

United States of America



To: United States Negotiators at United Nations World Climate
Subject: Briefing on Negotiating Goals

Goals

The US seeks to negotiate a global agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that achieves the best outcome for our economy and national interests, as well as for the world. At the 2015 UN climate negotiations in Paris, nations agreed to a goal of limiting global warming to “well below 2°C” compared to preindustrial levels. You must now decide on the following:

1. US actions to reduce carbon emissions, if any. Despite recent stabilization and modest declines, US emissions are expected to grow over time without further action. You can decide when US emissions will stop growing, when they will begin declining, and at what annual rate emissions decline, if at all.
2. Whether to make a commitment to reduce deforestation or to increase reforestation or afforestation.
3. How much the US will contribute, if at all, to the Green Climate Fund, which is intended to provide at least \$100 billion/year by 2020 for developing countries to reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change.

Context

The scientific consensus on climate is clear: over 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is happening, that it is caused primarily by use of fossil fuels, and that the impacts could be devastating. US government research has shown that climate change is harming all 50 states today and that without dramatic reductions in global emissions, the damage will become far more severe.

Public Opinion

A majority of the public in the US believes climate change is real and that human activity contributes significantly to it. Most support policies that could be implemented to address climate change but oppose those actions that raise the cost of living. Climate change ranks near the bottom of most people’s priorities, far below national security, the economy and jobs. Most people are opposed to any agreement that places undue burden on our own economies, while developing nations’ emissions continue to grow. Meanwhile, entrenched fossil fuel interests continue to sow doubt about climate change causes and action.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, the bipartisan “Risky Business” report (<http://riskybusiness.org>), endorsed by former US Treasury Secretaries of both parties, shows that the costs of delay are high while most states and regions in the US will benefit from emissions reductions policies.

National Action

In Paris, the US pledged a 26-28% reduction in US emissions from 2005 levels by 2025. The pledge relies on the successful implementation of limits on power plant emissions, improved fuel efficiency in cars, and action at the state and regional levels (e.g., emissions trading programs in the Northeastern US and California). However, there is resistance to these plans by the Trump administration, some elected officials in the US Congress, and business interests with a stake in the fossil fuel industry.

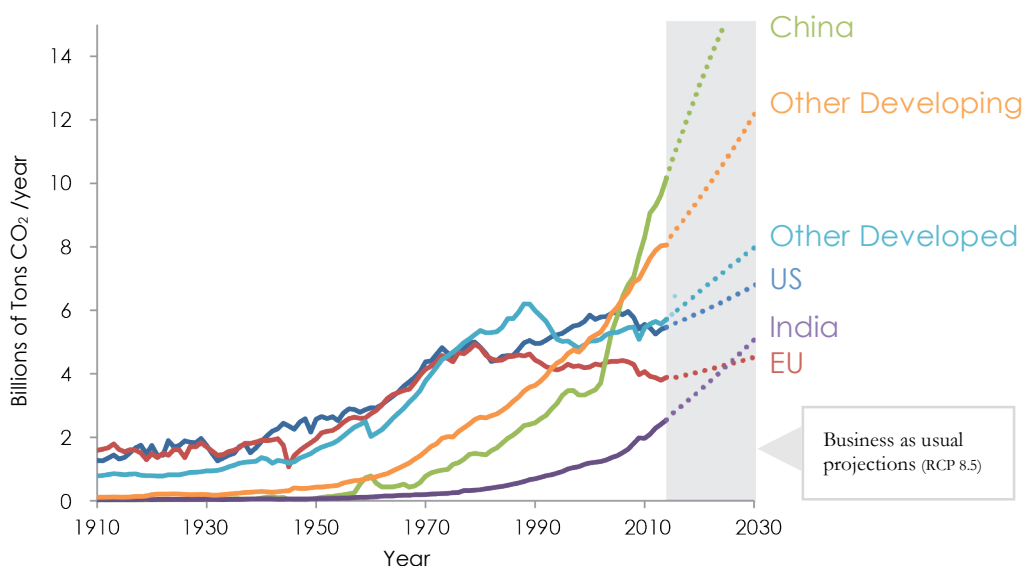
Forests and land use

Though we can pledge reductions in emissions from deforestation and land degradation (REDD) within our country, doing so would address only a small portion of US emissions.

