

Summit on Climate Change



Power Green Growth, Protect the Planet

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Backgrounder

Why we need to “Seal the Deal” in Copenhagen

On 7 December 2009, representatives from 193 Parties will convene in Copenhagen seeking to seal the deal on a fair, comprehensive and scientifically rigorous climate agreement for the post-2012 period.

This year, we have the opportunity to choose a new path. Copenhagen offers the chance to retool our global economy – to invest in clean energy, boost prosperity and lift millions out of poverty. By sealing the deal in Copenhagen, we can provide a more livable planet for our children and generations to come.

If we seal the deal in Copenhagen this December...

We strengthen long-term economic recovery. Solutions to climate change are also solutions to our current economic and energy woes. Stimulus package spending on energy efficiency, public transport, smart grids and renewable energy technologies provide double dividends by revitalizing our economy in a safer, more sustainable direction and boosting energy independence.

We build the economy of tomorrow, today. Businesses will have the policy and price signals needed to generate investment in green technologies, create green jobs, and scale up clean energy and infrastructure.

We save money. Economists agree it is cheaper to act today than to delay. Climate change-related costs are expected to rise dramatically in the coming decades as livelihoods are destroyed, hunger and disease spread, millions are displaced, and extreme weather affects every continent. By investing in simple, cost effective measures today, we can limit some of the worst impacts of climate change and build equity in a safer future.

We build a cleaner, healthier, safer future for our children. The accelerating impacts of climate change will dramatically alter life as we know it for future generations, including for our children and grandchildren. While we can't reverse climate change, we can slow its effects by cutting emissions and taking prudent action to preserve natural resources and strengthen our resilience to extreme weather events.

We demonstrate our values. Climate change is about protecting lives and livelihoods, and the legacy we leave for the future. Addressing climate change now demonstrates that we care about protecting the planet and the well-being of generations to come..

If we don't act this year in Copenhagen...

We risk catastrophic consequences from a dangerously unstable climate.

- Scientists say greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2020 if we are to avoid climate impacts that could destabilize every aspect of society. Already, some of the worst-case scenarios projected two years ago by the IPCC are being realized – or exceeded.
- Polar ice caps and glaciers are melting at a faster pace than expected. Sea levels are rising. Oceans are becoming more acidic. Desertification is spreading. Deadly storms, droughts, floods and extreme weather are becoming more frequent.
- Some 25-30 per cent of the world's species risk extinction by 2100.
- Small island nations such as the Maldives could disappear under water.

Hundreds of millions of people could lose their homes, livelihoods and means of survival as a result of climate impacts.

- Three-quarters of all humanitarian disasters are now climate-related, up from 50 per cent only a decade ago. In the last two decades, the number of annual recorded disasters has doubled to 400.
- Altered weather patterns could increase competition over water, food, land and other vital resources.
- Huge populations risk severe water shortages as glaciers melt with alarming speed in the Himalayas, the Rockies and the Andes. Water tables are under serious stress in China, India, and the Southwestern United States.
- By 2020, some 75 to 250 million people in Africa will face increased water shortages. Rain-fed agriculture, the dominant method in Africa, is projected to decrease by 50 per cent in that time, with enormous consequences for hunger, malnutrition, disease and political instability.
- Rising sea levels could imperil 1 in 10 people who now live in at-risk coastal areas just a few meters above existing sea levels.
- Warmer global temperatures and heavier rains could increase the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue.

We lock in more dangerous climate impacts down the road. Once emitted, greenhouse gases reside in the atmosphere for decades if not centuries. Investments made today in fossil fuel-based energy infrastructure will lock in emissions – and hence future climate impacts – for decades to come.

We will lose out on the economic opportunities of the future. Countries that fail to utilize green technologies could lose out to neighbors that have made their industries more energy efficient, more competitive and more profitable.

There will be long-lasting political costs. We could miss a unique political window of opportunity for action that may not re-open anytime soon. It will be difficult to mobilize momentum for climate action later if we fail to act in Copenhagen. We might also set a negative precedent for cooperation on other global issues, including trade, finance and international security.

The longer we wait, the costlier climate change will become – for our planet for the economy, and for our children's future. A climate change agreement at Copenhagen is the smartest deal we can make for our shared future. We need to act now.

More information: www.un.org/climatechange