

# How to Move UN Climate Change Negotiation Forward

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Abstract:

*The UN climate change negotiation has laid down the foundation to combat climate change through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, its Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. However, progress achieved so far does not meet the urgent need to combat climate change. The international community should join hand in addressing climate change in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. The Kyoto Protocol has worked relatively well and negotiation for subsequent commitment periods under the Kyoto Protocol should be reactivated. Developing countries will do their own parts to combat climate change through nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement. So, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement will function as the two pillars to implement the Framework Convention. It is expected that COP 28 to be held in Dubai, UAE in December 2023 will be able to overcome major difficulties facing UN climate change negotiation.*

## 1. Introduction

Climate change is now the most challenging problem facing the international community. It was induced by anthropogenic emission of large quantities of greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum and natural gas since industrial revolution. Due to the difference in development levels, contribution of countries to the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere is quite different, with developed countries contributing to the bulk of concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides that its contracting parties shall deal with climate change in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. In order to implement the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol (KP) provided quantified emission reduction targets for industrialized countries. Due to US's refusal to ratify the KP, this top-down approach was changed into the bottom-up approach as embodied in the Paris Agreement (PA). The PA requires its contracting parties to make contributions to the international efforts of combating climate change

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through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). It seems that this approach is also far from achieving the goal of the PA based on the latest NDC pledges. More efforts are needed to stop and reverse the warming trend of our planet.

## **2. The Problem of Climate Change**

Since the start of industrial revolution in 1750, human beings began to use fossil fuels on a large scale. The burning of fossil fuels like coal, petrol and gas produces a lot of GHGs (mainly CO<sub>2</sub>) which will lead to the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere and result in climate change. Other human activities, such as deforestation, planting paddy fields, raising kettles, landfill of wastes, etc., also emit GHGs. If more GHGs are added to the atmosphere, these GHGs will break the balance of the existing GHGs in the atmosphere and trap more heat from the Sun and make the temperature of the Earth higher and warmer. As a result, the warm trend of the Earth's temperature will exacerbate extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts, floods, typhoons, tornadoes, etc., and will also lead to the melting of mountain snow cover and glaciers in both poles, sea level rise, bleaching of coral reef, reduction of crop yields, loss of biodiversity, spread of vector borne diseases, etc. Climate change may even exacerbate regional conflicts on water resources induced by extreme droughts and floods, and as a result cause large scale refugees.

People began to realize this problem in the 1980s. In order to obtain scientific information about climate change, WMO and UNEP jointly established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 the role of which is to provide governments with scientific information on climate change through assessment of authoritative scientific documentation published worldwide. In 1990, IPCC published its first assessment report saying that GHG emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of GHGs. The Global-mean surface air temperature has increased by 0.3°C to 0.6°C over the last 100 years (1890-1990), with the five global-average warmest years being in the 1980s. Over the same period global sea level has increased by 10-20cm<sup>1</sup>. Up to now the IPCC has issued six assessment reports and many special reports. All of them confirm that global temperature is rising.

## **3. Response Measures of the International Community**

Based on the scientific information provided by the first assessment report of the IPCC and observed factual climate change on the ground, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 45/212 in December 1990,

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<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change: The 1990 and 1992 IPCC Assessments, IPCC First Assessment Report Overview and Policymaker Summaries* 63-64.