

New draft of climate accord leaves big issues unresolved

December 9 2015, by Seth Borenstein And Sylvie Corbet



U.S Secretary of State John Kerry delivers his speech during a news conference at the COP21 Climate Conference in Le Bourget, north of Paris, France, Wednesday, Dec. 9 2015. Kerry is announcing that the United States will double its commitment to helping vulnerable nations adapt to climate change impacts such as increased extreme weather events. (Ian Langsdon, Pool via AP)

Negotiators released a new, shorter draft of an international accord to fight global warming Wednesday—and it leaves key issues unresolved

just two days before the high-stakes talks in Paris are scheduled to end.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry challenged diplomats to reach agreement by Friday's self-imposed deadline, promising American funding for countries hit hardest by the rising seas and extreme weather that scientists attribute to man-made emissions.

The new draft released by the U.N. climate agency is 29 pages, down from a 43-page version issued Saturday. There are about 100 places where there are decisions still to be made, including multiple options left in brackets, or blank spaces.

One major issue remains money. The draft doesn't settle the question of whether advanced developing countries should join wealthy nations in helping the poorest and most vulnerable nations deal with climate change.

It doesn't resolve the question of the long-term goal of the accord—whether it is to remove carbon emissions from the economy altogether or just reduce them. Nor does it settle whether governments are aiming to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F) above pre-industrial times or closer to 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F).

"We have never been this close to a climate change agreement," said Maldives Environment Minister Thoriq Ibrahim, chairman of an alliance of island nations. "It's now up to us ministers to show the leadership needed to make hard decisions that put the interests of people and the planet ahead of shortsighted politics."



Chief Bill Erasmus of the Dene nation, Northern Canada, center, gestures with activists from Greenpeace during a protest in front of a two-story-high, mechanically operated polar bear called Aurora into the conference venue, to represent everyone hoping in the next 72 hours during the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Le Bourget, north of Paris, France, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

The new text "definitely shows progress both in terms of the conciseness of the text as well as in terms of the crystallization of the political points that still need a lot of work," U.N. climate agency chief Christiana Figueres told reporters.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said, "Some progress has been made, but there is still a lot of work to be done."

He said negotiators had "a long night" before Wednesday's draft was submitted.

"We must prepare to be working all night and tomorrow—probably continuously," Fabius said.

Kerry, speaking at the conference outside Paris, announced Wednesday that the U.S. will double its contribution to helping vulnerable nations adapt to the effects of climate change, increasing grant money to \$860 million from \$430 million by 2020. Developing nations have been demanding more money as they struggle with an increase in extreme weather events such as hurricanes, heavy rains and floods.



A man, no name given, listens to Chief Bill Erasmus of the Dene nation, Northern Canada delivering a statement on the emergency of global warning political reactions during a demonstration to support indigenous at the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Le Bourget, north of Paris, France, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

The money will be part of an existing promise by wealthy countries to jointly mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020. It will help fund domestic weather services and tracking systems to better assist poorer nations in forecasting and coping with extreme weather.

Kerry has made combating climate change a priority since he became secretary of state, and sounded familiar themes.



Global citizen's movement Avaaz in a Star Wars themed stunt with Yoda and two storm-troopers pose during a protest for Paris climate agreement to put the world

on course for clean energy front of the mini red Eiffel Tower replica during the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Le Bourget, north of Paris, France, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

"Make no mistake: If, as a global community, we refuse to rise to this challenge—if we continue to allow calculated obstruction to derail the urgency of this moment—we will be liable for a collective moral failure of historic consequence," he said. "We are not just responsible to ourselves—we are responsible to the future."

Several activist groups staged small protests around Paris and the conference venue Wednesday, pushing for an ambitious accord. Greenpeace brought out a huge mechanical polar bear. Others dressed up as Star Wars characters Yoda and Storm Troopers.

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Citation: New draft of climate accord leaves big issues unresolved (2015, December 9) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-paris-climate-accord-big-disputes.html>

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