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International Climate Change Conferences

UN Climate Change Conference i...



The Road to Paris

This December 2015, delegations from Canada and around the world will be travelling to Paris, France to be part of a large and important meeting about climate change. Delegations of young people will be raising the voice of Canadian and global youth and urging world leaders to act on climate change. Help them represent you by creating and sending an eCard that will be displayed at the meeting. The world has a chance to slow the effects of climate change. Now is the chance for the voices of Canadians to be heard. We must all act now!

UN climate chief: extreme weath...



Climate change is being recognized as one of the greatest challenges to face humankind. As the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said “There is no Plan B – because there is no Planet B!” Climate change is a truly global phenomenon and threatens the needs of all humans for food, clean water and clean air. As our scientific knowledge of climate change grows we see more and more connections with other global challenges such as drought, flooding, extreme weather – even war and the spread of disease. Climate change can be seen in news from around the world,

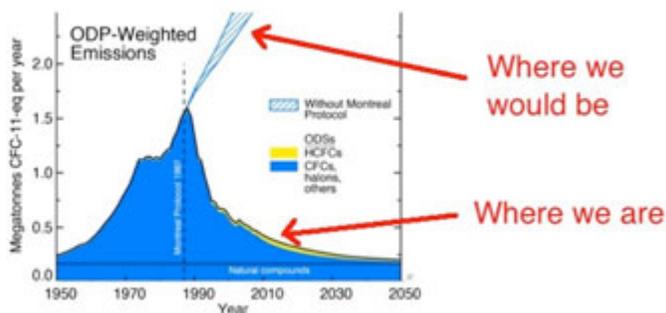
but it is also a local problem. You can learn more in the [Climate Change eCard Topic](#) and in [GreenLearning's Climate Change Where I Live](#) [☑](#) program.



Multilateral meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, India's Prime Minister, China's President, Brazil's President, and South Africa's President at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, 2009 ¹.

Why a Climate “Summit”?

The international struggles against climate change have basically taken place during your lifetime. For much of human history leaders have met at key times to try to solve problems that concerned more than one country. In the last 100 years, problems that are global have required bigger and more significant international meetings. These are often called “summits.” There have been summits on peace treaties, discrimination against certain groups, spread of disease, banning land mines and environmental issues. One of the most successful summits produced the Montréal Protocol (1987), an international agreement signed by almost all of the countries of the United Nations to protect the ozone layer. As a result of this Conference, ODP Weighted emissions have been cut drastically.



This graph shows how the Montréal Protocol changed global emissions². [Click for larger image](#) [☑](#)

The global movement to fight climate change has been more difficult.

Timeline: International Struggle Against Climate Change (when were you born?)

- 1890s "Global warming" first coined as a term by scientists
- 1900s More and more scientists worry about the effects of human activity on the earth and its atmosphere.
- 1970 First “Earth Day” and the beginnings of the modern environmental movement
- 1988 A conference in Toronto where politicians and scientists urged that “humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally

pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequence could be second only to global nuclear war.”

- 1988 Scientists from around the world establish the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) to study the effects of climate change.
- 1992 Rio Earth Summit: governments from 154 nations establish the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) – ratified in 1994.
- 1990s ... UNFCCC has held regular international gatherings (called Conference of the Parties, or COP)
- 1997 Kyoto Accord on reduction of greenhouse gases reached
- 2005 Kyoto Accord goes into effect
- 2014 COP 20 – Held in Lima, Peru
- 2015 COP 21 – held in Paris with aim of creating a binding treaty

Critics assert that people are given false hope and promises by the UN climate change process. Countries commit to targets of reducing emissions or joining global plans, but there is nothing legally binding about the Conferences. Speeches sound good, but no organization, not even the United Nations has the power to enforce the promises made.



