

Nearly 200 nations pledge to slow global warming

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

December 13, 2015 Sunday

FINAL EDITION

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Section: NEWS; Pg. A1

Length: 1447 words

Byline: Associated Press

Body

Long-term goal • Keep global warming "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) Still to be ratified • At least 55 countries linked to at least 55 pct. of global emissions must sign off Critics remain • Nicaragua balks, and thousands demonstrate, calling accord too weak to save planet

LE BOURGET, France • About 200 nations adopted the first global pact to fight **climate change** on Saturday, calling on the world to collectively cut and then eliminate greenhouse gas pollution but imposing no sanctions on countries that don't.

The "Paris agreement" aims to keep global temperatures from rising another degree Celsius (1.8 Fahrenheit) between now and 2100, a key demand of poor countries ravaged by rising sea levels and other effects of **climate change**.

Loud applause erupted in the conference hall after French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius gavelled the agreement. Some delegates wept, others embraced.

"It's a victory for all of the planet and for future generations," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said, adding that the pact will "prevent the worst most devastating consequences of **climate change** from ever happening."

Brazilian Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira added: "Today, we've proven that it's possible for every country to come together, hand in hand, to do its part to fight **climate change**."

In the pact, the countries pledge to limit the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by human activity to the levels that trees, soil and oceans can absorb naturally, beginning at some point between 2050 and 2100.

In practical terms, achieving that goal means the world would have to stop emitting greenhouse gases - most of which come from the burning of oil, coal and gas for energy - altogether in the next half-century, scientists said. That's because the less we pollute, the less pollution nature absorbs.

Achieving such a reduction in emissions would involve a complete transformation of how people get energy, and many activists worry that despite the pledges, countries are not ready to make such profound, costly **changes**.

RATIFICATION IS NEEDED

The deal now needs to be ratified by individual governments - at least 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions - before taking effect. It is the first pact to ask all countries to join the fight against global warming, representing a sea **change** in U.N. talks that previously required only wealthy nations to reduce their emissions.

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"History will remember this day," U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said. "The Paris agreement on climate change is a monumental success for the planet and its people."

Speaking from Washington, President Barack Obama said the climate agreement offers "the best chance to save the one planet we have."

The deal commits countries to keeping the rise in global temperatures by the year 2100 compared with pre-industrial times "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), and says they will "endeavor to limit" them even more, to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The world has already warmed by about 1 degree Celsius since pre-industrial times.

Ben Strauss, a sea level researcher at Climate Central, said limiting warming to 1.5 degrees instead of 2 degrees could potentially cut in half the projected 280 million people whose houses will eventually be submerged by rising seas.

More than 180 countries have ready presented plans to limit greenhouse gas emissions - a breakthrough in itself after years of stalemate. But those pledges are not enough to achieve the goals in the accord, meaning countries will need to cut much more to meet the goal.

"We've agreed to what we ought to be doing, but no one yet has agreed to go do it," said Dennis Clare, a negotiator for the Federated States of Micronesia. "It's a whole lot of pomp, given the circumstances."

The agreement sets a goal of getting global greenhouse gas emissions to start falling "as soon as possible"; they have been generally rising since the industrial revolution.

It says wealthy nations should continue to provide financial support for poor nations to cope with climate change and encourages other countries to pitch in on a voluntary basis. That reflects Western attempts to expand the donor base to include advanced developing countries such as China.

In a victory for small island nations, the agreement includes a section highlighting the losses they expect to incur from climate-related disasters that it's too late to adapt to. However, a footnote specifies that it "does not involve or provide any basis for any liability or compensation" - a key U.S. demand because it would let the Obama administration sign on to the deal without going through the Republican-led Senate.

The adoption of the agreement was held up for nearly two hours as the United States pressed successfully to change the wording on emissions targets from saying developed countries "shall" commit to reducing emissions to they "should." Experts said that means the deal probably won't need U.S. congressional approval.

OPPOSITION REMAINS

Nicaragua said it would not support the pact. Its envoy, Paul Oquist, said the agreement does not go far enough to cut global warming and help the poor countries affected by it.

Nicaragua is one of eight participating countries that haven't submitted emissions targets, after Venezuelan envoy Claudia Salerno said her country - which had been holding out - liked the agreement and had submitted its pledge.

Thousands of protesters demonstrated across Paris, saying the accord is too weak to save the planet.

Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace said the accord is a good start but isn't enough. "Today the human race has joined in a common cause, but it's what happens after this conference that really matters," he said. "This deal alone won't dig us out the hole we're in, but it makes the sides less steep."

KEY POINTS OF CLIMATE DEAL

LONG-TERM GOAL

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The long-term objective of the agreement is to make sure global warming stays "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and to "pursue efforts" to limit the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). To achieve that goal, governments pledged to stop the rise in heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions "as soon as possible." By some point after 2050, the agreement says, man-made emissions should be reduced to a level that forests and oceans can absorb.

EMISSIONS TARGETS

To reach the long-term goal, countries agreed to set national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions every five years. More than 180 countries have already submitted targets for the first cycle beginning in 2020. Only developed countries are expected to slash their emissions in absolute terms; developing nations are "encouraged" to do so as their capabilities evolve over time. Until then, they are expected only to rein in the growth of emissions as their economies develop.

REVIEWING TARGETS

The initial targets won't be enough to put the world on a path to meet the long-term temperature goal. So the agreement asks governments to review their targets in the next four years and see if they can "update" them. That doesn't require governments to deepen their cuts. But the hope is that it will be possible for them to do so if renewable energy sources become more affordable and effective.

TRANSPARENCY

There is no penalty for countries that miss their emissions targets. But the agreement has transparency rules to encourage countries to do what they say they will do. That was one of the most difficult pieces to agree on, with China asking for softer requirements. The agreement says all countries must report on their emissions and efforts to reduce them. But it allows for some "flexibility" for developing countries that "need it."

