

A Copenhagen Agreement

The UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen presents a critical opportunity to strengthen the international response to global climate change. The aim in Copenhagen should be a comprehensive political agreement that puts countries on a clear path to concluding a legally binding agreement in 2010. This interim agreement should deliver both immediate action and the broad architecture of a future treaty, including:

- Ambitious political commitments for mid-term action by all major economies: economy-wide emission reduction targets for developed countries, and quantified mitigation actions by major developing countries;
- A “prompt start” on adaptation, forestry, technology and capacity-building activities and support in developing countries;
- The core elements of a legally binding agreement to be finalized over the coming year, including: a framework for verifiable mitigation commitments by all major economies; new arrangements for sustained mitigation and adaptation support to developing countries; and a system to verify countries’ actions and support; and
- A clear mandate to conclude negotiations on a legally binding agreement at COP 16 in December 2010.

The Ultimate Goal: A Ratifiable Treaty

Negotiations are proceeding on parallel tracks under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which includes the United States, and under the UNFCCC’s Kyoto Protocol, which does not. The ultimate outcome could take many forms; the most coherent would be a single comprehensive agreement under the UNFCCC.

Whatever its particular form, it is important that this final outcome be legally binding. Countries will deliver their strongest possible efforts only if they are confident that their major counterparts and competitors are as well. This confidence is best instilled and maintained through mutual and verifiable commitments. While the United States and other countries are moving to strengthen

their domestic climate efforts, and most will be ready to announce political commitments in Copenhagen, not all are prepared to take on binding legal commitments. An interim agreement in Copenhagen would significantly advance the global climate effort by settling fundamental legal and design issues so that governments can then negotiate specific commitments in a ratifiable agreement post-Copenhagen.

In Copenhagen: A Strong Framework Agreement

Much of the focus in Copenhagen will be on the political commitments announced by governments on their domestic climate efforts, and on the decisions and “prompt-start” finance needed to quickly operationalize new support for developing

countries. It is critical that the Copenhagen agreement also begin to establish the legal and institutional framework for converting these interim pledges and decisions into an effective treaty with legally binding commitments. It should go as far as possible to define:

Ambitious Goals. The agreement should recognize the imperative of limiting warming to 2 degrees Celsius and set an aspirational goal of reducing global emissions at least 50 percent by 2050.

A Framework for Mitigation Commitments. The agreement should clearly define the nature of mitigation commitments and how they are to be reflected in a final agreement (e.g., through “appendices” or “schedules”). Consistent with the UNFCCC’s principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” it should allow varying forms and levels of commitments depending on national circumstance:

- Absolute economy-wide emission targets for all developed countries; and
- A wider range of quantifiable policy-based commitments for major developing countries (e.g., sectoral emission targets, energy efficiency standards, renewable energy targets, sustainable forestry goals).

The agreement should launch and support a process, such as a “registry” process, to elaborate country-specific commitments for the major developing countries and to align support for them. It also should go as far as possible in defining implementation and accounting rules.

Support for Developing Countries. The agreement should broadly establish the mechanisms, sources, and levels of support to be provided in a final agreement for adaptation, capacity building, forestry and technology deployment in developing countries. It should: set initial funding levels and a timetable for periodic replenishment; set criteria to determine countries’ contributions to and/or eligibility for support; rely on, rather than replicate, existing multilateral financial mechanisms; provide for stronger developing country representation in the governance of climate finance; and, recognize the full range of multilateral and bilateral funding sources.

A Sound System of Verification. The agreement should establish basic terms for the measurement, reporting and verification of countries’ mitigation actions, and of support for developing country efforts, as called for in the Bali Action Plan. Building on existing reporting and review requirements under the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol, it should require annual emissions inventories by all major-emitting countries (with a phase-in period and support for developing countries); national verification of countries’ mitigation commitments; and, regular implementation reports subject to international review. The review process should culminate in a clear determination of whether or not a country is complying with its commitments, with facilitative remedies in cases of non-compliance.

This is one in a series of policy briefs examining post-2012 international climate policy. The Pew Center on Global Climate Change was established by the Pew Charitable Trust to bring a new cooperative approach and critical scientific, economic, and technological expertise to the global climate change debate. We inform this debate through wide-ranging analyses that add new facts and perspectives in four areas: policy (domestic and international), economics, environment, and solutions.



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