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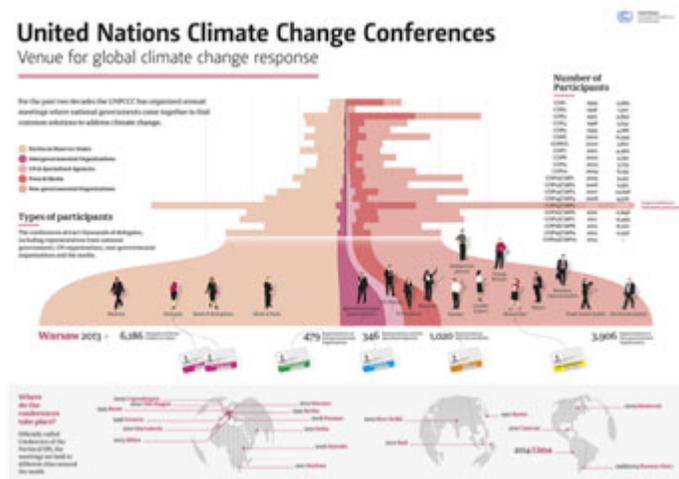
The counter argument is that the process of weaning ourselves off our reliance and dependence on fossil fuels is one that is complex and takes time. In addition, nations have now agreed that the climate change conference in Paris in November 2015 will create a Global Climate Treaty that will be binding.

Maybe the key is public pressure from citizens. Maybe that's why you need to send an eCard!

What Happens at a Summit?

What will the Canadian youth delegates see when they are in Paris? There are literally thousands of people there for this twelve day meeting. Summits are complex events with reporters,

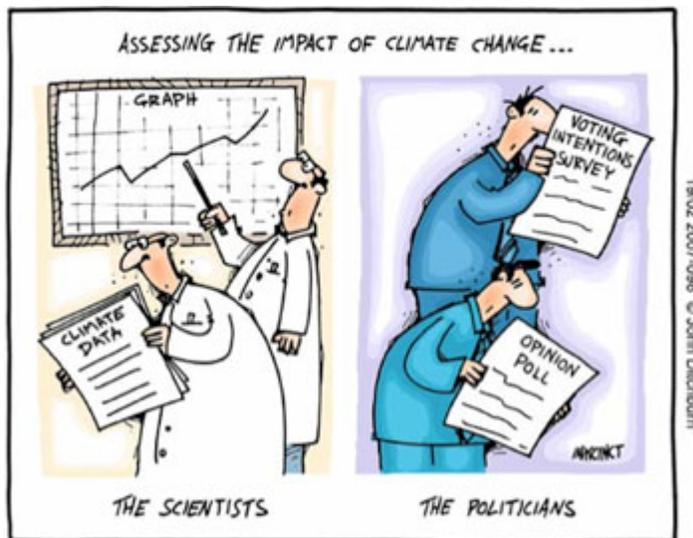
photographers, security personnel, scientists, observers from different environmental groups – and then all the officials. There are UN officials, translators and interpreters, clerical staff and, of course, the official delegations from each attending country. Each delegation brings its chief people – maybe the country's leader or Minister of the Environment and then a whole group of support staff. At The Millennium Summit (2000), for example, over 150 world leaders participated – including 100 heads of state, 47 heads of government, three crown princes, five Vice-Presidents, three Deputy Prime Ministers and 8,000 other delegates.



Infographic: Who attends UNFCCC conferences

⁴ . [Click for larger image](#)

You can investigate the size and extent of these summits by browsing the UNFCCC website for the COP20 Conference in Lima, Peru.



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Much goes on behind the scenes at these Conferences. As our Canadian youth delegates travel around their hotel and the Conference venue they will see people text messaging, talking on their mobile phones and there will be hundreds of people huddled in small group discussions over coffee. In some ways, this is the core of the Conference. Security people have a hundred logistical decisions, reporters have to figure what story is the best to file and who they can get hold of to interview, NGOs try to figure out where to put pressure to get their voices heard at the official tables and country delegations constantly think of the implications of every detail – from the big announcements down to the fine print in the reports.

