



Warsaw Climate Talks End with Foundation for a Global Agreement

By Rebecca Lefton, Gwynne Taraska, and Jenny Cooper,
with Ben Bovarnick December 4, 2013

After two weeks of negotiations, replete with dramatic high-level huddles and multiple all-night sessions, the U.N. climate talks ended with a modest set of decisions to keep countries on the path toward an international climate agreement by 2015.

Delegates from nearly 200 countries convened in Warsaw, Poland, for the annual Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC, to craft an effective global strategy to reduce global warming pollution and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

More than 24 hours after the negotiations were scheduled to end, countries reached agreement on the following issues, which collectively signal the continued global commitment to addressing climate change:

- **A pathway to an international agreement.** Such an agreement would address climate mitigation, adaptation, and finance. Countries agreed to introduce their national climate mitigation contributions by early 2015, which would provide time to assess whether their actions are sufficient to address severe climate change. The 2015 U.N. climate agreement would apply to all countries.
- **A call for developed countries to continue mobilizing climate finance “at increasing levels” through 2020.** This funding would build resilience and reduce emissions in developing countries. The decision requests developed countries to submit strategies for scaling up climate finance through 2020, including information on pathways for mobilizing funds commensurate with a \$100 billion annual commitment by 2020. It also says that parties will convene workshops to scale up climate finance that will inform a biennial high-level ministerial dialogue on climate finance—starting in 2014 and ending in 2020.

- **An entity to address loss and damage.** Countries agreed to establish an entity to address the adverse impacts of climate change in developing countries. Its functions include enhancing risk management and financial support.

This issue brief further explains the outcomes of the Warsaw meeting and what work lies ahead for the international community to address global warming.

Advancing a global agreement on climate change

During the 2011 U.N. climate talks in Durban, South Africa, countries decided to create a global climate agreement applicable to all parties by 2015—known as the Durban Platform—with the goal of keeping average global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius, the level scientists say is necessary to avoid the worst impacts of global warming.¹ A main task for the parties in Warsaw was to establish a process and timetable for creating the agreement in order to stay on track for finalizing the agreement by 2015.

There is broad international agreement for nationally determined mitigation targets, as well as a period of consultation and review among parties to measure the collective level of ambition—the sum of all countries’ greenhouse gas emissions targets—against the 2 degree target. Todd Stern, the U.S. special envoy on climate change, presented the U.S. vision for the 2015 agreement in an October speech, calling for nationally determined commitments to be announced by early 2015, followed by a period of review and consultation.² The European Union similarly proposed a multistage process for commitments to be put forward in the fall of 2014, followed by a period of assessment. The Least Developed Countries Group, comprised of 49 developing countries particularly vulnerable to climate change, urged for the Warsaw meeting to adopt “a clear roadmap for negotiating the planning, scope, structure and design of the new 2015 agreement” and for a draft agreement by 2014, followed by consultations ahead of adoption in 2015.³

In the time leading up to the talks and throughout the two-week-long negotiations, some developing countries pushed back on taking on commitments and establishing a timeline or process for the 2015 agreement. Parties’ entrenched positions on how responsibility should be allocated between developed and developing countries based on historical emissions underlay their positions. During the talks, the Like-Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change, or LMDC, group argued that developed countries would need to specify their emissions-reductions commitments before developing countries presented their own.⁴

The bulk of the projected increase in greenhouse gas emissions will be from developing countries, particularly major emerging economies such as China and India. Therefore, broad participation in a new agreement is necessary to keep global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius.

On Friday, November 22, the final night of the conference, negotiators worked and reworked the central paragraphs of the negotiating text outlining the process by which countries are to introduce their emissions-reduction contributions. For more than an hour just before midnight, there was a high-level ministerial huddle in which negotiators hashed out language for a process and timetable for the 2015 agreement.

Ultimately, by early Saturday evening, parties adopted the decision titled “Further advancing the Durban Platform” that sets parties on a path toward a 2015 agreement.⁵ They agreed on a deadline for countries to report their intended emissions reductions by early 2015, allowing for time to review to determine whether the collective action would be enough to set the world on a path that avoids catastrophic warming. They also reaffirmed that the text of the 2015 agreement will be applicable to all countries—an important move away from a bifurcated agreement that calls on developed countries to reduce emissions before developing countries.

