**Nations Approve Landmark Climate Accord in Paris**

By Coral Davenport 12/12/15

LE BOURGET, France — With the sudden bang of a gavel Saturday night, representatives of 195 nations reached a landmark accord that will, for the first time, commit nearly every country to lowering planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to help stave off *(hold off)* the most drastic effects of [climate change](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier).

The deal, which was met with an eruption of cheers and ovations from thousands of delegates gathered from around the world, represents a historic breakthrough on an issue that has foiled *(frustrate the effort or plans of)* decades of international efforts to address climate change.

Traditionally, such pacts *(agreements)* have required developed economies like the United States to take action to lower greenhouse gas emissions, but they have exempted *(not required to do something that others are require to do)* developing countries like China and India from such obligations.

The accord, which [United Nations](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/u/united_nations/index.html?inline=nyt-org) diplomats have been working toward for nine years, changes that dynamic by requiring action in some form from every country, rich or poor.

“This is truly a historic moment,” the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said in an interview. “For the first time, we have a truly universal agreement on climate change, one of the most crucial problems on earth.”

1. Why is the Paris Climate Accord historic?

Scientists and leaders said the talks here represented the world’s last, best hope of striking a deal that would begin to avert *(prevent)* the most devastating effects of a warming planet.

Mr. Ban said there was “no Plan B” if the deal fell apart. The Eiffel Tower was illuminated with that phrase Friday night.

The new deal will not, on its own, solve global warming. At best, scientists who have analyzed it say, it will cut global greenhouse gas emissions by about half enough as is necessary to stave off an increase in atmospheric temperatures of 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages and more destructive storms.

1. Will the Paris Climate Accord solve global warming? Why or why not?

But the Paris deal could represent the moment at which, because of a shift in global economic policy, the inexorable *(impossible to prevent)* rise in planet-warming carbon emissions that started during the Industrial Revolution began to level out and eventually decline.

At the same time, the deal could be viewed as a signal to global financial and energy markets, triggering a fundamental shift away from investment in coal, oil and gas as primary energy sources toward zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear power.

1. Why could less investments in coal, oil and gas be better for the environment?

Just five years ago, such a deal seemed politically impossible. A similar 2009 climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen collapsed in acrimonious *(angry and bitter)* failure after countries could not unite around a deal.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with his Chinese and Indian counterparts in order to help broker the deal, said, “The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet.”

The core of the Paris deal is a requirement that every nation take part. Ahead of the Paris talks, governments of 186 nations put forth public plans detailing how they would cut carbon emissions through 2025 or 2030.

1. How is the Paris Climate Accord different from the Kyoto Protocol?

Those plans alone, once enacted, will cut emissions by half the levels required to stave off the worst effects of global warming. The national plans vary vastly in scope and ambition — while every country is required to put forward a plan, there is no legal requirement dictating how, or how much, countries should cut emissions.

Thus, the Paris pact has built in a series of legally binding requirements that countries ratchet up *(increase by small amounts)* the stringency *(quality of being very strict)* of their climate change policies in the future. Countries will be required to reconvene *(meet again)* every five years, starting in 2020, with updated plans that would tighten their emissions cuts.

That system depends heavily on the views of the future world leaders who will carry out those policies. In the United States, every Republican candidate running for president in 2016 has publicly questioned or denied the science of climate change, and has voiced opposition to Mr. Obama’s climate change policies.

Yet amid the spirit of success that dominated the final hours of the negotiations, Mr. Arias Cañete reminded delegates that the accord was the beginning of the real work. “Today, we celebrate,” he said. “Tomorrow, we have to act. This is what the world expects of us.”

**Directions**: Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper in COMPLETE sentences.

1. Do you believe it should the government’s responsibility or an individual’s responsibility to reduce climate change? Explain your answer.
2. Do you believe the Paris Climate Accord will be successful? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe countries should be punished if they aren’t able to reduce their emissions? Why or why not?
4. How do you think the Paris climate accord could be improved?