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Parliamentary Briefing

THE UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP) 21 IN PARIS

24 July 2015

WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC) ABOUT?

The “ultimate objective of the Convention” is in its Article 2:

*The ultimate objective of this Convention and any related legal instruments that the Conference of the Parties may adopt is to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, **stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.** Such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.*

In 2010, at COP 16 in Cancun, governments effectively interpreted Article 2 as agreeing that emissions need to be reduced so that global temperature increases are limited to below 2 °C. However for many vulnerable countries, in particular low-lying island nations, this level of temperature rise poses grave risks. The COP is supposed also to look at *strengthening the long-term global goal on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge, including in relation to a global average temperature rise of 1.5 °C.*

There are 195 Parties to the Convention and 192 Parties to its Kyoto Protocol.

The COP meets annually in November/December; **COP 21** in Paris will be the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC. The COP Presidency and hence the venue rotates among the five UN regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe and Others). The President of the COP is usually the Environment or Climate Minister – however at COP15 in Copenhagen, as world leaders were present, the Danish Prime Minister took the role. In Paris the COP President will be the **French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius**. Until then Peru remains as the Presidency, with **Peruvian Environment Minister Manuel Pulgar-Vidal** serving as the COP President.



President: His Royal Highness,
The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB, OM
Chair: Sir Andrew Cahn KCMG
Chief Executive: David Nussbaum

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At the same time there will be four other groups meeting in Paris:

- The most important will be the **ADP** or Ad Hoc Working Group on the **Durban Platform for Enhanced Action**. The ADP is where the negotiation of the Paris deal has been taking place over the last four years – its mandate is to *develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties, and to do this no later than 2015 in order for it to be adopted at COP21 and for it to come into effect and be implemented from 2020*. Alongside this the ADP has a work plan on enhancing mitigation ambition to identify and to explore options for a range of actions that can **close the ambition gap** with a view to ensuring the highest possible mitigation efforts by all Parties. The 2015 agreement negotiations take place in “workstream 1” and the pre-2020 ambition negotiations in “workstream 2”. Ad hoc working groups are set up for a particular piece of work and dissolve once the mandate has been fulfilled – hence the ADP will end in Paris.
- **CMP 11** is the 11th Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol; it meets annually alongside the COP. The CMP reviews the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and takes decisions to promote its effective implementation.
- There are two permanent subsidiary bodies (SBs) to the Convention. The Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (**SBSTA 43**) supports the work of the COP and the CMP through the provision of timely information and advice on scientific and technological matters as they relate to the Convention or its Kyoto Protocol. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (**SBI 43**) supports the work of the COP and the CMP through the assessment and review of the effective implementation of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol. The SBI also advises the COP on budgetary and administrative matters. The SBs meet in parallel every six months; around June in Bonn (seat of the UNFCCC secretariat) and then in conjunction with the COP at the end of the year.

A short background to the UNFCCC can be found [here](#).

This <http://www.theroadthroughparis.org/> clearly shows important meeting and events on the calendar to COP21 in Paris and beyond.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES FROM PARIS

1. The table below simplifies WWF’s Paris scenarios – at the moment we it looks like we will get the “limited progress” outcome.

Outcome	Post-Paris activities / policy implications
Strong – Implementation of pre-2020 initiatives and announcements about enhanced actions or over-achievement of existing targets. Strong review and negotiation process for future commitments (in 5-year cycles). A set of rules that allow for transparency and comparability. Adaptation and loss and damage captured in the new agreement. A clear roadmap for	Hold countries to account; push government to honour commitments (in the UK strong carbon budgets and increased International Climate Fund finance commitments). Work to improve ambition on the ratchet-up mechanism on future commitments so they are more consistent with a <1.5/2°C temperature rise trajectory.

resourcing in the post-2020 period.	
Limited progress – Improved technical process for pre-2020 but no concrete initiatives launched or implemented. Hooks for ratcheting-up post-2020 but needing to be fleshed out later. Process for future commitments in agreement but no numbers in Paris. A call for future work on loss and damage.	That countries are coming forward with Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) indicates an appetite for a deal containing (mitigation) numbers. Many of these could be conditional – i.e. indicating more ambition in light of concerted global action or with additional financial support. As above we should work to improve ambition on the ratchet-up mechanism on future commitments so they are more consistent with a <1.5/2°C trajectory.
Weak – mainly just a political statement similar to that from the UN Secretary-General Summit Sept 2014; might contain a long-term goal with no trajectory or near-term goals and would signal a permanent bottom-up regime for mitigation and finance.	The science-based, top-down, divide-up-the-pie of emissions cuts (and finance) has proven not to be politically feasible. Countries do not agree on which basis (e.g. equity, historical responsibility, cost-effective etc.) to calculate what their pledge must be. If this is the limit we must encourage countries to use the science when developing pledges (so a top-down envelope around their bottom-up contribution).
Collapse of talks	Unlikely given the current momentum. French Presidency likely to push for a weak deal rather than none at all. If so we'd need to regroup and push again in 2016.

MOMENTUM IS BUILDING

2. Several events in June point to momentum building towards the Paris COP:

- With China and three other countries submitting their **post-2020 pledge** (INDC) on 30 June there are now pledges covering **over half of global greenhouse gas emissions**.
- At their summit on 29 June the EU and China agreed a **joint statement on climate change**.
- The **Papal Encyclical 'Laudato Si'** published on 18 June encouraged the world's 1.2 billion Catholics to take better care of our planet.
- On 17 June the Climate Coalition **For the Love of** campaign saw nine thousand people come together in Westminster, and **lobby** over 300 MPs, asking them to take action on climate change.
- The **UNFCCC negotiating session** in Bonn ended on 11 June with an 85 page "**streamlined and consolidated text**" with all issues / concepts still on the table and clearer options. The Co-chairs have a mandate to produce a more manageable (**non-paper**) by 24 July.
- On 10 June the Financial Times ran a **letter from 80 businesses** calling on the Prime Minister to act on climate change including pushing for a global 2°C deal in Paris; pass a strong fifth carbon budget; and strengthen the UK's low carbon economy.

- **G7** leaders agreed on a historic set of [climate-related decisions and targets](#) on 8 June – including a decarbonisation of the global economy over the course of the century, a global emissions reduction target of 40 to 70% by 2050 and the transformation of the energy sectors of G7 countries by 2050. G7 leaders also pledge to provide insurance and protection to the poorest and most vulnerable from the impacts of climate change, and to accelerate renewable energy access in Africa.
- On 5 June Norway’s \$890 billion government pension fund decided to **divest** its investments related to coal ([\\$10 billion worth](#)), making it the biggest institution yet to join a growing international movement to abandon at least some fossil fuel stocks.
- On 3 June **IKEA** [announced](#) it will spend €500m on wind power and €100m on solar energy over the next five years and its charitable arm will devote a further €400m helping poor countries likely to be worst hit by climate change.
- On 1 June **Europe’s largest oil and gas companies** [joined together](#) to call for governments to agree to carbon pricing at COP21.

Note that some businesses are not behind the climate change agenda (e.g. Shell drilling in the Arctic, varying responses to the push for fossil fuel divestment etc). This is an important trend to watch.

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