Why No Deal Yet?

If we listen to the news, we might think that these summits always end up in talk, but no action. What we learn about these conferences, however, is not the whole story. Some global summits get very little coverage and we only hear about the final document that is issued – called a communiqué. Climate change conferences, on the other hand, get more coverage and the daily news will have a wrap-up every evening of the day's events. The UN websites have daily briefings which are very formal and only cover the official, open meetings. Closed door meetings and other activities cannot be covered or are too numerous to follow. The media also focuses on anything controversial and headline grabbing. During every international conference there are many small agreements; baby steps toward the bigger solution.

Case Study: Tumeria

What About the Rest of Us?

No wonder many people feel very removed from international summits. The delegates are selected and sent by the country and in a democracy we have elected our parliamentarians, but hugely important deals are being negotiated and it looks like they are largely behind closed doors. What is the role of the voice of the people in these summits?



The Peoples Climate March, New York City September 2014 – over 675,000 people marched in over 2000 communities around the world.

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The reality is that individual Canadians are represented at the summits in different ways. We can pressure our elected Members of Parliament to listen to what we think about climate change. We can follow the blogs or news releases from youth delegations. We can watch for environmental groups that we support as they hold meetings and try to deliver messages to the many world leaders there. Sending an eCard is a way to have your voice join with others on the world stage.

The Direction for Canada

One official of the UNFCCC has summarized the challenges facing these talks, explaining that countries need an agreement on four "political essentials":

1. How much are industrialized countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases?
2. How much are major developing countries such as China and India willing to limit the growth of their emissions?

3. How much financial support will industrialized countries provide to developing countries to help them reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change?
4. How will that financing be managed?

Canada faces difficult choices at these summits. Like all countries, there are many factors that push the official delegation in different directions. It is like a juggling act and the Prime Minister, with the advice of all his staff, will have to decide what ideas to support and what to say in public speeches. Even seemingly small things matter; when does the PM arrive, what tone he takes in his speeches. One important signal will be whether he meets with the youth delegates and other groups that are presenting the voice of Canadians.

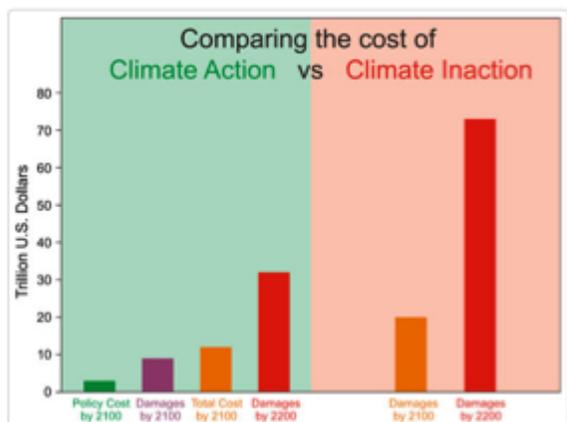


Many feel that this cartoon from a previous climate change conference would still apply today.

⁷. [Click for larger image](#)

The Canadian delegation needs to think about those who will be affected by the decisions made at the Conference. The challenge is that with climate change already having significant effects on the economy and health of Canadians, our delegation has to think of everyone and many factors. Factors such as effects on the fossil fuel industries, farmers, health care costs, impacts on the tourism sector, etc. A big factor for Canada is the economic importance of the oil and gas industry in our economy.

The challenge is that it is difficult to calculate whether this will be helped or harmed by signing a climate change agreement. The fossil fuel industry is accused of pushing the federal government to limit the harshness of the agreement, but not all companies agree. Some feel that fighting climate change makes sense in all ways and they are backed up by economists from around the world. Some politicians claim that we have to choose between economic growth and environmental protection. Other politicians and most economists believe that they go together. A strong economy can only come from a healthy environment.



Economic studies have calculated the costs of putting a price on carbon versus doing nothing.

