

COP 21 - BRAVING TERROR ATTACKS TO FIGHT THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

"It is my conviction that we have come up with an ambitious agreement"

- French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius after the conclusion of climate talks (COP - 21) in Paris

These apparently banal words spoken with an extremely emotional overtone actually speaks volumes about the significance of coming up with a historic global agreement on climate change in the face of ghastly terror attacks which shook the city of Paris, the host of COP-21, only a month ago.

The problems posed by Climate Change have reached an alarming level. In fact, no country is immune to them. It is only through a combined effort by all countries that the threats posed by climate change can be tackled.

Perhaps the most significant cause of climate change is human impact. In fact, impact of humans exacerbates Global Warming which in turn results in erratic climate. The UNFCCC and its Conference of Parties (COP) seeks to mobilize international efforts to mitigate Global Warming and its associated problems.

The COP-21 in Paris was highly anticipated for a multitude of reasons concerning Global Warming. But terror attacks which rocked the city and the world a few days before the conference made the COP-21, and its success in reaching a landmark global agreement on climate change, a rare display of global solidarity in testing times.

Keywords - Climate Change, COP-21, Global Warming, Kyoto Protocol

A. Climate Change and Global Warming Threat

Climate Change & Global Warming - General Definitions

The most general definition of *Climate Change* is a deviation in the statistical or data distribution of weather over periods of time that range from decades to millions of years. It can be a change in the average weather or a change in the distribution of weather events around an average. Climate change may be limited to a specific region or may occur across the whole planet earth.

Global Warming is the gradual heating of Earth's surface, oceans and atmosphere. Scientists have documented the rise in average temperatures worldwide since the late 1800s. Earth's average temperature has risen by 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit (0.8 degrees Celsius) over the past century, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Temperatures are projected to rise another 2 to 11.5 degrees F (1.133 to 6.42 degrees C) over the next 100 years. [1]

Human Activity - The primary cause behind Global Warming

97 percent of climate scientists agree that the rate of global warming trends the planet is now experiencing is not a natural occurrence, but is primarily the result of human activity. That consensus was made clear in a major climate report released Sept. 27, 2013, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Human-caused global warming occurs when human activity introduces too much of certain types of gas into the atmosphere. More of such gases equal more warming. The atmospheric gases primarily responsible for the greenhouse effect are known as "greenhouse gases" and include water vapor, carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Burning Fossil fuels, deforestation, mining, use of natural gas etc. are just some of the activities that release Greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and increase Global Warming. [5]

Adverse Effects of Global Warming and associated Climate Change

The effects of global warming are already visible in many areas of the world. For example, in Montana's Glacier National Park, where about 150 glaciers were once located, only 25 glaciers larger than 25 acres remain, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Scientists have expressed confidence that climate change will make hurricanes more intense, as well; the unusually strong hurricanes that have formed over the past few years give evidence for this. Hurricanes get their energy from the temperature difference between the warm tropical ocean and the cold upper atmosphere. Global warming increases that temperature difference.

Temperatures are getting more intense, as well. North America reached record highs in 2012, making it the hottest year since record keeping began in 1895. Surprisingly, global warming can also cause unusually cold weather.

Apart from this, melting polar ice caps due to global warming may cause extensive damage and threaten the very existence of humans. [1]

B. Fighting Climate Change and Global Warming

UNFCCC - a resolute approach to reduce Greenhouse Gases and mitigate Global Warming

The UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change) is an international environmental treaty produced at the UNCED, informally known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. The objective of the treaty is to stabilize greenhouse gas

concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

The treaty itself sets no mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms. In that sense, the treaty is considered legally non-binding. Instead, the treaty provides for updates (called “protocols”) that would set mandatory emission limits. The principal update is the Kyoto Protocol, which has become much better known than the UNFCCC itself. [2]

The Kyoto Protocol - The First Effective Protocol that shapes future protocols

The Kyoto Protocol is a protocol to the UNFCCC aimed at fighting Global Warming. It was initially adopted on 11 December 1997 in Kyoto, Japan and entered into force on 16 February, 2005. As of November 2009, 187 states have signed and ratified the proposal. Under the protocol, 37 industrialized countries (Annex I) countries commit themselves to a reduction of Greenhouse gases.