International climate finance

In 2009, developed countries committed to annually mobilizing \$100 billion from public and private sources for climate mitigation and adaptation by 2020. Countries also agreed to the creation of the Green Climate Fund, or GCF, which would provide a significant portion of the \$100 billion commitment.⁶

During the Warsaw climate summit this year, developing countries called for a roadmap for reaching the promised \$100 billion. They also called for an interim pledge in the years leading up to 2020, and for money to fill the GCF. The United States and other developed countries, however, were reluctant to commit to a finance roadmap—particularly when major developing countries were walking back on their responsibilities to tackle emissions in the context of the Durban Platform.

Finance negotiations went through the night and past 5:00 a.m. for several nights until a compromise was reached. The long-term finance decision aims to provide certainty around the finance commitments by calling on developed countries to submit strategies for scaling up climate finance through 2020, including information on pathways for mobilizing funds. Workshops will focus on scaling up finance, and these will inform biennial high-level ministerials starting next year through 2020. No concrete interim targets, however, were included in the decision. The GCF should be operational in time for donations beginning next year; the GCF decision calls on developed countries to provide “ambitious and timely contributions” to the GCF before the next round of high-level talks in Lima, Peru, in December 2014.⁷

In the meantime, the United States and other donor countries will continue to focus on using public resources to leverage larger private flows. New initiatives on mobilizing finance are underway that work through development finance institutions, export credit agencies, and multilateral development banks to generate private investment and scale up climate finance.⁸

Private sources and public-private partnerships will play a significant role in the future mobilization of finance commitments as governments face budget shortfalls, and they could provide a significant portion of climate finance in a ramp-up period to 2020. A 2010 report by the Center for American Progress and the Alliance for Climate Protection specifies the increases in public and private investment that would be necessary during a ramp-up period in order to meet the commitment to raise \$100 billion annually by 2020—most of which would come from private sources.⁹

Loss and damage

Typhoon Haiyan devastated the central Philippines and killed thousands of people just before the Warsaw climate talks began. The issue of loss and damage therefore became a focal point during the talks. “Loss and damage” refers to permanent loss or repairable damage caused by severe weather events or slow-onset events such as temperature rise or sea-level rise. The inhabitants of low-lying islands, for example, are confronting the eventual loss of their nations and cultures.

During last year’s climate talks in Doha, parties agreed to establish “institutional arrangements, such as an international mechanism” to address loss and damage in vulnerable countries in Warsaw this year.¹⁰

Two questions about the prospective mechanism caused controversy. The first was whether it should be an independent entity within the UNFCCC, which contains two central pillars of mitigation and adaptation. Negotiators from low-lying islands and other developing countries argued that the recent spate of devastating loss and damage marks a new era of climate change and calls for the construction of a third pillar.

Developed countries such as Norway and the United States, however, supported the creation of a mechanism but opposed the creation of a third pillar. They held that the mechanism should fall under the adaptation framework, on the grounds that addressing loss and damage without an eye on adaptation would only invite further loss and damage.¹¹

The second question was whether the loss and damage entity should include a mechanism for developed countries to provide compensation for the harm caused by their historical emissions. There is a moral argument to be made for compensation, but the idea is currently divisive and politically unviable within the UNFCCC. All parties, however,

have long been in agreement that finance from developed countries—construed without moral baggage—is necessary to address the problem. In the final days of the talks, no negotiators discussed compensation. Instead, they discussed whether the mechanism should be an independent entity.

The draft decision established an entity called the “Warsaw Mechanism,” which would fall under the adaptation framework. However, in a concession to low-lying island nations, the draft decision included a provision to reassess the mechanism after three years. It also established that the mechanism’s functions would include enhancing knowledge of risk management and enhancing financial and technical support.¹²

In the last several hours of the talks, negotiators for low-lying island nations and many developing countries vigorously opposed the word “under” in the first paragraph of the decision, which stated that the mechanism would fall under the adaptation framework.¹³

In the end, the draft decision was adopted with modifications, including the addition of a preamble to recognize that there are instances of loss and damage that overwhelm adaptation measures. The first paragraph was also amended to state not simply that the mechanism falls under the adaptation framework, but that it does so subject to the reassessment mentioned later in the document.

The negotiator from the Philippines said before the adoption of the text that he understands the reassessment to include a review of where the Warsaw Mechanism sits within the UNFCCC.

REDD+ developments at Warsaw

A positive development from the talks was progress on the U.N. program called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, or REDD+, to address deforestation. Steps to combat deforestation are important, since the loss of forests represents approximately 20 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁴ The United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway announced renewed commitments to finance REDD+, totaling more than \$280 million.¹⁵ Negotiators also defined new rules for distributing finance through the Green Climate Fund to developing countries, and agreed to rules for measuring and verifying deforestation emissions through a new REDD+ information hub.