Global Landscape

- China is now the world's second largest economy, is growing far faster than the US, and generates about 30% of global CO₂ emissions. In Paris, China pledged to peak its CO₂ emissions by 2030, when its emissions are projected to be four times those of the US but made no commitment to reduce emissions.
- Meanwhile, emissions from rapidly developing countries, such as India, continue to grow. The US cannot agree to further action unless there are significant, verifiable agreements for emissions reductions from the rest of the world. Without emissions cuts from other developing and less developed nations, by 2050, their combined emissions will rise to almost three times those of developed countries.
- The less developed nations continue to emphasize that reductions in their emissions would require extensive financial assistance from developed countries, but corruption pervades many of these countries and financial assistance often fails to reach its intended use. They may also emphasize forestry policy over cutting fossil fuel emissions, which, while important, is insufficient for meeting the climate challenge.

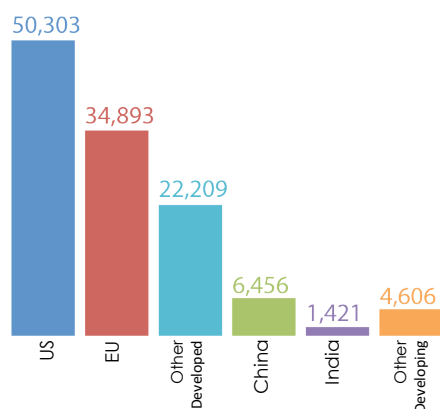
CO₂ Emissions from Fossil Fuels and Cement



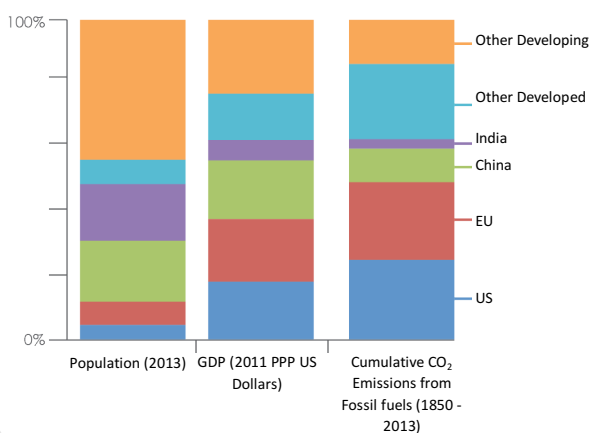
China is the world's largest emitter of CO₂. Without action, developing countries' emissions from fossil fuels are projected to more than triple by 2100.

Sweden sustained annual emissions reductions of 4.5% to reduce their dependence on oil (1976-1986). France and Belgium saw similar reductions around this time. Otherwise, most significant historical emission reductions have come from financial or political crises. According to UNEP, a 3.5% annual reduction rate is extremely ambitious.

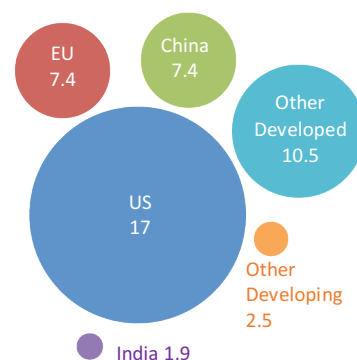
GDP per person (2011 PPP US Dollars)



Population Wealth and Cumulative Emissions



Emissions per person 2013 (tons of CO₂ per year)



While cumulative emissions so far have been higher in the developed countries (i.e., the **US**, **EU**, and **other developed countries**), the growth of population, GDP per person, and emissions in the developing nations far outpaces growth in the developed countries. Under business-as-usual assumptions, cumulative emissions of all developed countries (**US**, **EU**, and **other developed**) are expected to fall to 37% of total by 2100.

Since 1980, emissions per person have risen dramatically in **China** and **India** (by 391% and 285%, respectively) but have fallen in the **US** and **Europe** (by 20% and 26%, respectively).