

Clean Energy at the UN Climate Summit (COP21)

Overview

The world is gathering in Paris, France, for another round of negotiations that aim to produce a global agreement to ramp up the fight against climate change.

While there have been many rounds of talks before this, there are three main reasons the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) is seen as a significant milestone in the world's transition to clean, renewable energy:

1. **Global commitments can drive the expansion of clean energy.** Countries previously agreed at COP17 in Durban, South Africa, that 2015 would be the year the world would strike a new global climate deal. Scheduled to come into force in 2020, this new international agreement is expected to include pledges from all countries to cut or curb emissions. COP21 represents an important moment for all countries to set firm, cooperative paths forward to cut carbon pollution and manage the impacts of a changing climate. A strong deal in Paris will also send a clear signal to world markets that clean, renewable electricity is quickly becoming the energy source of choice — and that signal will unlock the additional capital needed to throw the global clean energy transition into high gear.
2. **Clean energy is the world's best tool for fighting climate change.** Building an efficient, clean energy economy around the world is the single best tool for holding back climate change. This worldwide transition requires strong policy, government and private sector leadership, and access to technology to harness the world's abundant renewable resources and massively expand the supply of clean electricity. For the first time in recorded history, carbon pollution levels in 2014 did not rise while global GDP grew — a phenomenon the IEA largely attributes to the increase in energy efficiency and renewable energy around the world.
3. **Momentum is building and leadership is taking many forms.** Compared to previous years, clean energy innovation and other efforts to fight climate change have hit the mainstream globally, which increases the likelihood of success. Momentum is building thanks to leadership from many sectors — private enterprise, the mayors of major cities, and other sub-national governments are all stepping forward with climate solutions. Cities, corporations and individual citizens all have an essential role to play in cutting carbon pollution, so the leadership emerging from these quarters is cause for optimism and is raising expectations for a positive outcome.

What the Paris Talks Need to Deliver on Clean Energy

CLEAN ENERGY TARGETS

In the long term, 2050 targets for carbon-free energy generation are needed to guide the global transition away from fossil fuels. Clear short- and mid-term targets are also needed, which will enable countries to succeed in 2050. These clean energy targets will indicate how significant a role clean energy generation will have in helping countries meet their emissions-reduction commitments.

REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY

Countries must review their climate action commitments every five years, and strengthen those commitments as needed to achieve their emission reduction goals.

CLOSE THE GAP ON CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

To reduce carbon pollution at the scale and rate required to avoid dangerous climate change, countries need to show greater ambition in relation to the climate solutions they will adopt and the amount of clean energy they generate and consume. Doing so requires implementation plans for clean energy and commitments to increase the capital invested in the clean energy and clean technology sectors. Countries can, for example, scale up their clean energy plans and actions before 2020 and pledge to contribute to meeting the climate finance target of USD\$100 billion a year by 2020, which would help expand climate mitigation efforts via clean energy.

Status of the UN Negotiations

The majority of the text that currently forms the Paris agreement still needs to be agreed upon. This means that all negotiators and governments will be engaged in true negotiations, trying to find common ground and developing proposals to achieve agreement.

These discussions will cover challenging issues, including financing for climate change solutions and ensuring a mechanism is included that requires countries to consistently review and improve on the actions they are taking to fight climate change, including their commitments to increase clean energy generation.

Key Issues Related to Clean Energy in the Negotiations

AMBITION FOR CLIMATE ACTION BETWEEN NOW AND 2020

This part of the negotiations will discuss key challenges, looking at which developed countries can or will increase their targets, and which will take further action on clean energy. This work-stream will try to encourage better and more collaborative cross-border climate action, including (but not limited to) clean energy innovation and deployment.

AMBITION FOR CLIMATE ACTION AFTER 2020

This work-stream will discuss the long-term 2050 targets, and also a mechanism to ensure that ambition continues to be reviewed and strengthened, including on mitigation actions such as clean energy deployment.