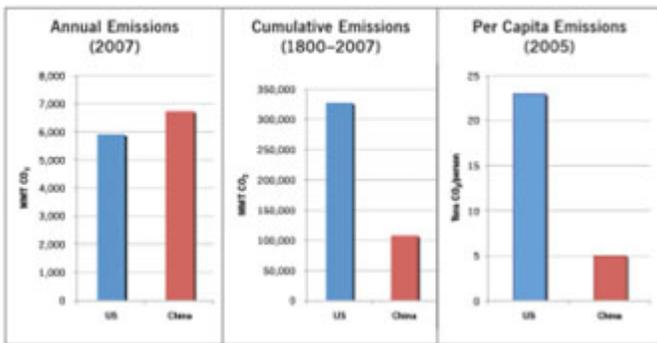
The policy choices that face all countries are complex. They range from delay and inaction all the way to heavily restricting carbon emissions and putting a price on carbon.

International Climate Change Policy Scenarios

Scenario	Implications for Canada
<p>#1. Anarchy Countries face the fact that international talks have failed. Each country makes it's own policies on climate change based on local effects of climate change and on the politics and economy of the country.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This seems like a realistic scenario, but will change happen fast enough? • Canada is already feeling the effects of climate change • An energy resource rich country like Canada will find it difficult to voluntarily cut back • Governments and companies that accept controls will suffer economically against countries who have no controls.
<p>#2. Kyoto Model Countries commit to a new global agreement like the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 which promises to limit emissions by a certain rate by a certain year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada actively supported the design of the Kyoto Protocol and ratified it in Parliament, but we have not met our target of reducing emissions – emissions have actually increased over 25% since 2011 when we pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol. Our recent pledges to reduce emissions are some of the lowest of any industrialized country • Many believe that this is a political issue between those who favour a hands off approach which protects the energy companies and especially the Alberta Oil Sands and those who would move toward more balanced investment in green technologies and jobs
<p>#3. Work Through United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Countries work individually or in cooperation with others to develop climate policies and plans that are best suited to their country. The UNFCCC oversees actions and progress towards broader climate change targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Canadian government would have to orient our energy policy to fighting climate change and would have to balance subsidies to the fossil fuel industries (especially the Oil Sands) with helping to grow green technologies and encourage energy efficiency through regulation.
<p>#4. Equity Approach Countries agree to work toward a safe level of greenhouse gas emissions. This would be set by international agreement and expressed in terms of emissions per person. In this scenario, developed countries agree to move first because they have already used huge amounts of energy to develop their economies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada is one of the countries that has resisted this approach saying that countries like China and India that are major polluters shouldn't face less pressure than countries like Canada and the United States • Developing countries feel that countries like Canada already had a chance to industrialize without limits. Why can't they have a chance to bring development to their people?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They also point out that many developing countries are big polluters, but actually pollute less per person than developed countries like Canada.
<p>#5. Global Tax Countries agree to some kind of internationally negotiated tax that puts a price on greenhouse gas emissions. This tax collected at the national level would have the effect of forcing emissions to safe levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada has resisted this approach because we are a country that relies on fossil fuels for a large part of our exports • Many economists feel a global tax would not hurt specific countries if it was applied fairly • See chart above showing how cutting emissions will be better for the economy than continuing unregulated

Figure 1. United States and China: Annual and Cumulative Emissions²⁵



Emissions can be compared in three ways: How much does a country emit, what is the total over time, and what is the total per person.

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What Do You Choose?

We have seen that despite the size and complexity of international summits, Canada has a role to play and there are always implications for our people. Yours can be one voice in the many that speak up to give their opinion on the best way forward. Your research into Canada and climate change conferences will help you prepare for what you will say when you send an eCard to our youth delegates. Canada will create policies on climate change. Make your voice one that decision-makers hear!

Join our dialogue on international climate change Conferences on Twitter @greenlearning and on Facebook: GreenLearning Canada Foundation.