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Has CITES had its day?



VIEWPOINT
Mark Jones

Governments, conservationists and pro-trade groups have been trying to make what capital they can from their respective "victories" at last month's meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). But, asks Mark Jones, is the 37-year-old convention successfully doing the job it was established to do?

CITES is mandated to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants, or products derived from them, does not threaten their survival.

An impressive-sounding 175 parties (member countries) are committed to implementing various protection measures for some 5,000 species of animal and 28,000 plants.

Yet at times on the floor of last month's conference in Doha, Qatar, one had the impression that the arguments and outcomes had more to do with protecting commercial interests than protecting wildlife.

The process of decision making has become intensely political. Parties choose to use scientific evidence to support their positions when it suits them, and refute the validity of the science when it doesn't.

Parties also use procedural technicalities to their political advantage. At times, during a heated debate, the conference resembles the bearpit of a national parliament.

Countries with vested interests in particular issues often send large delegations and high-ranking politicians and officials in order to persuade other parties to side with them on crucial votes.



“ CITES... gets into difficulty when it tries to deal with species of high commercial value ”



Japan sent a hefty delegation to CITES to protect its bluefin interest

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Faced with proposals to protect beleaguered stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna and several species of shark, Japan sent around 50 delegates to coerce island states and developing nations into supporting their opposition.

It used claims of cultural bias, veiled threats, trade incentives and aid packages. Serving sushi derived from Atlantic bluefin tuna at a lavish reception for delegates the night before the vote was a particularly cynical move.

The Zambian delegation rolled out Chieftainess Chiawa, head of a prominent indigenous group, to play the "poverty card" in support of their efforts to secure permission from the conference to downlist their elephant population and sell off their stockpiled ivory; her pleas not to let her people starve when considering the fate of Zambia's valuable ivory stocks were impassioned, if somewhat lacking in logic.

The European Union, whose 27 votes are a powerful force, votes as a bloc despite wide differences of opinion between EU member states on some issues.

Surely if a party firmly believes that science and evidence supports a particular view, it should be obliged to vote accordingly, and not be forced to vote differently by political arrangement?

The UK broke ranks by voting in favour of Atlantic bluefin tuna protection, incurring the wrath (and no doubt further sanctions down the line) of its EU partners.

CITES EXPLAINED

Threatened organisms listed on three appendices depending on level of risk

Appendix 1 - all international trade banned

Appendix 2 - international trade monitored and regulated

Appendix 3 - trade bans by individual governments, others asked to assist

"Uplisting" - moving organism to a more protective appendix;
"downlisting" - the reverse

Conferences of the Parties (COPs) held every three years

CITES administered by UN Environment Programme (Unep)

These and other factors had a major bearing on the voting on a number of important proposals.

Attempts to gain CITES listings for marine species threatened with extinction because of overfishing, including bluefin tuna and hammerhead sharks, failed to gain the necessary support, in spite of UN Food and Agriculture Organization endorsement.

As a consequence, these species - like so many other overfished marine stocks - remain at the mercy of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), the very organisations that have presided over their near demise.

Poor arguments

Delegates in favour of maintaining trade in certain threatened species often claim that limiting trade will harm the economies of poor communities, or reduce the opportunity for people to obtain essential resources.

However, most shark fishing is carried out in international waters by large commercial vessels to serve the tastes of the growing middle classes in East Asia for shark fin soup, and 80% of Atlantic bluefin tuna ends up as sushi in Japanese restaurants.

Red and pink corals are disappearing fast in order to supply nothing more essential than markets for jewellery and trinkets.

Yet they all failed to gain protection.

In any event, there is nothing that will devastate a poor coastal community more than the complete collapse of a stock of fish, removing a potential resource for the generations to come.

Satanic salvation

Some of the decisions and resolutions adopted by the conference, though, will have important conservation benefits.

Several species of Madagascan plants, Latin American amphibians, and reptiles have received CITES

“ The conference operates on a budget of around \$6m - not much more than the value of some of the yachts moored in

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listings restricting international trade.

Doha's bay outside the conference centre ”

The unsung Satanic beetle from Bolivia gained an Appendix 2 listing to protect it from unscrupulous collectors.

Protection for many other species has been strengthened, including antelopes, rhinos, tigers, snakes and freshwater turtles; and the conference eventually rejected proposals from Tanzania and Zambia to be allowed to sell off their elephant ivory stockpiles.

Demand led

CITES seems to be most successful when dealing with species for which international trade poses a significant threat but where financial or economic considerations are limited.

It gets into difficulty when it tries to deal with species of high commercial value.