FINANCING COMMITMENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

This discussion focuses on avenues to raise a targeted USD\$100 billion a year by 2020 to pay for both climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. It looks at both private and public finance options, ways to meet the 2020 targets, and developing new targets for the period after 2020. This finance primarily comes from developed nations and can fund mitigation efforts in developing countries, including clean energy development efforts.

Canada's Role in the Negotiations

Canada's tone and participation at these negotiations will be under scrutiny given our history of blocking progress at previous summits and the shift to a more positive and solution-oriented approach heading into COP21. The world will welcome Canada to the negotiations, and the presence and contribution of provincial, municipal, industry, and civil society leaders will help to reinforce the impression that Canada is taking a new, solutions-oriented approach on climate. The recent announcements of new levels of climate action from the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba – in addition to early leadership shown by B.C., Ontario, and Quebec – will help earn Canada a seat at the climate solutions table.

Meanwhile, clean energy solutions from around the world will be on display at COP21. Canadian leaders will have ample opportunities to speak with experts and examine real-world examples of solutions at work in other jurisdictions.

Key Issues for Canada on Clean Energy

FINANCING

Canada has delivered \$1.2 billion in fast-start financing to date, and the federal government just announced a new commitment of \$2.65 billion over the next five years to support climate action in developing countries. Canada's contribution so far has largely taken the form of loans for adaptation, as well as mitigation efforts, in more than 50 developing countries. According to the Canadian Coalition for Climate and Development, this \$1.2 billion was considered Canada's fair share of the initial \$30 billion global fast-start financing goal because Canada provided four per cent of the global total, which represents our country's traditional contribution level to multilateral financing efforts. There are, however, concerns that Canada's contribution came at the expense of aid financing. Canada's new commitment is a tangible step closer to the global target of raising USD \$100 billion per year by 2020; a key issue to watch will be level of contributions other countries are committing to make in both the short and medium term.

TARGETS FOR CLEAN ENERGY

Prime Minister Trudeau has committed to work with provinces on clean energy and climate solutions in the 90 days following the Paris climate summit. If the parties strike a strong global deal in Paris, it could add momentum to the climate leadership and ambition shown by Canada's provincial and federal governments.

Clean Energy Canada's Expectations for the Paris agreement

Undoubtedly, a strong climate deal in Paris would help to send a clear signal to world markets that clean energy is the power of choice, and clean energy will power the economic giants of the future. However, it's clear the global transition to clean energy is already well underway – and that will hold true even if the Paris talks fall short of expectations.

It's happening because clean energy represents an immense economic opportunity. In the past five years, more than a trillion dollars (USD) has been invested in renewable energy, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance. Nations representing nearly half of the global emissions have implemented or committed to implementing a price on carbon pollution, according to the World

Bank. Even in Canada, new jobs were created faster in the renewable energy sector than in any other sector in 2014, our research for Tracking the Energy Revolution (Canada, 2015) found.

Certainly, a strong commitment in Paris to decarbonize major economies, invest in climate solutions, and help ensure clean energy access for the world would create a major incentive for countries, including Canada, to scale up investments in renewable energy technology and innovation. It would also encourage countries that are currently lagging behind in the transition to take serious measures — like pricing carbon pollution and phasing out fossil fuels — to change how they produce and use energy.

Ultimately a successful outcome in Paris could boost momentum around the world for the clean energy transition — and as Canada follows through on its climate leadership commitments, we could supply the expertise, technology and policy solutions the world will be looking for.

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About Clean Energy Canada

Clean Energy Canada is a program of the Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, B.C.

We work to accelerate Canada's transition to clean and renewable energy systems by conducting and commissioning research, hosting dialogues, and inspiring and informing policy leadership. Through collaboration with civil society, governments and the private sector, we raise awareness and build support for solutions that address climate disruption and foster an energy efficient, environmentally responsible and prosperous economy.