

# CANADA'S ROLE AT COP21



environmental  
defence

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## Why COP21 in Paris matters

Climate change is a global problem. It has no boundaries or borders. As a result, it is important for all countries to coordinate their activities, to share information and to inspire each other to greater collective and individual action. On the world stage at the United Nations (U.N.), this leads to challenging but necessary discussions and negotiations. Climate change is already happening. And keeping climate change from becoming even more destructive requires much more immediate and concerted action around the world.

Past agreements, like the signing of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Rio in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and the Copenhagen Accord in 2009 were far from perfect but each enabled progress in tackling climate change internationally.

**The climate summit in Paris is the next big opportunity.** From November 30<sup>th</sup> to December 11<sup>th</sup>, Paris is hosting the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP21).

The current round of U.N. climate negotiations was launched in 2011 at the climate summit in Durban, South Africa. At the Durban summit, governments agreed to finalize a new global agreement on climate change by 2015 for the period beyond 2020.<sup>1</sup> (The Copenhagen Accord included countries' commitments for 2020.) At COP21 in Paris, the goal is for negotiations to conclude and that global agreement to be finalized.

**The world has let so much time pass without taking strong action on climate change that this agreement must be the one that ensures that average global warming stays well below 2° Celsius** — the level of warming

that scientists agree we need to stay below to avoid the worst climate catastrophes.

This primer will discuss the key role that Canada can play at COP21, the important issues that will need to be resolved to get a global agreement in Paris, and how Canada can take leadership positions and push for a strong and successful outcome.

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## Canada's role at COP21

Global negotiations of any kind are difficult and those on climate change can be particularly so. **It only takes a few disruptive or unhelpful participants in these talks to damper excitement, suppress ambition or block progress.** Over the past decade, Canada has unfortunately played this role. As a result, Canada's international reputation has been tarnished.

**However, Canada can influence the proceedings and outcome of COP21 in a positive way.**

It's true that Canada is not the most powerful country in the world. But as a middle power that has often exercised moral leadership, Canada has advanced solutions on significant, global challenges in the past. Canadians can point with pride to the creation of U.N. peacekeeping forces as a Canada-led initiative.

And we don't have to go back to the 1960s to witness Canada making a difference globally. The Canadian government played a critical role in launching the Ottawa Process, which concluded with the signing of the Land Mine Treaty in 1997. Even on environmental issues, Canada's middle-power status enabled the country to have a strong and positive influence. For example, Canada convened the first global climate change conference in Toronto in 1988. Canada also played a lead role in finalizing the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances in 1987.

**Canadians are ready to see our government play a leadership role again on the world stage. COP21 in Paris is an important opportunity for Canada to step up and demonstrate meaningful climate action.**

## What are the key issues for COP21?

There are a number of crucial issues that need to be resolved and included in the agreement to be finalized at Paris. Some of these pre-date the Rio summit in 1992 and some have arisen since the Durban summit in 2011.

### FAIR SHARE OF EFFORT

One of the most critical issues is what each country's fair share contribution should be to the global fight against climate change. This issue has been part of the global negotiations since they began. Many have rightly argued that countries that have historically produced the most carbon emissions and those that have the most wealth — often the same countries — should do more to reduce emissions and tackle climate change than others that have produced less emissions. This idea was enshrined in international law through the UNFCCC as the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."<sup>2</sup>

**In essence, this principle means that all countries are responsible for contributing to the fight against climate change. However, each country's contributions will depend on the extent to which the country caused the problem of climate change and the extent to which the country has resources to devote to solving it.** Wealthy, industrialized countries like the U.S. and Canada should act first and quickest because they are, by far, most responsible for the carbon that has been added to the atmosphere and because they also have relatively greater financial and technological resources they can put toward reducing emissions. This category also includes wealthy oil-producing Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait,

who in the U.N. climate change negotiations are classified as developing countries because of their stage of development in the early 1990s when the UNFCCC was negotiated.

Emerging economies like China, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico need to take on responsibilities too, but theirs will be different in nature or more modest in ambition since none have contributed to the problem of climate change to the same extent as developed countries and all still have significant challenges related to poverty and development. Least developed countries should focus on adapting to climate change and pulling their citizens out of poverty since these countries are most greatly impacted by climate change, had very little to do with creating the problem in the first place, and face incredible challenges related to fulfilling the most basic needs of their citizens.

**All countries, from the poorest to the richest, must focus their economic and energy development on low-carbon options.**

Industrialized countries can invest in the

development and deployment of cutting-edge clean technologies like renewable energy, electric vehicles, and efficient building design. They must also provide financing, access to technology as well as capacity-building support so that developing countries can pursue low-carbon energy and economic development that leapfrogs the high-emitting, fossil fuel-based path that the industrialized world took over the past two centuries. (For more information on climate financing/assistance, see below page 5.)