In order to meet the objectives of the protocol, Annex I countries are required to prepare policies and measures for the reduction of greenhouse gases in their respective countries. In addition, they are required to increase the absorption of these gases and utilize all mechanisms available, such as joint implementation, the clean development mechanism and emissions trading, in order to be rewarded with credits that would allow more greenhouse gas emissions at home. [6]

Conferences of the Parties (COP) - Annual meetings for climate change

Since the UNFCCC entered into force, the parties have been meeting annually in Conference of the Parties (COP) to assess progress in dealing with climate change, and beginning in the mid-1990s, to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol to establish legally binding obligations for development countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. From 2005 the conferences have met in conjunction with Meetings of Parties of the Kyoto protocol (MOP) , and parties to the convention that are not parties to the protocol can participate in Protocol – related meetings as observers.

By virtue of this Convention, all the Parties have common but differentiated responsibilities. In addition, they take into account the specific nature of their national and regional development priorities, their goals and circumstances.

According to the foregoing, their responsibilities are:

1. Gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and optimal practices.
2. Implement national strategies for addressing the issue on greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to foreseen impacts of climate change, as well as determining the provision of financial and technological support to developing countries.
3. Cooperate to be prepared and adapt to climate change effects. [4]

COPs - Significant milestones in the journey leading to the Paris Conference

1995- COP-1: The Berlin Mandate

COP 1 took place in Berlin, Germany. It voiced concerns about the adequacy of countries' abilities to meet commitments under the Conventions. These were expressed in a U.N ministerial declaration known as the 'Berlin Mandate'.

1997- COP-3: The Kyoto Protocol

As already discussed, COP3 took place in Kyoto, Japan and adopted the Kyoto Protocol which outlined greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligation for 37 industrialized countries.

1998- COP-4: Buenos Aires, Argentina

COP 4 took place in November 1998 in Buenos Aires. It adopted a 2 year plan of action to implement the Kyoto Protocol.

2002-COP-8: New Delhi, India

Taking place from October 23 - November 1, 2002, COP 8 adopted the Delhi Ministerial Declaration that, amongst others, called for efforts by developed countries to transfer technology and minimize impacts of climate change on developing countries.

2004-COP-10: Buenos Aires, Argentina

It took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2004. To promote developing countries better adapt to climate change, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action was adopted.

2005-COP-11/MOP-1, Montreal, Canada

It took place in Montreal, Canada in 2005. It was the first meeting of the parties of Kyoto Protocol since their initial meeting in Kyoto in 1997 and was the largest intergovernmental conferences on climate change ever.

2007-COP-13/MOP-3 Bali, Indonesia

COP 13 took place from December 3 and December 15 2007 at Nusa Dua in Bali, Indonesia. Agreement on timeline and structured negotiation on the post 2012 framework was adopted.

2009-COP-15/MOP-5, Copenhagen, Denmark

COP-15 took place in Copenhagen, Denmark from December 7 to December December 18 2009. It adopted the "Copenhagen Accord" which recognizes the scientific case for keeping temperature rises below 2 degrees centigrade. But the drawbacks of this accord was that it did not have a baseline for this target and no commitments for reduced emissions. Moreover, the Accord was legally non-binding.

2012-COP-18/MOP-8, Doha Qatar

It took place from Monday 26 November to 8 December 2012, at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha. It reached an agreement to extend the life of the Kyoto Protocol till 2020. It focussed on 5 key aspects of climate change:

Adaptation

Finance

Mitigation

Technology

Loss and Damage

2014-COP-20/MOP-10, Lima, Peru

It was held in Lima, Peru, from December 1 to 12, 2014. The goal of the conference was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature increase to 2 degrees celsius above current levels. The entire attention in the Lima Conference was however directed towards the 2015 conference in Paris. [1, 4]

The Paris Attacks: Terror casts its shadow on the climate conference

On the evening of Friday 13 November 2015, a series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks occurred in Paris. The attacks killed 130 people. The attacks were the deadliest on France since World War II, and the deadliest in the European Union since the Madrid train bombings in 2004. The French President announced a three- day mourning. There were intense reactions from all over the world. The ISIL claimed responsibility for the attacks. The Paris attacks cast a deep shadow over COP 21. Security was stepped up and demonstrations were banned. But none of the 130 plus heads of state and government attending the conference pulled out. [4]

World comes together with greater resolve for a strong agreement: A message to terrorists

