



# News Release

## Progress Outweighs Uncertainty in Paris Climate Deal

Saturday, December 12—"A very important new milestone has been reached in the fight against climate change. The [agreement reached in Paris this Saturday](#), after two weeks of talks under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is a strong deal that should be welcomed as an impetus to do even more. Our challenge is to keep up the momentum!" says Carol Werner, the [Environmental and Energy Study Institute's](#) Executive Director.

- **The agreement sets an ambitious goal of keeping warming significantly below 2° Celsius (3.6°F).**  
Until now, the global community had agreed to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit), in line with the scientific consensus that any warming above that level could lead to catastrophic consequences. But small island nations, which face an existential threat from rising seas, insisted on a more ambitious target of 1.5°C. A compromise was reached, with the global community agreeing to keep warming significantly below 2°C and to pursue "efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C." The goal is to achieve carbon neutrality (a "balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases") in the second half of this century.
- **Countries will submit more ambitious climate plans every 5 years.**  
The agreement specifies that "each Party shall communicate a nationally determined contribution [climate action plan] every five years" and that each "successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression." As U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry aptly put it, "We didn't come to Paris to build a ceiling. We came to build a floor." A mandatory review process makes it much more likely nations will ratchet up their carbon-cutting goals, as clean energy technologies become cheaper, more effective, and are deployed more rapidly and broadly. As more and more countries see the benefits of a clean energy economy, larger commitments are likely to be made.
- **The agreement includes a system to keep nations accountable.**  
Each signatory nation has pledged to reduce its carbon emissions, but such pledges need verification if they are to be meaningful. The deal specifies that when accounting for their climate actions, "Parties shall promote environmental integrity, transparency, accuracy, completeness, comparability and consistency" by adopting specific guidelines. The agreement also includes a schedule for countries to meet for stock-taking meetings in which they will have to report on their progress.
- **Almost every country has submitted a written pledge to cut its carbon emissions.**  
It could be said the Paris climate negotiations were a success before they even started. A total of [185 countries, representing 97 percent of the world's population and 94 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions](#), submitted climate action plans (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) to the United Nations before the climate talks began. For the first time, a climate deal requires action from both developed and developing countries, though it specifies that "Developed country Parties shall continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets."

- **Businesses are on board.**

A total of [2,025 companies](#) have publicly pledged to cut their carbon emissions. In the United States, 154 companies (employing nearly 11 million people and with a combined market capitalization of over \$7 trillion) have signed the American Business Act on Climate Pledge, in which they commit to take significant climate actions. The fossil fuel divestment movement has reached a critical mass: more than [500 institutions with more than \\$3.4 trillion in assets](#) have pledged to divest from fossil fuels. And 28 of the world's wealthiest investors have pledged to invest [a combined \\$2 billion](#) over the next five years (including \$1 billion from Microsoft founder Bill Gates alone) in clean energy research and development.

"Perhaps nothing has made more of a difference than the shift in business community attitudes towards the climate effort," says Jared Blum, EESI's Board Chair, who has long followed climate negotiations.

The good news is that cutting greenhouse gas emissions and boosting the economy are not at odds. [Just published research](#) suggests that in 2015, for the first time ever, global carbon emissions declined even though the global economy grew.

But some uncertainty remains:

- **The climate action pledges are not binding.**

Though parts of the Paris agreement are binding, the national climate action pledges themselves are not. The U.S. delegation could not accept binding emission reduction targets as these would have required Senate ratification, which would probably not have been forthcoming. This, unfortunately, allows nations a lot of wiggle room. It is to be hoped that peer pressure will be enough to keep nations in line so that their pledges lead to results.

- **The pledges will not keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6°F), let alone 1.5°C (2.7°F).**

According to an [analysis by the Climate Action Tracker](#), if nations follow through on their unconditional pledges, global warming should remain below 3 degrees Celsius. That is a far cry from 2 degrees, and could lead to catastrophic impacts. That is why it is critical that the Paris agreement be taken as a starting point, with nations gradually ratcheting up their goals.

- **Developing countries will receive more financial support... but only in 2025.**

One of the key points of disagreement during the negotiations was whether developed countries would be required to provide financial support to developing countries to help them cut their carbon emissions. The global community had previously agreed that rich countries would contribute \$100 billion a year for climate action in poorer ones. The Paris deal commits countries to set a new, higher funding level in 2025.

Perhaps the biggest remaining uncertainty is that though this climate deal has been unanimously adopted by the delegations in Paris, it must still be ratified or approved by at least 55 countries, accounting for at least 55 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, before it comes into force.

"Undoubtedly, tensions will be apparent as countries begin implementing their pledges—that is when limited resources will force choices," says EESI Executive Director Carol Werner. "There was a lot of goodwill around the climate negotiations in Paris, and a lot of momentum. None of the main players wanted to see a repeat of the disappointing Copenhagen talks. But now that the deal is done, the momentum must not be squandered. A deal is only as good as its implementation."

[View the Paris climate agreement](#)

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