progress made in dealing with climate change and (2) adopts decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention. The Paris conference will be the 21st such meeting -- in other words, "COP 21."

The Kyoto Protocol and the Durbin Platform for Enhanced Action

The Kyoto Protocol, adopted at COP 3 in 1997, established legally binding emissions-reduction targets for developed nations. Some 37 industrialized countries and the EU committed to reduce GHG emissions an average of five percent against 1990 levels during a first commitment period from 2008 to 2012. The Doha Amendment (2012) set new targets: emissions-reductions of at least 18 percent below 1990 levels during a second commitment period ending in 2020. (The U.S. is not a Party to the Kyoto Protocol.)

COP 17 in Durbin in 2011 marked a turning point in climate change negotiations. The Parties agreed (1) to launch a process to develop a new protocol with legal force and *applicable to all the Parties* (including developing nations) and (2) to have it ready for adoption at COP 21 in 2015, with implementation to start in 2020.

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)

Whereas a top-down approach was taken with the Kyoto Protocol, which set binding emissions targets for developed countries, the framework for the new protocol to be finalized at COP 21 employs a bottom-up approach. Every country is to determine its own climate commitment (its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution, or INDC), taking into account its own circumstances, priorities, and capacity.

Countries have begun to submit their INDCs in advance of COP 21. The U.S. submitted its INDC in March, formalizing its commitment to cut emissions by 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025, and to make best efforts to reduce by 28 percent. The EU's intended contribution is to reduce its GHG emissions 40 percent compared to 1990 levels by 2030. China is expected to submit its INDC based on its November 2014 pledge to peak its CO₂ emissions "around 2030 and to make best efforts to peak early."

While allowing countries to set their own targets improves the odds that COP 21 will reach agreement on a new protocol, it remains to be seen whether the targets will be sufficiently stringent to put the world on a path to limiting global temperature rise to 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

What Your League Can Do To Promote a Successful Outcome for COP 21

The September 2014 People's Climate March showed that there is strong public support for effective climate action. According to peoplesclimate.org, there were 400,000 participants in New York City and another 2,646 events in 162 countries. Nonetheless, we now need to work to ensure that the U.S. Congress ratifies the new protocol that emerges from COP 21.

Here are some suggested League actions --

- (1) to build understanding of the importance of the climate negotiations at COP 21 and
- (2) to ensure implementation of the Clean Power Plan, which will be an essential part of the action needed to achieve the emissions reductions pledged in the U.S. INDC.
 - Write an article for your local Voter and your local newspaper.
 - Hold an informational meeting for members, with ideas for member action.
 - Join with other groups to sponsor an informational public meeting.
 - Meet with the local editorial board to solicit an endorsement of COP 21 results.
 - State Leagues: Coordinate a meeting with your U.S. Senators to urge support for the COP 21 results.
 - Encourage members to take action to reduce their own carbon footprints and link their efforts to COP 21. One example: Interfaith Power and Light is inviting individuals and congregations to take the Paris Pledge to reduce their carbon pollution by 50 percent by 2030, with the goal of being carbon neutral by 2050. [Information at www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/2014/10/take-the-paris-pledge/]

For more information about COP 21 and about the Clean Power Plan --

- United Nations: http://unfccc.int/essential_background/convention/items/6036.php
- Center for Climate and Energy Solutions: www.c2es.org/international/2015-agreement
- Clean Power Plan fact sheet: [salsa.wiredforchange.com/o/5950/c/9217/images/EPA Clean Power Plan - LWV Fact Sheet.pdf](http://salsa.wiredforchange.com/o/5950/c/9217/images/EPA_Clean_Power_Plan_-_LWV_Fact_Sheet.pdf)