Closing the ambition gap

While NGO and media attention during the two weeks of talks was focused on contentious but important issues around finalizing a 2015 agreement and finance, a critical issue flew under the radar: deficient work on addressing skyrocketing greenhouse gas emissions worldwide before the agreement will take effect in 2020. This is known as the ambition gap.

The latest analysis from the U.N. Environment Programme estimates a gap of 8 gigatons to 12 gigatons of carbon dioxide, equivalent between countries' current climate pollution pledges through 2020 and the emissions reductions scientists say are necessary to keep us on a path to limiting temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius.¹⁶ There was some progress in the talks on closing this gap, but it was not sufficient. "We did more than expected here, but this also doesn't lead us to a pathway of 2 degrees," said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres.¹⁷

Countries that have not made commitments were urged to do so. Parties agreed to identify options to reduce emissions and to "promote voluntary cooperation on concrete actions in relation to identified mitigation opportunities."¹⁸ They also agreed to share best practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the local and subnational level to promote information exchange and cooperation.

This is a positive step, but additional work is required.

Mexico, the European Union, and Norway had pushed for inclusion of international collaborative initiatives that could include, for example, international cooperation to catalyze action to reduce super pollutants.¹⁹ Methane and other super pollutants such as black carbon—soot—and hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, do not last as long in the atmosphere as CO₂ but are much more potent. Methane, for example, traps 34 times as much heat as CO₂ over a 100-year timeframe.²⁰ The final version of the Warsaw text, however, had no mention of international collaborative initiatives.

Todd Stern highlighted such initiatives, including the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, or CCAC, to limit super pollutants among 30 member countries in Warsaw. Such multilateral actions outside the U.N. climate negotiations will continue to represent the best chance to reduce emissions in the near term.

During the second week of the negotiations, Stern announced that the CCAC will launch a partnership with oil and gas companies to reduce the potent greenhouse gas methane. The announcement is important for addressing a huge source of climate change, given that methane emissions account for approximately 15 percent of greenhouse gas emissions globally.²¹ In the United States, oil and gas systems represent the single-largest source of methane emissions; worldwide, they represent the largest source of methane emissions after agriculture.

Shifting party lines

The Warsaw talks provided incremental progress toward the 2015 international climate agreement. Negotiations were tenuous at times, with countries working hard to overcome political hurdles that have historically plagued the U.N. climate talks. Still, the historic fissure between developed and developing countries seemed less deep during the two-week-long negotiations, as developed and developing countries alike found common ground on the importance of seeking an agreement with a clear timeline for introducing targets.

In Warsaw, historically large rifts between developed and developing countries were shifting. A smaller group of developing countries—including China, Brazil, and parties in the LMDC group—were opposing some of the commitments for countries to reduce their emissions because they believe developed countries should put forth their commitments first.²² These countries, however, are becoming increasingly isolated, as broad support for establishing a pathway to the 2015 agreement grows among developed countries and developing countries alike.

LMDCs say that developed countries are responsible for taking on greenhouse gas reductions first because of historical emissions. However, taking global energy-use projections into consideration, other countries recognize that major emerging economies like China, which is now the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world and was the second largest behind the United States for many years prior, and fast-growing emitters like India, must take on targets simultaneously for an effective global response to climate change.²³

The African Group, Latin American Group, and Least Developed Countries group are aligned with the United States, European Union, and other developed countries pushing for a stronger pathway to 2015.

According to Figueres' message to the Conference of the Parties, it is crucial "to maintain to your commitment to the current that is underneath the wave. The current is moving in the right direction."²⁴

While much work remains to be done over the next two years in the run-up to the U.N. climate talks in Paris, the evolving positions of countries and groundswell of support for finalizing an agreement before the talks, provide a promising outlook on progress toward an international agreement in 2015.

An international problem requiring national solutions

As Stern said during the conference, climate change is “first and foremost a quintessentially a global problem,” but “you can’t ever forget that the most important locus of action on climate change is at the national level.”