The international trade value of timber and fish products dwarfs that of all other species put together. Yet despite demand for many tree and fish species driving them towards extinction in the wild, the vast majority of attempts to introduce or strengthen protection for them failed at this conference.

As we go forward, it is vital that the conference exercises its mandate to regulate trade in these species.

Exploitation of, and trade in, wildlife and wildlife products is driven by demand.

In an ideal world, we would control trade in endangered species by reducing the demand, by educating people in consumer states.

However, in the face of criticism concerning "interference with national sovereign rights", "cultural traditions" and "ignorance of poverty", such efforts are unlikely to succeed - certainly not in time to save many of the species this conference discussed.



The conference did not approve further sales in ivory

So, while continuing with demand reduction efforts, the focus is on controlling the supply through national and international regulation, effective enforcement and severe penalties for offenders who try to obtain, ship or trade in wildlife products illegally.

The growing involvement of sophisticated, well-funded and increasingly armed criminal organisations in the illegal wildlife trade was recognised at the conference, along with the need for enforcement efforts to match this level of sophistication if it is to be effective.

Wildlife crime, long seen as "soft", is now up there with the trade in drugs, weapons and people in terms of its significance and the way it operates.

Only game in town?

So is CITES still an effective force for species conservation?

There is a feeling among many conservationists that Doha may have been our last chance to give real, meaningful protection for some species - and that we missed it.

However, for all its faults, CITES is the one international convention specifically targeted at controlling trade in endangered species, so it is the international legal framework with which we have to work.

The conference operates on a budget of around \$6m - not much more than the value of some of the yachts moored in Doha's bay outside the conference centre.

Perhaps what CITES needs is a bigger budget, sharper teeth, and some way of taking some of the politics and vested interests out of its proceedings.

The protection of many species affected by trade requires international cooperation and protection, because they are captured in one country, transported through others, and consumed in others still.

If CITES won't provide this international protection, who will?

Mark Jones is programmes and fundraising director of Care for the Wild International, a UK-based conservation charity

The Green Room is a series of opinion articles on environmental topics running weekly on the BBC News website

Do you agree with Mark Jones? Is CITES - and are other international conservation fora - dominated by political self-interest? Is there any alternative? Are decisions made at the Doha meeting likely to lead to extinctions?

Japan and China have a lot to answer for. It seems that 90% of endangered animals end up there in one way or the other; pelts, food, trinkets or medicines. Nothing will work until the new generation is educated in their destructive nature. We cannot continue to rape our only worlds resources because we will be the ones who ultimately suffer. It's a really sad state of affairs.

Nightshade, Swindon

What perhaps one need is more enforcement efforts. This article reminds me of one UN magazine feature on the analysis of CITES and the need to strengthen enforcement.

john Willy, Tokyo, Japan

I like very much your analysis of the meeting - however (and don't get me wrong I am a conservationist) the Zambia amended proposal (to sell rawhides, hunting trophies and live animals) was not given the right attention - this was not about selling ivory stocks...unfortunately a proposal that had some merits got wrapped up into a larger and quite emotional debate - where some lost perspective on what was agreed at Cop14 and failed to objectively assess whether the concerned expressed with regard to one off sales were true also for downlisting for these other specific uses. Despite the politicization of the debates, I think CITES remains the most effective international agreement; If I was a State party I would revisit the rules on secret voting: by increasing transparency and accountability - which vote by secret ballots defeats - we can perhaps de-politicize a little more future debates and perhaps through targeted consumer campaigns make sure that CITES parties are accountable to their constituencies.

Tanya Rosen, New York, USA

In response to Pierre's comment below, if the ivory trade were to be allowed in some countries, this would set a precedent and others would soon be clamouring for the same right. It would be impossible to control how the ivory was sourced and where it had come from. There would be widescale poaching and many elephants would suffer terribly. The decision not to allow Zambia and Tanzania to begin selling ivory is one of the best ones made at CITES.

Wendy De-Ville, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

The problem with CITES is that it does very little to enable or provide positive incentives for sustainable levels of harvesting. It seeks to regulate harvesting levels indirectly by placing restrictions or outright bans on international trade. This is a very weak and blunt (non-specific) policy instrument and, as the author notes, it "gets into difficulty when it tries to deal with species of high commercial value." In fact, it is possible that CITES is making matters worse for high-value terrestrial species such as rhinos, tigers and elephants. When market demand persists in the face of bans (as with illicit drugs), massive profit opportunities arise, attracting organized crime rings to step in and control the trade that governments cannot. As CITES progressively increases legal trade restrictions, it inexorably drives trade into the hands of these suppliers of last resort: the same criminal syndicates that smuggle arms and drugs and mostly remain beyond the reach of the law. The USA has recently pledged over \$ 1.5 billion simply to try and control the illegal drugs trade with Mexico - a