President Obama spoke out amid concerns that security fears in Paris coupled with an understandable deflection of French attention away from the COP-21 Paris Conference. He said, " I think it's absolutely vital for every country, every leader, to send a signal that viciousness of a handful of killers does not stop the world from doing business". French officials also insisted that they were determined not to let their agenda be set by terrorists. Many observers' hoped that the threat might galvanize the talks to greater solidarity and urgency. [8]

COP 21/MOP 11: The Paris Conference 2015

The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP-21/MOP 11 was held in Paris, France from 30 November to 12 December 2015. The conference negotiated the Paris Agreement as a global agreement on the reduction of climate change. The agreement will become legally binding if joined by at least 55 countries which represent at least 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the organizing committee at the onset of the talks, the expected key result was an agreement to set a goal of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. The agreement also calls for zero net anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions to be reached during the 2nd half of the 21st century.

A number of meetings took place in preparation for COP-21, including the Bonn Climate Change Conference, which produced a draft agreement. According to the organizing committee of the summit in Paris, the objective of the 2015 conference was to achieve, for the first time in over 20 years of negotiations, a binding and universal agreement on climate, from all the nations of the world. The International Trade Union Confederation said that the goal was to be "zero carbon, zero poverty".

On 12 December 2015, the participating 195 countries agreed, by consensus, to the final global pact, the Paris Agreement, to reduce emissions as part of the method for reducing greenhouse gas. In the 12 page document, the members agreed to reduce their carbon output "as soon as possible" and to do their best to keep global warming to well below 2 degrees centigrade. France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said that the ambitious and balanced plan was a "historic turning point" in the goal of reducing global warming.

The COP-21 has had its fair share of criticism. It has come under flak for being non-binding on member states until 55 parties who produce over 55% of the world's greenhouse gas have ratified the agreement. Moreover, there is no mechanism to force a country to set a target by a specific date nor enforcement measures if a set target is not met. Also, the agreement "predicated upon an assumption" that high polluters will drive down their carbon pollution voluntarily and assiduously without any binding enforcement mechanism. [3]

The debate ignited by COP -21: Do terrorism and climate change have anything in common?

The Paris attacks before COP-21 urged world leaders to call for action to address climate change. Many academicians and national security experts agree that climate change contributes to an uncertain world where terrorism can thrive.

U.S. military officials refer to climate change as a "threat multiplier" that takes issues like terrorism that would pose a threat to national security and exacerbates the damage they can cause. A 2014 Department of Defense report identifies climate change as the root of government instability that leads to widespread migration, damages infrastructure and leads to the spread of disease.

The parallels between the situation described in the government report and the situation on the ground in Syria are striking. The worst drought on record in the Middle Eastern Country has created instability for farmers and threatened the food supply. At the same time, the government has struggled to hold on to power across the country in the face of militant groups and millions of Syrians have fled their homeland. Also, many International Relations experts say that Oil is the common factor between terrorism and climate change. In fact, "Dirty Oil", which helps fund the terrorists, must be banned.

Thus it can be seen that Terrorism and Climate Change have similar geopolitical and economic spheres whose linkages are also with refugee crisis, colonialism, inequality, indifference, racism, fossil fuel dependency, war etc. [7, 8]

COP-22 : Executing the Paris Agreement on a Global Scale

COP 22, the 22nd annual Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held at Marrakech concluded with the release of the Marrakech Action Proclamation, which "celebrates the unstoppable global momentum on climate change and sustainable development action".

Businesses, investors, cities and local governments undertook fresh voluntary commitments, building on those made at Paris in 2015. The NDC partnership, a coalition of many countries, non-state actors and international institutions committed to ambitious NDC implementation, was created. The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action was launched to provide a roadmap for climate action by countries and other stakeholders in the period 2017 to 2020.

Even though some of them were inadequately addressed, COP 22 tackled several matters at the very heart of the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC. These matters were namely:

1. Mitigation
2. Adaptation
3. Finance
4. Capacity building. [3, 4]

Conclusion:

An agreement that shows immense resolve and unparalleled promise

COP 21 is an agreement that makes ambitious promises. However, its implementation will depend on the joint efforts of the several countries involved. The agreement should be practically implemented and should not remain as an empty promise. Perhaps a more binding agreement would have enforced countries to adhere to norms. But COP 21 is a bold step nonetheless in the right direction.

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