

Negotiators agree on early draft of UN climate deal

February 13 2015, byKarl Ritter



In this Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2015, file photo a plume of smoke billows from the coal-fired Merrimack Station in Bow, N.H. After failing six years ago to craft a global agreement to fight climate change, world governments are hoping that this year will mark a breakthrough in the slow-paced U.N. climate talks. In Geneva this week, negotiators from more than 190 countries are working on an early draft of a deal that's supposed to be adopted in Paris in December.(AP Photo/Jim Cole, File)

U.N. negotiators on Friday produced an early draft of what eventually

should become a landmark climate deal in Paris next December, piling on suggestions to make sure the document reflected every country's wishes.

So instead of shrinking to a more manageable size, the 38-page text from a previous climate change meeting swelled to 86 pages during the weeklong negotiating session in Geneva.

"We were hoping to see a more concise text," said Ilze Pruse, a delegate from the European Union.

Others said the key thing was to ensure that all countries felt their views were reflected—something many developing countries have insisted on since a 2009 attempt to forge a global deal crashed in Copenhagen.

"After years of false starts and broken promises, restoring ownership and trust in the process is no small achievement. And I think we have come a long way toward doing that," said Ahmed Sareer, a Maldives delegate who represents an alliance of island nations.

The Paris agreement isn't expected to stop climate change but it would be the first time that all countries have agreed to do something about it. Previously only rich countries have committed to limit their emissions of global warming gases, primarily carbon dioxide, from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

The slow-moving U.N. talks got a boost last year when top climate polluters China and the U.S. jointly announced emissions-limiting pledges for the Paris deal, which would take effect in 2020. The European Union and Norway have also presented climate targets.

Negotiators now have 10 months to deal with key issues like how to share the emissions cuts that scientists say are needed to make sure

climate change doesn't reach dangerous levels. Changes in climate are already occurring and could get worse, leading to flooding of coastal areas, disruptions to agriculture and drinking water and the spread of diseases.

Greenpeace climate expert Martin Kaiser said "countries failed to grab the bull by the horns." But many environmental activists were upbeat, since the bloated text meant their own ideas survived, including long-term goals for phasing out the emissions from fossil fuels.

Most of today's emissions come from developing countries, led by China, but historically, the majority of emissions have come from the West, which industrialized earlier.

Each side thinks the other should do more, and that was reflected in the Geneva draft. The U.S. and other rich countries added text stressing the need for all countries to pitch in, while developing countries introduced demands for financial help to deal with climate change.

U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres acknowledged that the range of options and sub-options in the draft means that governments have a lot of work ahead. But she said it was important to kick off the negotiations with a text that covered everyone's concerns.

"There is no one country that wants to be left behind by an agreement that will have an impact on their future," she said.

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