President Barack Obama’s Climate Action Plan, which expresses the renewed commitment by the United States to address climate change, lent credibility to U.S. negotiators as they argued for domestic action from all parties.²⁵ Stern noted that “the United States was ‘perfectly comfortable’ agreeing to commitments,” which reflected confidence that the United States is prepared to meet its emissions-reduction target.²⁶

President Obama announced the Climate Action Plan on June 25, 2013. It laid out a domestic and international agenda to promote clean energy and climate resilience, while discouraging further investment in fossil fuels. Secretary of State John Kerry delivered a message to countries at the conference on November 18 on the plan, describing the new proposed EPA regulations on carbon emissions from new power plants; developments in transportation efficiencies from higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE, standards; and ongoing work to reduce the use of HFCs, which will all be instrumental in reducing U.S. emissions.²⁷

The State Department has projected that the policies outlined in the plan will reduce U.S. emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020—the level President Obama pledged in Copenhagen, in spite of the failure by Congress to pass substantial climate legislation, as was originally anticipated.²⁸

The United States has taken important first steps to implement the plan, which is essential for the country to meet its international climate goals. Successful development of clear restrictions on power plant emissions and continued efforts by the federal government to curb emissions through support for clean and efficient energy are imperative for the United States to continue to demonstrate leadership in this sphere. The agreement by parties in Warsaw will call on all countries to act in similar fashion and develop their own domestic mitigation plans. As Stern noted, international agreements have the role of driving more attention and more action within national governments.

Conclusion

A foundation for a global climate agreement that is strong as well as broadly inclusive emerged from the Warsaw talks. There was substantial support for finalizing an agreement by 2015 that will include ambitious action on climate from a significant range of developed and developing countries.

However, the actions that will be taken to limit emissions before 2020, when the agreement will take effect, were less clear. The most significant opportunity to reduce emissions in the near term is through a phasedown of HFCs—super pollutants that are hundreds to thousands of times more potent than CO₂—in the Montreal Protocol. A phasedown of HFCs in the Montreal Protocol can avoid 1.9 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent, or GtCO₂e, by 2020, and more than 95 GtCO₂e by mid-century.²⁹

In addition, other existing multilateral bodies can be enhanced to deal with climate change. The Major Economies Forum, or MEF, a group of countries that comprises approximately 80 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, can be scaled up to form binding agreements on energy efficiency and renewable energy. CAP has proposed a 40 percent zero-carbon target for MEF parties by 2035.³⁰

Throughout the negotiations, Stern commented on the cooperative relationship between the United States and China on climate and clean energy. He highlighted agreements between the two countries, most notably a new joint working group on climate change and a presidential agreement in support of a phasedown of HFCs. This relationship between the world's two-largest greenhouse gas emitters will be critical for stopping global climate change in the future. Domestic actions by both countries to reduce emissions are critical for a successful partnership. They are also important for keeping all countries at the negotiating table for an agreement to adequately address global greenhouse gas pollution.

The U.S. position on climate change is stronger than ever, with the president's Climate Action Plan having reinvigorated his commitment to address climate change at home and abroad by strengthening climate diplomacy efforts and helping developing countries build resilience and chart a low-carbon development path. The outcome of the Warsaw climate talks invites all countries to prepare domestic mitigation contributions to be submitted before 2015. It creates a foundation for keeping all countries on the hook for national reduction targets—a necessary step for avoiding dangerous global warming. Historic divisions of responsibilities between developed and developing countries are breaking down. Now, all countries should intensify their efforts domestically to be incorporated in a 2015 international climate change agreement. They too must work bilaterally and multilaterally wherever possible before then to reduce emissions before 2020, to close the emissions gap, and to build clean energy and resilient economies in order to generate security and prosperity for all.

Rebecca Lefton is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for American Progress. Gwynne Taraska is the research director and interim director of the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at George Mason University and a Visiting Researcher at the Center. Jenny Cooper is a graduate student at the University of Michigan Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise. Ben Bovarnick is a Special Assistant at the Center.

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 - 2(b) To invite all Parties to initiate or intensify domestic preparations for their intended nationally determined contributions, without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions, in the context of adopting a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties towards achieving the objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2 and to communicate them well in advance of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (by the first quarter of 2015 by those Parties ready to do so) in a manner that facilitates the clarity, transparency and understanding of the intended contributions, without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions.
 - 2(c) To request the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action to identify, by the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties, the information that Parties will provide when putting forward their contributions, without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions, referred to in paragraph 2(b) above.
 - 2(d) To urge and request developed country Parties, the operating entities of the financial mechanism and any other organizations in a position to do so to provide support for the related activities referred to in paragraphs 2(b) and 2(c) above as early as possible in 2014.
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