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Persistence pays off – Singapore authorities' successful prosecutions against wildlife crime recognized by CITES Secretary-General Certificate of Commendation, 22 July 2017

Geneva, 22 July 2017 - The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) of Singapore was today awarded with a Certificate of Commendation by the Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The CITES Secretary-General's Certificate of Commendation formally recognizes exemplary enforcement actions, and was awarded to AVA in recognition of the great perseverance it demonstrated in securing successful convictions for illegal timber trade following the seizure of an illegal shipment of 3,235 metric tonnes (29,434 pieces) of CITES-listed rosewood (*Dalbergia* spp.) logs, on 14 March 2014. The market value of the logs was estimated to be in excess of USD 50 million.

Following the seizure, the AVA initiated a criminal case against the company that was identified as the consignee of the rosewood, and its managing director. The director and the company were prosecuted for importing a CITES-listed species into Singapore without the requisite CITES permit. The accused argued that the shipment was not "imported" into Singapore but merely "in transit" to another country, and that as such, different regulatory requirements applied. The accused company and its director were subsequently acquitted twice by a District court, but AVA persisted. After filing two appeals the High Court of Singapore, in March 2017, ruled that the charges brought against the accused had been proven beyond reasonable doubt. The High Court reversed the orders of acquittal and the managing director was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment and the maximum fine of SGD 500,000, and the company was sentenced to the maximum fine of SGD 500,000. The High Court also ordered that the rosewood logs be forfeited to the Government of Singapore.

Speaking at the award ceremony, Secretary-General John E. Scanlon said: "This case represents an excellent example of persistence paying off with the authorities in Singapore securing convictions against those involved in the illegal trade in CITES-listed specimens. The efforts by Singapore's CITES Management Authority, the AVA, are testament to the outstanding work being done in Singapore to combat wildlife and forest crime. These convictions send a clear message that wildlife crime will not be tolerated in Singapore, and that those involved will be brought to justice."

The Certificate was accepted by AVA Director-General Dr. Yap Him Hoo, who said: "Singapore is honoured to receive the CITES Certificate of Commendation and would like to thank the CITES Secretariat for its strong support and assistance in our investigation of the rosewood case. Singapore has zero tolerance on the use of Singapore as a conduit for wildlife trafficking and timber smuggling. We adopt a multi-prong and whole-of-government approach underpinned by a robust enforcement regime to deter illegal wildlife trade. Besides rosewood, Singapore has also successfully made a number of seizures such as ivory, rhinoceros horns, pangolin scales, tortoises and turtles. The timely sharing of intelligence and information, international collaboration and cooperation between wildlife enforcement agencies and perseverance are important elements in combatting the illegal wildlife trade."

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The Certificate was presented during a joint session of the 29th meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and the 23rd meeting of the CITES Plants Committee, held in Geneva from 18 to 22 July 2017 and from 22 to 27 July 2017, respectively.

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The Paris Agreement: Turning Point for a Climate Solution

by [David Waskow](#) [1] and [Jennifer Morgan](#) [2] - December 12, 2015

WRI experts [Yamide Dagnet](#) [3], [Eliza Northrop](#) [4], [Heather McGray](#) [5], [Athena Ballesteros](#) [6], [Joe Thwaites](#) [7] and [Niranjali Amerasinghe](#) [8] contributed to this post.



Today marks an historic turning point in global action on climate change. Paris Agreement adopted. Photo credit WRI

At the [UN Climate Conference in Paris](#) [9], known as COP21, 196 countries joined together in the [Paris Agreement](#) [10], a universal pact that sets the world on a course to a zero-carbon, resilient, prosperous and fair future. While the Agreement is not enough by itself to solve the problem, it places us clearly on the path to a truly global solution.

Building on the foundation of national climate plans from 187 countries, the Paris Agreement is a reflection of the remarkable momentum from cities, companies, civil society groups and others that complement the global will to act that has grown over the years since the first international conference on climate change in 1992.

The Paris Agreement will maintain and accelerate that momentum. It offers clear direction with:

- long-term goals and signals,
- a commitment to return regularly to make climate action stronger,
- a response to the impact of extreme climate events on the most vulnerable,
- the transparency needed to ensure action takes place and

- finance, capacity building and technology to enable real change.

But the Agreement does even more: it marks a new type of international cooperation where developed and developing countries are united in a common framework, and all are involved, engaged contributors. It reflects the growing recognition that climate action offers tremendous opportunities and benefits, and that climate impacts can be tackled effectively, with the unity of purpose that has brought us to this moment.

