

# THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS

The 2016 Paris Agreement is an international agreement on climate change binding every country that has signed to act on the climate response. Countries are required to outline their climate actions through “Nationally Determined Contributions,” with developed countries leading on mitigation and finance. This 2-sider explains what the Paris Agreement is and how to get involved in making sure that countries are responding to it.



## THE BACKGROUND

The Paris Agreement follows on from two previous climate agreements made at the end of the last century: the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1998 Kyoto Protocol. Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries signed up to legally binding targets on greenhouse gas emissions. The protocol also includes the Clean Development Mechanism, through which developed countries fund projects in developing countries that would reduce overall global emissions while not making those reductions in their own countries. This is a form of what is known as carbon off-setting.

The Paris Agreement is the first legally-binding climate change agreement that commits countries to emission reductions. It is viewed as fair because developed countries, who have benefited more from industrialization, have the responsibility to lead on the core actions of:

**Mitigation:** the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

**Adaptation:** adapting to climate change impacts on different areas of life such as what crops are grown, where to safely live and work, alongside building resilience for future scenarios

**Loss and Damage:** support to those who face irreversible loss and damage due to current and locked-in climate change.

**Finance:** financial support from developed countries to developing countries to help them mitigate and adapt, while still having the chance to eliminate poverty through sustainable development as grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Paris Agreement is historic because it commits global efforts to “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” The IPCC has analysed that a 1.5°C temperature limit, in comparison to even a 2°C temperature limit, could prevent significant species extinction, human suffering and loss of life, as well as eco-system collapses that would include the irreversible melting of the Greenland ice cap and associated sea-level rise.

differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.” Each country’s successive NDC must be more ambitious than the last one, and all NDCs must contribute to long term mitigation and adaptation goals, ensuring that countries collectively fulfill the Paris Agreement’s goals. To measure progress on this, countries engage in a **global stock-take every 5 years.**

The first will take place in 2023.

All NDCs are available on the UNFCCC database.

Under the Paris Agreement, each country defines its climate action in **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** which are updated and submitted every 5 years. NDCs provide mitigation targets and projects, adaptation goals and programmes, commitments on finance to be provided by developed countries and needed by developing countries, and the required technology and capacity. NDCs are intended to reflect the country’s highest possible ambition, recognizing “common but

This page is an excerpt from QUNO’s “People’s Climate Empowerment Series”, a publication that explains international efforts on climate change and how these can help us support fair, ambitious and inclusive climate action.

**To find out more visit:**

<https://quno.org/resource/peoples-climate-empowerment-series>

It is important to advocate for the right to participate in formulating your country's NDC. Countries like Ecuador and Kenya have explicitly mentioned public participation in their NDCs. To help your country commit to ambitious, fair, and efficient climate action through their NDC, look out for:

**Human rights language in climate action, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.**

Norway's NDC states that "consultations with Indigenous People, Sami People, procedures for consultation processes between the central government and the Sámediggi, established in 2005, constitute a crucial framework for ensuring Sami rights under international law to participate in processes that may affect them."

**Inclusion of gender equality and gender-informed processes regarding climate change,** as demonstrated by the Marshall Islands, which "commits to a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach in all NDC-related planning, programming and implementation."

Economic activities which include a **just transition** to guarantee worker and social welfare protection.

**The protection of nature and natural resources,** especially if they are carbon sinks, such as tropical rainforests and bogs. The updated NDC for Suriname is committed to ensuring that its 93% forest cover remains, and understands the importance of

safeguarding these forests as part of global ecological systems.

**Food security, sustainable production, and diets,** as what we eat and throw away are huge parts of our individual and collective carbon footprints. Bangladesh commits to supporting families transitioning away from polluting kerosene cooking stoves and increasing climate-resilient and biodiverse agriculture without jeopardizing feeding its people.

**The military is a major emitter.** Check to see if their GHG emissions – of both military bases and warfare – are included in countries' NDCs as these remain invisible in many international negotiations and agreements.

**NDC methods and calculations that are based on best available science,** including that which is distributed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The NDC submitted by Latvia on behalf of the European Union applies the "Global Warming Potential on a 100 year Timescale," which is in accordance with the IPCC.

These are all examples of priorities which, if included, can create a more ambitious, effective and fair NDC for global climate action. The effectiveness of the Paris Agreement depends on the ambition of the highest emitting countries. The IPCC has concluded that, if we continue under a very high rate of greenhouse gas emissions, global surface temperature could rise by 3.3°C to 5.7°C by 2100, compared to preindustrial levels. Climate Action Tracker has calculated that current NDCs could reduce the projected warming associated with the status quo from 4.8°C to a still-catastrophic 2.6°C rise by 2100. However, this statistic is based on the financing and implementation of binding long-term targets and 2030 NDCs but is not reflected in real world policies and actions. Commitments remain insufficient and global emissions are rising. Under NDCs, climate action needs to take place at the domestic level. Opportunities for getting involved in your country's NDC formation differ from place to place. You can begin by learning about what is in your country's current NDC and then asking elected officials about how they are ensuring its implementation. It is also important to look at how your regional and/or local government is responding to your country's NDC.

## WHAT TO DO NOW – PRACTICAL STEPS

**Everyday:** 1.) Consider how we can change our everyday behaviors to have less impact on our planet - this can include changing what we eat and throw away, the way we use energy at home, or how we travel. 2.) Talk with the people around us, especially those who may not understand the human impact of climate change or feel powerless and don't know how to help.

**Medium-Term:** 1.) Join or support a union and advocate alongside our colleagues for a just transition that takes workers' rights into account. 2.) Engage with local groups or local chapters of organizations or movements we respect (be that environmental groups, faith community initiatives or a sports club). 3.) For owners of financial assets, look into the choice of ethical pension funds, banking and investments.

**Long-term:** 1.) Engage politically – this spans getting involved in local, regional and national politics and making sure we vote in every election. 2.) Ask our government representatives if our country's NDC includes all sources of emissions, including fossil fuel extraction, and emissions from aviation and shipping. 3.) Climate securitisation is a pressing issue - look into our country's military spending. Could this money be shifted towards supporting systemic change, such as the phase out of fossil fuels? 4.) Campaign, research or contribute to public consultations. Public participation in climate policy making is our legal right!

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) is an expert observer of the UNFCCC, IPCC and Human Rights Council. QUNO has been supporting work on climate change at the international level through diplomacy, advocacy and education initiatives since 2012. Please consider making a donation to help us continue with this work.