

Towards a new international climate agreement

A new international agreement to combat climate change is due to be adopted in December 2015 at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The 20th Conference of Parties, which was held in Lima last month, made some progress, but a number of open issues must still be resolved by the negotiators.

Background

Current climate agreements commit only developed countries to taking climate action, but not developing countries some of which have become major emitters of greenhouse gases. After the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009 failed to adopt a new agreement, the 2011 Durban conference decided that a new agreement applicable to all countries should be concluded in 2015, and enter into force in 2020.

Outcomes of climate change conference in Lima, December 2014

COP 20 in Lima concluded with the adoption of the [Lima call for climate action](#), a document that invites all Parties (countries) to communicate their intended contributions to post-2020 climate action well before the Paris conference. Countries have a lot of freedom on what information to include in their communications, and when to submit them. A negotiating text for the Paris agreement should be made available by May 2015. Besides actions to stop global warming, it should also cover adaptation to climate change.

An annex to the Lima call contains elements of a draft negotiating text for the Paris agreement. The annex is a menu of options reflecting the divergent negotiating positions of the various countries and country groups.

Issues to be resolved for the Paris agreement

The Lima conference left a number of important issues unresolved. First of all, the nature of countries' contributions is not clearly specified, which will make them hard to compare and assess. Given that countries' intended contributions will not be formally assessed or revised before the Paris conference, it is likely that they will not add up to the emissions reductions required to keep global warming below the internationally agreed limit of 2°C. A process for the periodic assessment and strengthening of national efforts will therefore have to be an important element of the new agreement. Processes for monitoring, reporting and verification of national contributions will also have to be agreed.

Another unresolved issue is the legal form of the agreement. While some negotiators favour a strong, legally binding agreement, others prefer a bottom-up approach based on voluntary contributions.

Finally, issues of fairness and equity need to be addressed, acknowledging that developed countries have a greater historical responsibility for climate change and stronger capacity for taking action. They can therefore be expected to make larger contributions to emissions reductions as well as climate finance for developing countries, but the size and extent of these contributions is disputed.

EU position

The October 2014 European Council meeting agreed on a greenhouse-gas reduction target of at least 40% by 2030. In November, the US and China – the world's major emitters – announced targets that are less ambitious, but considered as important building blocks to a climate agreement with global reach.

Both the [Council conclusions](#) adopted in advance of the Lima conference and the EP's [resolution of 26 November 2014](#) called for upfront information requirements for intended national contributions, as well as an assessment before the Paris conference of the contributions communicated. However, the Lima conference could not agree on these proposals. The EP resolution stressed the importance of energy savings, energy efficiency and sustainable breakthrough technologies. It called for the climate negotiations to be linked with the post-2015 development agenda.