The moment in Paris extended far beyond the Agreement itself. Cities and forests, business and finance – all these were part of the many initiatives and commitments that were launched or strengthened over the past two weeks. And they will be key to the solution as action moves forward with the energy generated by Paris.

Key Provisions

Long-Term Mitigation Goals

The Paris Agreement sets landmark goals for taking action on climate change, aiming to keep temperature rise to well below 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F) and to pursue efforts to keep it to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F). To achieve this, countries will aim to peak global emissions as soon as possible and – remarkably – countries agreed to reduce emissions rapidly to reach net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the second half of the century. They will do that taking equity, sustainable development and poverty into account.

Five-Year Cycles of Action

To build on the momentum from countries' national climate plans put forward for Paris, countries have agreed to a process to ramp up action on emissions every five years. By 2020, countries have agreed to come back and either submit new or updated national climate plans (known as nationally determined contributions). Every five years after that, countries will submit new contributions. Countries have also agreed that their mitigation plans will represent a progression beyond their previous efforts.

Five-Year Comprehensive Global Stocktake

The Agreement establishes a strong process for countries to regularly assess implementation and take stock of climate action every five years, called the Global Stocktake. This will assess

implementation of action on mitigation, adaptation and support, including finance, and inform implementation of countries' climate plans. Assessment will start in 2023, but countries have agreed to return in 2018 to review implementation of mitigation measures to inform their 2020 mitigation contributions.

Adaptation

Adaptation to climate change is a central issue for global climate action in this Agreement, where it is on par with mitigation. It establishes a global goal of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability, including an adequate adaptation response given the Agreement's temperature goal. The Agreement creates a cycle of action for strengthening adaptation efforts regularly, similar to the mitigation cycle. Countries will have flexibility on the timing and methods for communicating information about their adaptation activities or efforts. Support will be provided to developing countries for planning, implementation and communication of adaptation activities.

Loss and Damage

The Agreement addresses the important issue of loss and damage, referring to the serious impacts of climate change when mitigation and adaptation fail. Those people who are affected by climate change may face damage to their property or health, or in worse cases, permanent loss of land or livelihoods, or even loss of life. The Agreement acknowledges the issue of loss and damage as separate from adaptation, and makes permanent the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage, established two years ago to find ways to address these issues. The outcome also establishes a task force on climate change-related displacement within the WIM, and makes clear that the loss and damage provision does not create new legal liability for emitting countries.



WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

COP21 MAJOR OUTCOMES

5 Key Elements of the Paris Agreement

Countries to
**STRENGTHEN
CLIMATE
ACTIONS**
every 5 years

ADAPTATION
is a central pillar
to help world's
most vulnerable

**LONG-TERM
GOAL**
to achieve
climate neutral
world

**ENHANCED
TRANSPARENCY**
to ensure
commitments
are met

**FINANCE,
CAPACITY
BUILDING**
will scale up
support for
least developed
countries

The Paris climate negotiations prompted more than 10,000 new initiatives involving cities, regions, companies, investors and civil society organizations, including:

186
COUNTRIES
shared national
climate action plans,
called INDCs

127+
MILLION HECTARES
of degraded land in Africa
and Latin America
to be restored

400+
CITIES SET

\$1T
IN SOLAR

[11]

Finance

Finance will provide the needed power to turn the world toward a zero-carbon, climate-resilient future, and the purpose of the Agreement states that all financial flows – both public and private – need to be shifted from high to low emissions activities and risky to resilient investments. The Agreement makes clear that developed countries will continue to provide and mobilize finance to support developing countries, and developed countries agreed to continue their 2020 commitment of mobilizing \$100 billion a year until 2025. For the period after that, governments will adopt a new, higher, collective goal, though the extent to which finance will increase, and who will mobilize it, is a significant outstanding question. The Agreement opens the door for developing countries to provide support to their peers, recognizing that some developing countries are already doing so.

In addition, governments agreed to balance public funding between adaptation and mitigation, and agreed to significantly increase support for adaptation before 2020, which is of vital importance for the most vulnerable countries dealing with the impacts of a warmer world. Countries also committed to improve reporting on finance, with everyone providing information about finance provided or received, as appropriate.

Transparency

The Agreement establishes a common system for transparency for all countries. Through an enhanced transparency framework all countries will be required to report on their emissions and track progress on achieving their nationally determined contributions regularly. The information provided by all parties will be subject to an expert review and facilitative multilateral consideration of progress. The framework provides flexibility and support that takes account of different countries' capacities. Developed countries will report on the finance and support they provide, and developing countries will report on the finance and support needed and received.

