

# A Brief History of International Agreements to Combat Climate Change: From Kyoto to Paris via Copenhagen

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## Note:

All the three agreements operate within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and are based on the ***principle of common but differentiated responsibilities***.

## Kyoto Protocol

An international agreement within the UNFCCC, the **Kyoto Protocol** set up binding targets on signatory nations for cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of [5 percent](#) over 1990 levels by 2012.

The protocol was based on the principle of ***common but differentiated responsibilities*** i.e. developed countries had greater responsibility for combating climate change as compared to developing countries.

This is because developed countries had achieved progress through more than a century of industrial activity that inherently involves GHG emissions. As such, the protocol [applied](#) only to industrialized countries.

Cutting GHG emissions will restrict the average global temperature rise to less than 2°C above pre-industrial level average temperatures. This will prevent the consequences of runaway global warming such as floods, sea level rise, droughts, and epidemics.

The Kyoto Protocol identified [six GHGs](#):

- **Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)**
- **Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>)**
- **Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O)**
- **Hydro-fluoro-carbons (HFCs)**
- **Per-fluoro-carbons (PFCs)**
- **Sulphur hexafluoride (SF<sub>6</sub>)**

Adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997, the protocol went operational on 16 February 2005. The Marrakesh Accord of 2001 laid down the detailed rules for its implementation.

Starting in 2008, its first commitment period ended in 2012 and saw 37 industrialized countries agree to cut emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels. The second commitment period extended from 2013 to 2020 and asked for slashing GHG emissions by [18 percent](#) below 1990 levels.

Three mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol provided a financial incentive to slash emissions. Different units were used to calculate the amount of reduction. These mechanisms were:

- **International Emissions Trading:** allowed signatory countries that emitted less than their emission caps to [sell](#) the balance to countries that exceeded their emission caps
- **Clean Development Mechanism (CDM):** enabled signatory parties to [earn](#) saleable carbon credits by executing a emission-reducing project in developing countries
- **Joint Implementation (JI):** if a signatory country jointly implemented a emission-reducing or emission-limiting project with another country, the former's share in the amount of reduced emission was [counted](#) as the former's contribution to emission reduction

## Copenhagen Accord

As many as [114](#) parties finally signed the [Copenhagen Accord](#). This was a non-binding successor-agreement to the Kyoto Protocol signed at a conference held at Copenhagen, Denmark on 7-9 December, 2009.

This was the first time that any international agreement for combating climate change called for specific emission reduction targets even from China and other significant developing countries.

Being a **political and not legal agreement**, the accord is [not binding](#). Global leaders [agreed](#) on:

- Limiting global temperature rise to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels and, if possible, to 1.5°C
- Establishing processes for specific reduction targets by January 2010:
- A framework for national-international monitoring of emission reduction

- A collective commitment of \$30 billion in *new and additional resources* in 2010-2012 by developed countries to help developing countries cut emissions, adapt to climate change, and preserve forests
- Target of raising [\\$100 billion](#) a year in public and private finance by 2020 to fulfil the needs of developing countries
- Establishment of:
  - Copenhagen Green Climate Fund for delivering finance
  - High Level Panel to explore methods to attain the 2020 finance target
  - New Technology Mechanism to fast track the development and transfer of technology for mitigating climate change and adapting to it
  - Mechanism for Limiting Deforestation

## Paris Agreement

From 2020, the Paris Agreement will address all issues for mitigation and adaptation to the effects of GHG emissions including finance, technology transfer, and monitoring mechanisms.

It was signed in Paris, France on 12 December, 2015 and went operational on 4 November, 2016. As of June 2017, 195 members of the UNFCCC have signed it and 148 have ratified it.

The agreement is not binding but does include a review process aimed at putting pressure on signatory parties to cut GHG emissions. It also looks to accelerate all the processes required to counter climate change.

Specifically, the agreement [calls](#) for:

- Restricting global temperature rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels while expanding efforts to limit this temperature rise to 1.5°C  
This will require the world to cut GHG emissions by [40-70 percent](#) by 2050 and achieve carbon-neutrality by 2100
- Greater Transparency, Accountability, and Speed in all measures and mechanisms aimed at fighting climate change
- Establishment and Communication of targets called nationally determined contribution (NDC). These will be renewed every five years and each NDC will be an improvement over the preceding one
- Conserve and Upgrade GHG Absorbers such as forests
- Greater Adaptation to the Effects of GHG Emissions through international cooperation

- Financial Aid, Technology Transfer, and Capacity Building Measures as support by developed nations to developing countries
  - Improved Support for countries vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change
  - Better Awareness about Climate Change through education, public participation, and improved public access to information
  - Global Stocktake every five years starting with 2023 to examine progress on climate change
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