**The crucial point is that each and every country must do its utmost to reduce and avoid carbon emissions, but poorer countries will need to be able to rely on support from wealthier countries.**

Nobody should justifiably expect poorer countries to prioritize use of their limited resources to take climate action rather than providing dignified lives to their citizens.



## CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH

**The Canadian government can help to reach a strong climate deal in Paris by acknowledging that the 2030 target set by the previous federal government was the weakest in the G7 and by adhering to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility by setting a stronger carbon reduction target for 2025.** (Given Canada's track record of not meeting past carbon reduction targets, a nearer-term target for 2025 would give greater assurance to Canadians and our international partners.)

**Canada's fair share would involve reducing carbon emissions by at least one-third over the next decade and providing at least \$4 billion per year in climate financing to help developing countries adapt to or mitigate climate change.**<sup>3</sup> Setting such an ambitious target could encourage our Western partners to also increase their leadership and ambition. So far, developing countries have made emission reduction pledges that have been assessed to collectively meet their fair share. This is in contrast to the industrialized world, where no single country has met their fair share.<sup>4</sup>

The carbon reduction pledges that have been made so far by all countries would still mean that the planet would warm by much more than the 1.5°C threshold that a majority of the countries support (and even the 2°C threshold that all countries have signed on to).<sup>5</sup> It is up to industrialized countries like Canada to step up and help fill the gap, by deepening their own domestic emissions reduction ambition and, importantly, stepping forward with financial, technological and capacity-building support to enable poorer countries to go even deeper than their own fair share of the collective undertaking. Without greater commitments from the industrialized world to reduce carbon emissions, there is a real risk that investments in high-carbon infrastructure — pipelines, tar sands projects, power plants, etc. — will make it almost impossible to reach the deep reductions needed to avoid dangerous levels of climate change.

## RATCHETING UP AMBITION AFTER COP21

The gap between what has been pledged and what is needed to avoid dangerous levels of climate change is wide enough that it is unlikely to be bridged at COP21. Consequently, **there is a need for a ratcheting-up mechanism to increase ambition and make sure the Paris agreement does not lock in a long period of insufficient action.** The pledges that countries have been making for Paris are mostly for 2025 or 2030. If those commitments are insufficient, the

world cannot wait 10 to 15 years to address their shortcomings.

That is why there must be an agreement that all nations' Paris commitments are reviewed, both individually and collectively, on a regular basis, and an instrument is developed to ramp up those pledges until the sum of the pledges keeps warming below 2°C. These reviews and ratchets need to occur at least every five years, and the first round must begin between the Paris conference and the beginning of the implementation of the Paris commitments starting in 2020.

## CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH

**The need for ratcheting up ambition after Paris is another reason why Canada needs to make a commitment for 2025 rather than 2030 and encourage other countries to do so as well.** A nearer-term target will instill greater accountability and action. But Canada also needs to be supportive of more regular reviews of global and national emissions as compared to the 1.5°C and 2°C thresholds, as well as a mechanism for increasing ambition. Transparently assessing countries on their targets and performance, and agreeing in advance how those assessments will ratchet up ambition will give greater certainty that global action will be sufficient and country-level action will be fair.

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## RATCHETING UP AMBITION BETWEEN NOW AND 2020

**Though there is great hope for COP21 in Paris, having a new agreement for the post-2020 period does not mean that commitments for 2020 are to be forgotten or abandoned.** On the contrary, countries with 2020 commitments

are being urged by civil society and other governments to strengthen their targets for 2020. This has been a formal component of the U.N. negotiations.<sup>6</sup> Strengthening and meeting near-term targets will pay dividends through year-over-year reductions in carbon emissions. It will also allow countries to meet more ambitious targets in the future.

## CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH

Because of past federal inaction, Canada is not on track to meet its 2020 carbon reduction target (17 per cent reduction below 2005).<sup>7</sup> **The challenge for Canada is not to strengthen its 2020 target but to credibly show what it will do to get as close to that target as possible.** Committing to an ambitious policy framework will demonstrate to the world that Canada is ready to show serious dedication to tackling climate change, and will set up the country for getting onto an emissions reduction pathway that recognizes scientific limits and commits Canada to doing our fair share.

## CLIMATE FINANCING

One of the ways that common but differentiated responsibilities has been interpreted is through international climate financing, where industrialized countries provide financial assistance so that developing countries can adapt to the impacts of climate change, as well as develop along a low-carbon pathway.



### Characterizing climate financing

International climate financing has been characterized in different ways; some call it a climate debt that is owed to poor, developing countries for imposing the costs of climate change impacts on them and for using up their share of the atmospheric space that is no longer available. In this context, climate financing is seen as restitution. Industrialized countries have often rejected this framing, choosing instead to describe it as a sort of charity to assist the world's poor in their struggles.