Capacity Building

For the new international climate agreement to be universal, countries acknowledged that effective capacity building is vital to enable developing countries to take strong climate action. To elevate this issue, countries established the new Paris Committee on Capacity Building to

oversee a work plan to enhance capacity building. The Committee will identify capacity gaps and needs, foster international cooperation and identify opportunities to strengthen capacity for climate action.

Legal Form

The Paris Agreement is a universal, legal agreement under the UNFCCC, with the participation of all countries. It will be open for signature next April, and will come into force in January 2020. Notably, the Agreement contains a strong, legally binding framework for reporting, transparency and review of implementation capable of driving greater ambition to tackle climate change. The establishment of a mechanism to facilitate implementation and promote compliance will provide further assurance of Parties' actions.

Climate Conference Highlights

COP21's outcome fulfilled the promise of its opening day, when more than 150 heads of state and government converged in Paris to [express their commitment](#) [12] to climate action and a viable agreement. On the same day, 20 countries and 27 representatives from the private sector announced a multi-billion dollar clean energy fund and commitment to increase R&D investments, a [major boost to the talks](#) [13]. This set the stage for more progress on climate action across a wide spectrum of areas.

Forests and Restoration

Opening day, November 30, also saw [significant government commitments](#) [14] to protect forests, including \$5 billion in funding from Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. [Global Forest Watch Climate](#) [15], launched during the conference, offers the potential to shift the debate on monitoring forest-based emissions. The [African Forest and Landscapes Restoration Initiative](#) [16] (AFR100) seeks to restore 100 million hectares (nearly 250 million acres) of degraded and deforested land in Africa by 2030. [Initiative 20x20](#) [17] is landscape restoration effort in Latin America and the Caribbean that has now reached nearly 28 million hectares (nearly 70 million acres) and \$730 million in investment.

Cities

Building efficiency, sustainable mobility and interactive tools were among the city-level solutions advanced to prevent carbon-intensive congestion, sprawl and inefficiencies from locking in for

decades to come. WRI [announced 25 new partners](#) [18] to the [Building Efficiency Accelerator](#) [19] as part of the [UN SE4All initiative](#) [20] and presented the New Climate Economy message of better transport, better climate. A coalition including WRI advanced the [Paris Process on Mobility and Climate](#) [21] to position mitigation and adaptation contributions from transport sector. Along with UK DECC, WRI [demonstrated](#) [22] the [2050 Global Calculator](#) [23], an interactive model – WRI contributed the transport section – that allows users to explore 2 degrees C pathways. Looking ahead, the UN announced the [Climate Action 2016](#) [24] conference to deepen and expand action in six focus areas—with [cities and transport](#) [25] being key.

Business

More than 114 companies committed to set emissions reduction targets in line with [Science Based Targets](#) [26], using what scientists say is necessary to keep global warming below 2 degrees C. Participating companies have combined annual carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to what 125 coal-fired power plants emit in a year. [Goldman Sachs](#) [27] announced plans to invest \$150 billion in clean energy projects and technology. The investment bank previously had a target to invest \$40 billion in clean energy technologies by 2012, and will now almost quadruple that by 2025. [Google](#) [28] added 842 megawatts of renewable energy capacity around the world, nearly doubling the amount of renewables it has purchased to 2 gigawatts, equivalent to taking nearly 1 million cars off the road.

Investment

Institutional investors and banks signaled their plans to build climate change considerations into their decisions. [Allianz and ABP officially joined the Portfolio Carbon Initiative](#) [29], bringing the value of the Coalition's assets under management to \$600 billion. [Five Principles for Mainstreaming Climate Action within Financial Institutions](#) [30] also launched, with more than two dozen financial institutions indicating their intent to incorporate climate change into strategies and operations. An alliance of global investors, development banks, financial sector associations and NGOs launched the [Green Infrastructure Investment Coalition](#) [31] to support the accelerated financing of green infrastructure through investor-government global and regional dialogues, and 27 global investors issued the [Paris Green Bonds Statement](#) [32] to support policies that drive the development of long term, sustainable global markets in green bonds.

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ISSUE BRIEF

THE PARIS AGREEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Paris Agreement requires all countries—developed and developing—to make significant commitments to address climate change. Countries responsible for 97 percent of global emissions have already pledged their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for how they will address climate change. Countries will revisit their current pledges by 2020 and, ideally, strengthen their emissions reduction targets for 2030. The Paris Agreement includes a stronger transparency and accountability system for all countries—requiring reporting on greenhouse gas inventories and projections that are subject to a technical expert review and a multilateral examination. Countries will continue to provide climate finance to help the most vulnerable adapt to climate change and build low-carbon economies. While the Paris Agreement does not “solve” climate change, it allows us to start the next wave of global climate actions, creating a virtuous cycle for more aggressive action in the decades to come.