MONEY

The agreement says wealthy countries should continue to offer financial support to help poor countries reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change. It also encourages other countries to pitch in on a voluntary basis. That paves the way for emerging economies such as China to contribute, even though it doesn't require them to do so. Actual dollar amounts were kept out of the agreement itself, but wealthy nations had previously pledged to provide \$100 billion annually in climate finance by 2020.

LOSS AND DAMAGE

In a victory for small island nations threatened by rising seas, the agreement includes a section recognizing "loss and damage" associated with climate-related disasters. The U.S. long objected to addressing the issue in the agreement, worried that it would lead to claims of compensation for damage caused by extreme weather events. In the end, the issue was included, but a footnote specifically stated that loss and damage does not involve liability or compensation.

Graphic

White bears costumed activists demonstrate near the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, Saturday, Dec.12, 2015 during the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. As organizers of the Paris climate talks presented what they hope is a final draft of the accord, protesters from environmental and human rights groups gather to call attention to populations threatened by rising seas and increasing droughts and floods. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham) French foreign minister and President of the COP21 Laurent Fabius, center, applauds while United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, left, and French President Francois Hollande applaud after the final conference of

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the COP21, the United Nations conference on climate change, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Saturday, Dec.12, 2015. Nearly 200 nations adopted the first global pact to fight climate change on Saturday, calling on the world to collectively cut and then eliminate greenhouse gas pollution but imposing no sanctions on countries that don't. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) Activists gather near the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, Saturday, Dec.12, 2015 during the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. As organizers of the Paris climate talks presented what they hope is a final draft of the accord, protesters from environmental and human rights groups gather to call attention to populations threatened by rising seas and increasing droughts and floods. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus) French President Francois Hollande, left, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, center left, Christiana Figueres, 2nd right, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Foreign Affairs Minister and President-designate of COP21 Laurent Fabius, right, speak together at the end of a plenary session at Le Bourget, near Paris, France, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015 . Negotiators from around the world appear to be closing in on a landmark accord to slow global warming, with a possible final draft to be presented Saturday for a last round of debate at talks outside Paris. (Philippe Wojazer/Pool Photo via AP) A couple kiss as activists demonstrate near the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, Saturday, Dec.12, 2015 during the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. As organizers of the Paris climate talks presented what they hope is a final draft of the accord, protesters from environmental and human rights groups gather to call attention to populations threatened by rising seas and increasing droughts and floods. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus) French President Francois Hollande, left, French foreign minister Laurent Fabius, center, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon applaud at the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Saturday, Dec.12, 2015. Fabius says a "final" draft of a global climate pact would be legally binding. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) US Secretary of State John Kerry, left, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon meet on the sidelines of the COP 21 United Nations conference on climate change, in Le Bourget, on the outskirts of Paris on Friday Dec. 11, 2015. (Mandel Ngan, Pool via AP) The slogan "CLIMATE SIGN" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) The slogan "CLIMATESIGN" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) US Secretary of State John Kerry, shows off a bouquet which he received for his birthday from India's Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar, right, following a meeting on the sidelines of the COP 21 United Nations conference on climate change, in Le Bourget, on the outskirts of Paris on Friday Dec. 11, 2015. (Mandel Ngan, Pool via AP) The slogan "DECARBONIZE" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) The slogan "FOR THE PLANET" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori) This photo provided by environmental group Greenpeace shows the Arc de Triomphe roundabout painted with yellow by activists, Friday, Dec.11, 2015. The protest is one of many activist actions linked to the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. (Greenpeace via AP) France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, left, shakes hands with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon after a media conference at the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says negotiators trying to finalize a sweeping climate accord outside Paris are still in disagreement over how far-reaching it should be and who should pay for damages wrought by global warming. (AP Photo/Michel Euler) Climate activists carry a red banner during a demonstration at the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Hundreds of climate activists have stretched a block-long red banner through the Paris climate talks to symbolize "the red lines" that they don't want negotiators to cross in trying to reach an international accord to fight global warming. Reproduction of the Eiffel tower in the background. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

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Subject: ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (92%); GLOBAL WARMING (92%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (92%); **CLIMATE CHANGE** (91%); AGREEMENTS (90%); CLIMATOLOGY (90%); EARTH & ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (90%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (90%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (90%); PUBLIC POLICY (90%); STATE DEPARTMENTS & FOREIGN SERVICES (90%); TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (90%); **CLIMATE CHANGE** REGULATION & POLICY (89%); EMISSIONS (89%); GREENHOUSE GASES (89%); POLLUTION & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS (89%); AIR QUALITY REGULATION (78%); EMBARGOES & SANCTIONS (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS (78%); INTERNATIONAL LAW (78%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & NATIONAL SECURITY (78%); METEOROLOGY (78%); SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (78%); UNITED NATIONS (78%); PLANETS & ASTEROIDS (76%); UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTIONS (73%); OCEANS (69%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (60%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2012 (60%); business (%); general news (%); science (%); international agreements (%); environmental policy (%); **climate** (%); environment and nature (%); environmental treaties (%); united nations **climate change** conference (%); atmospheric science (%); environmental concerns (%); government and politics (%); international relations (%); environment (%); government policy (%); events (%); earth science (%); air quality (%); international **climate** treaty (%)

Organization: GREENPEACE INTERNATIONAL (84%)

Industry: GLOBAL WARMING (92%); EMISSIONS (89%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (78%)

Person: BARACK OBAMA (79%); JOHN KERRY (77%); BAN KI-MOON (58%)

Geographic: PARIS, FRANCE (90%); UNITED STATES (92%); FRANCE (90%)

Load-Date: December 14, 2015