Climate financing has been part of global climate change agreements dating back to the UNFCCC in 1992. And it is the lynchpin of the Paris agreement. **Without a significant and credible financing package, the Paris talks risk ending in failure.**

What does a significant and credible financing package look like? In Copenhagen in 2009, the world's developed countries agreed to mobilize \$100 billion per year in climate financing by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries. Paris needs to deliver a clear roadmap to reaching at least this amount in new and additional funding (not by redistributing or re-labelling other types of assistance as climate financing), with commitments for that financing to continue and increase post-2020.

## CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH

**Climate financing is one area where the federal government needs no input from the provinces.** And yet, in the recent past the Canadian government has failed to deliver on its commitments, providing financing in the form of loans rather than grants, and focusing its financing overwhelmingly on mitigation rather than adaptation. (Developing countries, and especially vulnerable and least developed countries, are facing such costly and devastating climatic impacts that they need significant funds for adaptation.)

**In Paris, the Canadian government should support innovative forms of financing,** such as a fuel tax on bunker fuels (fuels used in international aviation and shipping that have not been addressed in past climate agreements) or a financial transaction tax. This would ensure that the level of financing that can be delivered is sufficient and predictable. Despite how ambitious our suggested 2025 carbon reduction target is for Canada, it is only adequate if it is complimented with sufficient climate financing to assist developing countries with both adaptation and mitigation. **Canada's fair share would be 4 per cent of the \$100 billion total and therefore, start at \$4 billion per year in 2020.** This financing should be equally split between adaptation and mitigation, and should be in the form of grants, not the loans extended by the previous government.



**The science is clear that due to climate change there will be an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.**

## **LOSS AND DAMAGE**

**Another important and relatively new element in the negotiations is the creation of a fund for countries suffering loss and damage from climate change that simply cannot be adapted to.** Though related to international climate financing, this has been conceived as a separate fund so that the world's most vulnerable countries can address, for example, the disappearance of large parts of or whole small island states beneath rising seas or the massive costs of super storms, such as Typhoon Haiyan, which devastated a whole region of the Philippines two years ago.

The science is clear that due to climate change there will be an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and that sea levels will rise as glaciers and ice caps melt and the oceans expand.<sup>8</sup> But how quickly these changes will happen and who it will affect the most is not perfectly clear. It makes sense for all countries to be better prepared and to reduce the risk of these events, but there will be an increasing number of examples where even strong mitigation and adaptation measures, including all those preparations, will be overwhelmed by the scale of the impacts. That is why it is so important to create a significant fund to assist countries dealing with damage and loss from these large and catastrophic impacts.

## **CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH**

**The Canadian government needs to support a Paris agreement that includes a Loss and Damage Fund,** so that the world's most vulnerable countries can get assistance in times of greatest need, in some cases while facing the disappearance of their nation. Some industrialized countries, including some of Canada's most important allies such as the U.S., have been reluctant to support such a mechanism.<sup>9</sup> They worry, in part, that the development of such a mechanism would be an admission of fault and open them up to future liability. **Canada can show moral leadership by vocally supporting the creation of a Loss and Damage mechanism to assist the most vulnerable.**

## LONG-TERM GOAL

The Paris agreement is also expected to set a long-term goal that the global community will take on. Various options are on the table but **one that many in civil society support is a commitment to decarbonize the global economy by no later than 2050**, replacing all existing fossil fuels with 100 per cent renewable energy and sustainable energy access for all. This is an ambitious goal that goes after the root of the problem of climate change — the burning of fossil fuels. Several analyses have shown that this goal is possible, even with today's technology.<sup>10</sup> And the revolution that is already underway in renewable energy — for example, the cost



of solar power has declined significantly over the past decade — is predicted to continue.<sup>11</sup>

This goal also appears to be politically possible. Many countries are supporting this goal in the U.N. negotiations.<sup>12</sup> G7 countries almost agreed to this goal at their most recent meeting in Germany in June.

Unfortunately, the Canadian and Japanese Prime Ministers acted as spoilers and the goal agreed to was decarbonisation before the end of this century, rather than by mid-century.<sup>13</sup> Climate science shows that a carbon budget that avoids dangerous climate change is very close to zero after mid-century.

## CANADA'S NEEDED APPROACH

The Canadian government can show leadership in Paris and commit Canada to long-term action, as previous governments have done on this and other issues. **By rallying its G7 partners around an ambitious goal that was almost in reach, the new Canadian government can make amends for Canada's failure in Germany.**

## CONCLUSION

COP21 in Paris, even if successful, will not produce the last global agreement on climate change. But the climate summit is nonetheless a historic and pivotal moment. The world can take a giant step forward, acknowledge the scale of the challenge brought on by our combined carbon emissions, and commit to great collective action. If world leaders continue to sleepwalk they will doom many of the world's citizens to great suffering in the near and distant future.

**A hopeful solution has never been closer. The Paris summit could potentially deliver a good agreement and there are numerous ways the Canadian government can contribute to that good outcome. Let's hope it decides to.**

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