

# Rare optimism ahead of climate talks in Lima

November 29 2014, by Karl Ritter And Frank Bajak

---



In this Nov. 14, 2007 file photo, the 6,010-meter Huayna Potosi is seen above La Paz. El Alto and its sister city of La Paz, the world's highest capital, depend on glaciers for at least a third of their water, more than any other urban sprawl. But that supply is in peril. Global warming has doomed the world's tropical glaciers. Negotiators from more than 190 countries will meet Dec. 1, 2014, in the Peruvian capital, for two weeks to work on drafts for a global climate deal that is supposed to be adopted next year in Paris. (AP Photo/Dado Galdieri, File)

Energized by new targets set by China and the United States, the world's

top climate polluters, U.N. global warming talks resume Monday with unusual optimism despite evidence that human-generated climate change is already happening and bound to get worse.

Negotiators from more than 190 countries will meet in the Peruvian capital for two weeks to work on drafts for a global climate deal that is supposed to be adopted next year in Paris. Getting all countries aboard will be a crucial test for the U.N. talks, which over two decades have failed to reduce the [greenhouse gas emissions](#) blamed for [global warming](#).

Pledges by Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Barack Obama earlier this month to limit their emissions after 2020 sent a powerful signal that a global deal could be possible next year. The two countries, which produce about 40 percent of all global emissions, long have been adversaries in the U.N. climate talks.

"Climate change will not be solved only by the United States and China. But it certainly will not be solved without them," U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres told The Associated Press.

Earlier this year, the European Union announced an emissions target for 2030, meaning the world's three biggest emitters have made pledges. The hope now is that other big polluters including India, Japan, Russia and Australia will set their goals.

In Lima, delegates hope to specify what information should be included when countries submit their formal emissions targets early next year, so that the targets can be compared against each other. There is little expectation, however, that negotiators will agree on enforceable legal terms. The U.S. and other countries oppose a legally binding emissions treaty, which would face stiff opposition in a Republican-controlled Congress.



In this June 20, 2013 file photo, a masked man walks as the sun sets among buildings covered with haze, as Singapore urged people to remain indoors amid unprecedented levels of air pollution, at the Singapore Central Business District. Pledges by Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Barack Obama in November 2014, to limit their emissions after 2020, sent a powerful signal that a global deal could be possible next year. (AP Photo/Joseph Nair, File)

The talks in Lima come just a month after a scientific assessment by the U.N.'s expert panel on [climate change](#) warned that rising global temperatures could have an irreversible impact on people and ecosystems as glaciers melt, sea levels rise, heat waves intensify and oceans become warmer and more acidic.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said it's now 95 percent certain that humans are to blame for most of the warming, mainly by burning oil, coal and gas. Those emissions keep rising as fossil fuels

power the expansion of China and other emerging economies.

The delegates will be meeting in a country particularly threatened by the impact of climate change.

"Peru is hit from all angles," said Walter Vergara, a top Latin America climate change expert formerly with the World Bank. "Many ecosystems are going to be affected."

The Andean nation has 70 percent of the world's tropical glaciers, which are melting at an accelerated pace, putting 300,000 highlanders under severe stress as pastures and croplands slowly dry up.



In this June 12, 2011 file photo, people walk along the Cordillera Real of the Andes mountains on the outskirts of La Paz, Bolivia. According to the Environmental Defense League, a Bolivian NGO, Bolivia's glaciers along the Cordillera Real, Chacaltaya, Tuni Condorini and Illimani are shrinking in size by more than one meter every year and estimate that the majority of the snow in

this area could disappear by 2030. A scientific assessment by the U.N.'s expert panel on climate change warned that rising global temperatures could have an irreversible impact on people and ecosystems as glaciers melt, sea levels rise, heat waves intensify and oceans become warmer and more acidic. (AP Photo/Juan Karita)

Those glaciers have lost more than one-fifth of their mass in just three decades, and the 70 percent of Peru's 30 million people who inhabit the country's Pacific coastal desert, depend on glacial runoff for hydropower and to irrigate crops, meaning their electricity and long-term food security could also be in peril. Higher alpine temperatures are killing off plant and animal species in cloud forests and scientists predict Pacific fisheries will suffer.

The overall goal of the U.N. talks is to keep the average global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees F) compared with pre-industrial times. That would require a massive energy shift to renewable sources and, perhaps, capturing airborne CO<sub>2</sub> and storing it underground.

The U.N. Environment Program earlier this month warned that there's a growing gap between what countries promise to do about carbon pollution and what scientists say needs to be done to meet that goal.



In this March 8, 2014 file photo, steam from the Jeffrey Energy Center coal-fired power plant is silhouetted against the setting sun near St. Mary's, Kan. A groundbreaking agreement struck Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014, by the United States and China puts the world's two worst polluters on a faster track to curbing the heat-trapping gases blamed for global warming. Energized by these new targets set by China and the United States, the world's top climate polluters, U.N. global warming talks resume Dec. 1, 2014 in Peru, with unusual optimism despite evidence that human-generated climate change is already happening and bound to get worse. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel, File)

And global temperature data show 2014 is shaping up to become one of the hottest—if not the hottest—years on record.

"We're still heading in the wrong direction," said Andrew Steer, the head of the World Resources Institute, a Washington-based environmental group.



In this Nov. 4, 2006 file photo, an explorer looks on, in the Pastoruri glacier in Huaraz, Peru. Peru's "White Mountain Range" may soon have to change its name. The ice atop the Cordillera Blanca, the largest glacier chain in the tropics, is melting fast because of rising temperatures, and peaks are turning brown. The Andean nation has 70 percent of the world's tropical glaciers, which are melting at an accelerated pace, putting hundreds of thousands of highlanders under severe stress as pastures and croplands slowly dry up. (AP Photo/Karel Navarro, File)



In this Nov. 12, 2014 file photo, U.S. President Barack Obama, left, toasts with Chinese President Xi Jinping, at a lunch banquet in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Pledges by Xi Jinping and Obama in November to limit their emissions after 2020 sent a powerful signal that a global deal could be possible by 2015. The two countries, which produce about 40 percent of all global emissions, long have been adversaries in the U.N. climate talks. (AP Photo/Greg Baker, File)

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Rare optimism ahead of climate talks in Lima (2014, November 29) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-rare-optimism-climate-lima.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.