



Fact sheet:

The UN & COP

The terms defined

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Conference of the Parties (COP)

Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Background

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty adopted in 1992, now with 192 countries signatory. The objective of the Convention is to stabilise greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations to avoid “dangerous anthropogenic interference with Earth’s climate system.” Issues dealt with by the UNFCCC include GHG emissions, national policies and financial support for adaptation in developing countries.

The UNFCCC is also the name of the UN Secretariat supporting the operation of the Convention and is based in Bonn, Germany. The Secretariat works in parallel with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC consists of international scientists and publishes ‘assessment’ reports on the physical science of climate change, the impacts, and options for adaptation and mitigation. It bases its assessments on peer reviewed and published scientific literature.

In 2007, the IPCC released their Fourth Assessment Report. It states that “warming of the climate system is unequivocal” and recommends that developed countries cut emissions by between 25-40% by 2020.

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 under the UNFCCC and

currently has 184 member parties. The Protocol sets mandatory emission limits for 37 industrialised (Annex 1) countries to collectively reduce GHG emissions by 5% against 1990 levels, between 2008-2012. The protocol was limited to industrialised countries due to historical emissions and the recognition of “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

The 5% Kyoto target is to be reached through national measures, Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI).

The UNFCCC is currently trying to agree on a new international commitment post-Kyoto through its annual Conference of the Parties (COP). These meetings began in 1995 to assess progress in dealing with climate change. Since 2005, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) has met.

The issue

There has been little agreement on a post-Kyoto framework. There are a number of issues including whether it is a legally binding agreement, emissions reduction targets, financing and areas such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), with the negotiating blocks having differing opinions.



Fact sheet:

The UN & COP

The terms defined

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Conference of the Parties (COP)

Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The goal for COP15, held in Copenhagen in December 2009, was to finalise this post-Kyoto climate change agreement. Despite unprecedented participation, no agreement was reached other than the Copenhagen Accord led by President Obama with the main parties. However the Accord did not achieve consensus and is not legally binding.

The Accord states that temperature rise would be limited to 2 degrees Celsius and that US\$30 billion would be provided to developing states for adaptation in 2010-2012, with \$100 billion per year by 2020.

However, there has been little new funding come forward and little agreement about how to achieve the 2 degree limit. Countries current commitments are estimated to result in a higher than 3 degree temperature rise. Even 2 degrees would dramatically affect the pacific and Tuvalu did not support the Accord for this reason. However, Pacific Island countries have limited representation and little power at these international conferences.

The solution

Project Survival Pacific (PSP) began at COP14 in Poznan where it was clear that there were few young people present to speak on behalf of the most vulnerable nations. PSP sent a team of young Australians and Pacific Islanders to COP15 to ensure that the pacific voice was heard. This culminated in a speech given by Christina Ora to the UNFCCC opening plenary.

Although PSP is not a solution to the highly political UN environment, it does serve as a reminder to delegates that it is people's lives that they are negotiating. The pacific is already feeling the affects of climate change and pacific youth are the ones that have the most to lose.

Next steps

PSP will also be sending a delegation to COP16/CMP6 in Cancun, Mexico in the hope of a more successful resolution.

Further reading

<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

<http://www.ipcc.ch/index.htm>