In Paris on December 12, 2015, countries adopted an international agreement to address climate change that requires deeper emissions reduction commitments from all countries—developed and developing. Countries responsible for 97 percent of global emissions submitted their climate commitments prior to the conference. These commitments have been enshrined in over 160 countries with domestic ratification, acceptance, or approval. The agreement contains provisions to hold countries accountable to their commitments and mobilize greater investments to assist developing countries in building low-carbon, climate-resilient economies. Encouragingly, businesses, investors, states, provinces, cities, financial institutions, and others

have also pledged actions to help governments implement the agreement and even exceed their commitments.

While the Paris Agreement does not “solve” climate change, it is a critical inflection point. It brings us much closer to a safer climate trajectory and creates an ambitious path forward for decades to come. Countries have put forth an agreement that helps strengthen national action by ensuring that the current commitments are the floor—not the ceiling—of ambition. The agreement will also help spur greater action by cities, states, provinces, companies, and financial institutions. The Paris Agreement has created a virtuous cycle of increased ambition over time.

“A great tide has turned. Finally the world stands united against the central environmental challenge of our time, committed to cutting the carbon pollution that’s driving climate change. This agreement sets us on a course of verifiable gains we can build on over time. It provides real protection for people on the front lines of climate chaos. It speeds the global shift away from dirty fossil fuels and toward cleaner, smarter energy options to power our future without imperiling our world. And it sends a clear message to our children: we will not abandon you to pay the price for reckless habits that wreak havoc and ruin on our planet and lives. A crisis that took centuries to get here won’t go away overnight. But climate change has met its match in the collective will of a united world. Our challenge now, in our country and all others, is to make good on the promise of Paris, by turning the action we’ve pledged into the progress we need.”

— Rhea Suh, President, Natural Resources Defense Council¹

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT?

The agreement in Paris was built on the foundations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Copenhagen and Cancun Agreements. This new agreement has set countries' minimum obligations, implemented mechanisms to spur additional action in developing countries, supported the most vulnerable countries in addressing climate change, and established systems to hold countries to their commitments. The Paris Agreement will be strengthened over time using its solid framework.

WHAT NEW EMISSIONS REDUCTION TARGETS HAVE COUNTRIES AGREED TO IMPLEMENT?

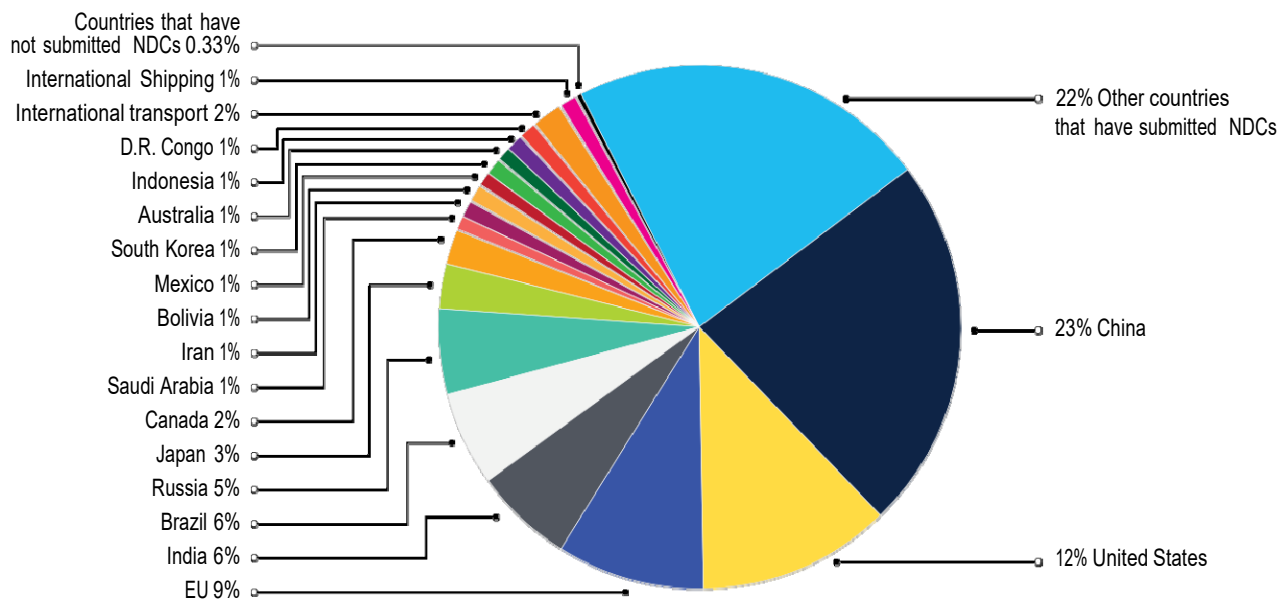
Countries responsible for more than 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions made specific commitments to reduce their emissions by 2020 as a part of the Copenhagen and Cancun agreements. The Paris Agreement includes commitments that go beyond 2020, reflecting a greater level of ambition than in the previous commitments.² Countries' emissions reduction commitments reflect their different levels of development and capabilities. For example, the United States and European Union have committed to economy-wide emissions reduction targets (e.g., cuts below 2005 levels), whereas developing countries and emerging economies have committed to targets that reflect their level

