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# Climate drama climax looks elusive

Copenhagen meetings unlikely to offer many solutions.

By Charles J. Nealey  
and Jim M. Glavin  
in Copenhagen

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — For 20 years, as this crowded planet grew warmer, nations have gathered annually to try to do something about it. History now brings them to this chilly northern capital, and to a crossroads.

The world looks to Copenhagen "to witness what I believe will be an historic turning point in the fight against climate change," says Yvo de Boer, United Nations organizer of the two weeks of talks opening Monday.

It may witness, instead, history put on hold.

The change in U.S. administration a year ago had stressed hopes the long-running climate talks might finally produce an all-encompassing package in 2009 to combat global warming and help its victims.

Too little time and too little agreement, however, especially between rich and poor countries, mean the 192 nations' Copenhagen conference is likely to produce, at best, a framework — a basis for continuing talks and signing internationally binding final agreements next year.

Two key building blocks for that framework may take shape here:

- Setting targets for controlling emissions of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gases, including by the leading countries, China and the United States.
- Agreeing on how much rich countries should pay for poor nations' clean energy technology and for severely stricken and vulnerable projects to counter a changing climate.



A bridge by Norwegian artist Jeppe Hein stands made of ice after Leonardo da Vinci's original design and situated on Copenhagen's Parliament Square symbolizes the speed with which ice at the poles melts.

Under the grand roof of the 1992 Rio treaty calling Copenhagen's modern belated center, delegates will also deal with a heavy agenda of other issues: the technicalities of protecting forests, measuring emissions, setting rules for "carbon credits," enforcing an eventual treaty, and other concerns.

Underlining Copenhagen's importance, at least 100 national leaders, led by President Barack Obama, will converge on the Danish capital to offer high-level backing to the talks.

On Friday the White House announced Obama would come to Copenhagen Dec. 18, the conference's last scheduled day. That's when the U.S. talks perennially go into overtime in last-minute wrangling and when other leaders are planning to take part.

The U.S. chief executive's change in plans indicated the Americans see a chance for important political agreements in those final hours.

Slow progress has marked climate talks since

## Background on the upcoming talks

Some 15,000 delegates, negotiators, scientists, journalists and others gather in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Monday to begin two weeks of negotiations on what to do about climate change. Here's a look at what's happening there.

Q Why is this meeting happening?

A It's called "COP-15" for the 15th Conference of Parties to the 1992 U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. The 1992 deal is best known as the Rio treaty. That agreement was ratified by 192 nations, including the U.S. Since then, delegates have met each year to discuss how the world can control global warming.

The most important previous meeting occurred at Kyoto, Japan, in 1997 when a treaty obliged industrialized nations to cut carbon dioxide and other global warming gases from 2000 to at least 4 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than preindustrial levels, scientists say. That would push the world deeper into a time of climate disruption, unusual droughts and powerful storms, species die-offs, spreading tropical diseases, coastal flooding and other unpredictable consequences.

From the Arctic, from threatened Pacific islands, from industrial capitals, it's that fear that's bringing 15,000 delegates, environmentalists, business lobbyists, scientists, journalists and others to this quiet city of parks and bicycling commuters.

It will also draw hundreds of policy reinforcements and protesters, activists demanding "climate justice," deeper emissions cuts by the wealthy whose smokestacks first overloaded the skies with greenhouse gas-

es, and richer compensation for poorer nations.

The emissions cuts offered this time amount to follow Kyoto reductions expiring in 2012, have disappointed scientists and poorer nations facing drastic climate change. They say greenhouse gases by 2020 must be reduced by 25 percent below 1990 levels, and more if others agree.

Awaiting U.S. congressional action, however, the Obama administration could demand "climate justice" for a 17 percent reduction by 2020 compared with a different baseline year, six, far short of what scientists say.

The developing world, for the first time, is offering its own actions — not straight reductions, but other steps to slow the pace of their emissions.

China says it will by 2020 reduce gases by 40 to 45 percent below "business as usual," that is, judged against 2005 figures for energy used versus economic output. India offers a 20 to 25 percent slowdown in emissions growth.

An analysis Thursday by European research organizations found the industrialized nations' targets together amount to only 8 to 12 percent below 1990 levels, far short of what scientists say.

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