
FACT SHEET

United Nations Climate Conference 2009

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1.1 In 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Convention) was adopted as the basis for a global response to the problem of climate change, and 192 countries (Parties) have ratified the Convention. The Convention sets an overall framework for inter-governmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. It recognizes that the climate system is a shared resource, and its stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

1.2 Under the Convention, governments of the Parties:

- (a) gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and best practices;
- (b) launch national strategies addressing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to expected impacts, including the provision of financial and technological support to developing countries; and
- (c) cooperate in preparation for adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

2. Kyoto Protocol

2.1 The Convention is complemented by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which have been accepted by 184 countries. Under the Kyoto Protocol, 37 industrialized countries and the European Community as a whole have committed to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases¹ by an average of 5% by 2012 against the 1990 levels. The Kyoto Protocol allows these countries to meet their emission reduction commitments via the Clean Development Mechanism, a market-based mechanism, permitting industrialized countries to earn emission credits through investment in sustainable development projects that reduce emissions in developing countries.

¹ The Kyoto Protocol applies to the emissions of six greenhouse gases. They are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and three types of industrial gases, namely sulphur hexafluoride, hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons.

3. United Nations Climate Conference

3.1 The United Nations Climate Conference (Conference) comprises the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP) and the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP). COP meets annually to review the implementation of the Convention, and CMP is held at the same time to adopt decisions and resolutions on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

3.2 In 2009, the Conference will be held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December.

4. Participants

4.1 Participation in the 2009 Conference is restricted to duly nominated representatives of the Parties, observer countries, accredited observer organizations² and accredited press/media. Parties to the Convention that are not Parties to the Kyoto Protocol may participate as observers in CMP.

5. Items for discussion

5.1 As the existing Kyoto Protocol will expire in 2012, the formulation of a new agreement is required in order to clarify four issues, namely:

- (a) emission reduction targets for developed countries;
- (b) nationally mitigation actions of developing countries;
- (c) financial and technological support for both adaptation and mitigation; and
- (d) an institutional framework with governance structures addressing the needs of developing countries.

² The Convention allows inter-governmental and civil society organizations duly admitted by COP to observe the meetings.

6. Points of concern

Emission reduction targets

6.1 The Kyoto Protocol places a greater burden on developed countries than on developing countries as it recognizes that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high level of greenhouse gas emissions. This principal is expected to continue applicable to the outcome of the 2009 Conference. In particular, individual developed countries will be required to set up a mid-term emission reduction target at 25% to 40% below the 1990 level by 2020, while developing countries will be given a long-term target to reduce worldwide emissions by at least 50% by 2050.³

6.2 While industrialized countries must accept binding emission reduction targets, developing countries are required to achieve a more lenient target by limiting the growth of their emissions in line with their sustainable development needs, and only when developed countries financially and technologically support them. Hence, a key challenge to the 2009 Conference is to ensure that the outcome of the negotiation is acceptable amongst all Parties.

Effects on climate change

6.3 According to the International Energy Agency⁴, global energy demand will grow 55% by 2030. In the period leading to 2030, the total investment in energy supply infrastructure worldwide is estimated to be US\$22 trillion (HK\$172 trillion), of which half of the investment is in developing countries. Therefore, even when industrialized countries manage to stop greenhouse gas emissions, emissions arising from developing countries make it difficult to sustain an under-two-degrees temperature rise under normal circumstances. As developing countries are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, significant funding is needed for any significant improvement of their situation.

³ The two emission reduction targets are the anticipated outcome of the negotiation at the Conference.

⁴ Established during the Oil Crisis in 1973-1974, the International Energy Agency is an inter-governmental organization acting as an energy policy advisor to 28 member countries to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for their citizens. Its current work focuses on climate change policies, market reform, energy technology collaboration and outreach to major consumers and producers of energy like China, India, Russia and the OPEC countries.

References

1. *COP15*. (2009) Available from: <http://en.cop15.dk/frontpage> [Accessed October 2009].
2. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. (2009) Available from: <http://unfccc.int/2860.php> [Accessed October 2009].
3. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009a) *Fact sheet: 10 frequently asked questions about the Copenhagen deal*. Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4997.php [Accessed October 2009].
4. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009b) *Fact sheet: An introduction to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol*. Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4978.php [Accessed October 2009].
5. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009c) *Fact sheet: Copenhagen – Background information*. Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4975.php [Accessed October 2009].
6. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009d) *Fact sheet: Copenhagen – why is a deal so important?* Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4976.php [Accessed October 2009].
7. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009e) *Fact sheet: UN Climate Change Talks – Bangkok 2009*. Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4990.php [Accessed October 2009].
8. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2009f) *Fact sheet: What is the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP/CMP)?* Available from: http://unfccc.int/press/fact_sheets/items/4980.php [Accessed October 2009].

Research and Library Services Division

30 October 2009

Tel: 2869 9602

Fact sheets are compiled for Members and Committees of the Legislative Council. They are not legal or other professional advice and shall not be relied on as such. Fact sheets are subject to copyright owned by the Legislative Council Commission (the Commission). The Commission permits accurate reproduction of fact sheets for non-commercial use in a manner not adversely affecting the Legislative Council, provided that acknowledgement is made stating the Research and Library Services Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat as the source and one copy of the reproduction is sent to the Legislative Council Library.