of development and historic contribution to climate change (e.g., greenhouse gas intensity targets). The 192 countries responsible for more than 97 percent of the world's climate pollution have announced specific reduction plans also known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (see Figure 1).³ The Paris Agreement entered into force on November 4, 2016, one month after 55 parties representing 55 percent of global emissions joined. To date, 160 parties have formally joined the Agreement.

WILL THE AGREEMENT DRIVE EVEN GREATER ACTION IN THE YEARS TO COME?

Countries will need to re-visit their current pledges by 2020 and, ideally, strengthen their 2030 targets because they discovered that they can achieve more aggressive action than they envisioned at this moment. This will start a process in which countries outline their next set of commitments every five years—setting a framework for continuously ratcheting down emissions over time toward a long-term target of emissions neutrality. Beginning in 2018 and every five years thereafter, countries will have a chance to take stock of the aggregate effort of all national pledges to determine whether the world is on a path to keep the global average temperature to well under a 2 degrees Celsius rise from pre-industrial levels. This is one of the most critical outcomes of the Paris Agreement—a solid process for reassessing and deepening emissions reduction commitments every five years.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY COUNTRIES WITH CLIMATE TARGETS



Source: Natural Resources Defense Council. Countries' share of emissions was calculated as a share of the world total GHG emissions for 2012, as reported by EDGAR. Countries that have not submitted targets are: Libya, Syria, Nicaragua. (Syria has not joined the Paris Agreement.) Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research, "GHG (CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, F-gases) emission time series 1990-2012 per region/country," European Commission Joint Research Centre, <http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=GHGs1990-2012>.

PARIS AGREEMENT: BUILDING UPON A HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), formed in 1992 by 196 parties, set the ultimate objective to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”⁴ The world has come a long way since the inception of the UNFCCC, sometimes in fits and starts. In 2009, the Copenhagen climate change conference produced the Copenhagen Accord. This Accord was expanded and formally adopted in 2010 as the Cancun Agreements where dozens of countries—including the United States, China, European Union, and India—committed to reducing their emissions by 2020. Countries also agreed to a new set of mechanisms to help developing countries reduce emissions and adapt to climate change, as well as a new system to track countries’ progress on their commitments. In 2011, climate negotiations in Durban, South Africa set the end of 2015 as the deadline for a new international agreement “applicable to all.” The Paris Agreement has fulfilled this mandate to establish a post-2020 agreement.

has been pledged to the GCF from 31 countries, including a \$3 billion pledge from the United States. In addition, countries agreed to help mobilize \$100 billion by 2020 through public and private financing to assist developing countries in reducing emissions and adapting to climate change. These investments help spur additional global action on climate change and help countries address its devastating impacts.

The Paris Agreement further catalyzes action and implementation over time, as developed countries have agreed to continue the existing collective mobilization commitment on finance (\$100 billion annually), through 2025. And prior to 2025, developed countries would set a new collective quantified goal of mobilizing at least \$100 billion for climate finance. Other countries are encouraged to also help mobilize finance. To provide predictability on climate finance, developed countries will communicate every two years on projected levels of public climate finance for developing countries, while developing countries will report on climate finance on a voluntary basis. Regular updates send a signal for where low-carbon investments can be made, and the resources available to help the most vulnerable communities adapt to climate change.

HOW WILL THE AGREEMENT TRACK COUNTRY-LEVEL PROGRESS?

The Paris Agreement includes a stronger transparency and accountability system that holds governments accountable to their commitments. The new transparency regime is legally binding, and applies to all countries. Countries must report their greenhouse gas inventories and progress towards their emissions reduction targets every two years. The reports will also require reporting on adaptation and will provide assistance to developing countries that need help to improve their reporting. These national level reports will be subject to an independent “technical expert review.” Countries will then be subject to a “multilateral examination” to consider progress toward their targets. These strengthened tools will shine a spotlight on whether countries are following through with their commitments as we will have publicly available and regular opportunities to track progress. These transparency and accountability tools will be aided by the powerful domestic motivation to follow through on their new commitments, since countries have realized that acting on climate change is in their own national interest.

