



GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS: OVER THE YEARS

June 1988, World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, Toronto: This is the first crisis call. At the conference, politicians and scientists conclude that "humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war". The conference recommends reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent by 2005.

November 1988, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): A major step towards introducing trust in the geopolitics of climate change is taken with the birth of the IPCC; the panel's first meeting is held in Geneva. The IPCC, which now consists of 2,500 scientists and experts on climate change, is given a mandate to assess the state of scientific knowledge on climate change, evaluate its impacts and come up with realistic solutions.

August 1990, IPCC's First Assessment Report: The report concludes that the increasing accumulation of human-made greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would "enhance the greenhouse effect, resulting on an average in an additional warming of the Earth's surface" - - unless measures are adopted to limit the emissions of these gases.

June 1992, Rio Earth Summit: At this summit, 154 signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agree to stabilise "greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous interference with the climate system". Developed countries accept responsibility for the overwhelming majority of emissions and "aim to stabilize" those emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000.

March 1995, First Conference of Parties (CoP), Berlin: The first CoP, made up of signatories to the UNFCCC, acknowledges that the UNFCCC is inadequate without country-specific commitments and agrees to negotiate emission reduction targets for industrialised countries.

December 1995, IPCC's Second Assessment Report: The report concludes: "The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate."

July 1996, Second CoP, Geneva: The US agrees to legally binding targets and timetables to reduce emissions, but also proposes an international emissions trading scheme. More than 100 other countries also agree to develop targets. In March 1997, at a meeting in Geneva, European environment ministers propose industrialised nations reduce their emissions by 15 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010. The chair of the IPCC says that all nations, developed and developing, would eventually be required to reduce emissions in order to stabilise the atmosphere.

December 1997, Third CoP, Kyoto: Kyoto Protocol (KP), the first landmark decision, an international agreement under the UNFCCC that sets binding reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions for developed nations, is adopted. More than 150 countries sign it. KP comes into force on February 16, 2005, after Russia ratifies it. KP requires a decrease of 6-8 per cent in emissions from the 1990 levels in the period 2008-12 (average for all countries: 5.2 per cent). It also proposes three 'flexible' mechanisms to help developed countries meet their targets: the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Joint Implementation (JI) and emissions trading. USA is not a party to the Protocol; it says KP is fatally flawed because it will cost US jobs, and because it leaves out countries like China and India which are the big polluters. In May 2002, Bonn hosts the first official negotiating meeting after Kyoto comes into force, where discussion begins on the second phase of the Protocol, post-2012.

December 2005, 11th CoP, Montreal: This CoP hosts the first Meeting of the Parties (MoP). Negotiations towards a second phase of KP are agreed on under what is called the Montreal Action Plan. An Ad-Hoc Working Group on Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) is established to ensure that discussions on the second commitment period continue unhindered. However, no deadline is given for finalising the amended Protocol.

February-November 2007: The IPCC releases its Fourth Assessment Report calling anthropogenic climate change "unequivocal" and stating that "most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations".

December 2007, 13th CoP, Bali: The Bali Action Plan, the second landmark, is agreed upon by negotiators. It sets guidelines and a timeline for "up to and beyond 2012" agreement on climate change mitigation and GHG emission reduction. The Bali Action Plan is set on enhanced action on four pillars: mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance. All these measures, it says, must be shared by all Parties by the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities". The Plan sets a two-year time table for talks and calls for an agreement to be adopted at the 15th CoP in Copenhagen.

December 2009, 15th CoP, Copenhagen: Industrialized countries, with the last-minute complicity of India and China, penned an alarmingly weak deal—the so-called Copenhagen Accord designed to undermine the negotiations to date. However the Accord was not officially endorsed

- Certain basic rules were changed forever, under the captaincy of the US, historical responsibility of the developed world in creating the climate crisis was erased. The

biggest flaw in the Copenhagen Accord is that it changed the framework for future negotiations on climate change and negate the provisions of the UNFCCC. Till now, the global climate agreement was premised on two issues: one that industrialised countries, primarily responsible for creating and responsible singularly for the stock of gases in the atmosphere must take the first action to reduce. And two, that these countries must provide finance and technology for the developing world to make the transition to low-carbon economies and to avoid emissions. However, the Copenhagen Accord dismantles this completely

- The Accord recognises the scientific view that the increase in global temperatures should be below 2°C, but does not commit nations to the 2°C or set out a pathway to ensuring this to happen.
- The Copenhagen Accord is meaningless because it depends on a voluntary and domestic target for emission reduction.

August-November 2010: Wikileaks provides the explanation how US manufactured consent by arm-twisting smaller countries.

December 2010, 16th CoP, Cancun: All countries — except Bolivia — agree on a draft similar to the Copenhagen Accord. No new legal instrument of emission reduction is adopted, neither is the current one (Kyoto Protocol) extended. Cancun also says no to the idea of historic debt to emission and atmospheric space. Developed countries voluntarily pledge to reduce emissions -- they have to measure, verify and report their emissions. However, there is no penalty if they fail. To institutionalize the voluntary pledge regime in emissions reduction, a third-party verification of domestic emission targets and actions is agreed upon.

December 2011, 17th CoP, Durban: Discussions on second phase of KP reaches a deadlock. The European Union says the world should agree to commit to a global legal agreement to cut emissions. It suggests that this agreement, which would come into force in 2015, should replace the Framework Convention on Climate Change and step up levels of ambition for all. It says that EU will not agree to the second phase of KP unless the world accepts its demand for a legal instrument to bind all. Canada, Japan, New Zealand and Russia withdrew from the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

The environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, at the event put forth the opinion, that India will not compromise on the principles of equity and historical responsibility, which according to her, were the bulwarks on which all climate negotiations must rest.

December 2012, 18th CoP, Doha: Countries agree on the second commitment period of KP. But the agreement is marred by weak greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitments by developed countries. With crucial developed countries — Japan, New Zealand and Canada — not being part of the second commitment period of the Protocol, only Europe, Switzerland, Norway and Australia are left to take legally binding commitments. The emission cuts these countries have committed to would amount to 18 per cent reduction by 2020, relative to the 1990 levels, compared to 25-40 per cent required to restrict global temperature rise to 2°C. Less than 15 per cent of the emissions will be covered under the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment

period. Targets set in this second commitment period match the ones pledged in Cancun Agreement.

Five years after Bali, the world has not gained much. The ambitious emissions reduction agreement is nowhere to be seen. Instead, most big polluting countries sit pretty without having to do much. If at all a new deal is struck, it will be after 2020.