HOW WILL DEVELOPING COUNTRIES BE ASSISTED IN REDUCING EMISSIONS AND ADAPTING TO THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE?

In Copenhagen, countries agreed to establish the multilateral Green Climate Fund (GCF) to help mobilize funding in developing countries to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Nearly \$11 billion

WHAT ARE COUNTRIES’ POST-2020 CLIMATE TARGETS?

Prior to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, countries submitted their proposed climate commitments, including specific targets for emissions reductions. So far, 192 countries—accounting for 97 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions—have submitted their climate pledges.⁵ These proposed commitments turned in to NDCs as soon as each country formally joined the Paris Agreement.

- n United States: cut economy-wide emissions of greenhouse gas emissions by 26 to 28 percent below its 2005 level by 2025 and make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28 percent.
- n China: peak carbon emissions no later than 2030, increase non-fossil fuels to 20 percent of the energy mix, and reduce carbon emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) by 60 to 65 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.
- n India: reduce emissions intensity by 33 to 35 percent from 2005 levels by 2030, increase cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel energy resources to 40 percent by 2030, and create additional carbon sequestration of 2.5 to 3 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030.
- n Mexico: cut greenhouse gas and short-lived climate pollutants 25 percent below business-as-usual (BAU) by 2030, implying a reduction of 22 percent for greenhouse gas emissions and 51 percent for black carbon.
- n European Union: reduce emissions to at least 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 through only domestic measures.

- n Brazil: reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 37 percent below 2005 levels by 2025, increasing renewable resources to 45 percent of the energy mix by 2030, and increasing the share of non-hydropower renewables in the electricity mix to 23 percent by 2030.
- n South Korea: reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 37 percent from BAU levels by 2030 across all economic sectors.
- n Indonesia: cut emissions by 29 percent from BAU levels by 2030.
- n Japan: reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent from 2013 levels by 2030.
- n Australia: reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

WILL THESE ACTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE ACTUALLY BE IMPLEMENTED?

Since the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, nations have rolled up their sleeves and implemented domestic actions to move toward low-carbon economies, including renewable energy targets, cap-and-trade programs, and sector-specific policies. For example, more than 160 countries now have renewable energy targets and policies.⁶ China has just announced a new set of domestic actions including plans for a national cap-and-trade program, and climate policies have been adopted in the vast majority of the world's major economies. Countries have realized that it is in their own interest to cut their carbon pollution. They have concluded that, far from destroying the economy, domestic climate action produces real benefits for their citizens, including new jobs, reduced poverty, and lower mortality rates. And as natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, they have seen that not addressing climate change has real and lasting consequences.

THE PARIS AGREEMENT WON'T "SOLVE" CLIMATE CHANGE

While the Paris Agreement won't "solve" climate change, it puts us much closer to a safer trajectory and highlights the path forward. Before the Copenhagen Accord, we were potentially headed for an increase in global average temperatures of 5 degrees Celsius (9 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels by 2100. The commitments from the Copenhagen Accord were estimated to bring this temperature increase down to 3.6 degrees Celsius (6.5 degrees Fahrenheit). The commitments submitted in advance of the Paris climate summit put us on a path to a 2.7 degrees Celsius (4.9 degrees Fahrenheit) temperature rise by the end of the century, closer to the 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) goal.

The Paris Agreement will now allow us to start the next wave of global climate actions. This agreement ensures that the national pledges are the floor—not the ceiling—of ambition. It will have five-year reviews under a single global transparency system with flexibility for developing countries that need it. It will spur countries to undertake even deeper cuts before 2030 and mobilize resources to help countries implement even stronger domestic reforms. Aggressive climate targets are still within reach if countries enact a virtuous cycle of ever more aggressive climate action as outlined in the Paris Agreement.⁷ Now that we have the first global climate agreement with commitments from all countries, it is time to roll up our sleeves to ensure future cycles of climate commitments can become more and more ambitious over time.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Rhea Suh, "NRDC President: Climate Change has 'Met its Match in the Will of a United World'" Natural Resources Defense Council. December 12, 2015. <http://www.nrdc.org/media/2015/151212.asp>.
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- 6 REN21, *Renewables 2015 Global Status Report*, REN21 Secretariat, 2015, www.ren21.net/status-of-renewables/global-status-report.
- 7 Climate Interactive conducted a study to show that in a "ratchet success" scenario, it would be possible to cut emissions to 1.8°C (3.2°F) of warming above pre-industrial levels. Under this scenario countries set in motion regularly more aggressive climate actions in the years to come. For more see: <https://www.climateinteractive.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Ratchet-Success-14-December-2015.pdf>.