

## Laying the Foundation for a Global Agreement

### COP 19 | Warsaw, Poland

Both the scientific community and nature itself have demonstrated that climate change is real and its impacts are increasingly devastating. According to the most recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), humans are overwhelmingly the cause of this change; we therefore must also be the solution. But every year that we wait to find solutions translates into compounding damage to our economic, health, environmental and societal well-being. Unfortunately, reality has shown repeatedly that early scientific estimates have understated the effects of climate change.

#### Taking Action Now

The annual Conference of the Parties (COP) presents an opportunity for the international community to collectively discuss and address the global threat of climate change. Unfortunately, it is also a space that has increasingly garnered criticism and doubt. But that doesn't have to be the case. As the 2015 target date for a new international agreement approaches, COP 19 can and must be used as an opportunity to strengthen the individual commitments of the Parties, and through those commitments, accelerate achievement of the emissions reductions trajectory that aligns with the recommendations of the global scientific community and aims to close the mitigation gap.

Now is the time for each country to actively pursue serious mitigation commitments and actions while designing a long-term, multilaterally agreed, ambitious and equitable framework. To achieve that, nations must not only meet their existing 2020 national emissions reduction commitments, but must look for ways to increase their collective level of ambition. Analysis by the United Nations Environment Program and others shows there is a sizeable gap between the global emissions projected in 2020 on the basis of existing pledges and what's needed to have a likely chance of staying under the 2 degrees Celsius global temperature increase limit agreed to by President Obama and other world leaders in 2009. Now, COP 19 is a crucial opportunity to ensure Parties get on the right path to close this mitigation gap, quickly ramp up financial support commitments and set a precedent for continued emissions reductions beyond 2020.

#### Designing a Global Agreement

There is no question that the most important and pressing task at hand for the international community is to establish a global agreement in 2015 that sets up a framework to sufficiently address climate change and puts the world on a path to significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and beyond. To be successful, this agreement must elicit widespread participation and strong commitments from Parties but also provide flexibility for varying national situations. Further, the agreement must have longevity, by which adjustments to national emissions targets can be made in light of new circumstances.

We support the call for countries to put forward their proposed post-2020 emissions commitments well in advance of the COP 21 climate meeting to be held in late 2015 in Paris. These proposed commitments would be subject to review and evaluation by other countries as well as by civil society, which should encourage countries to put forth their best possible offers. We need firm and robust targets, so this process should create an atmosphere that allows for an upward spiral of ambition so that countries are acting over time in line with the demands of the science. What should not be flexible nor unclear is the structure under which these commitments are made and communicated. For Parties to understand and evaluate national commitments and actions, there must be sufficient clarity beforehand regarding the information contained in the proposals and the format of the commitment. This structure, and the overall timeline for submission and review of national proposals, should be discussed and provisionally agreed upon at COP 19.

## Creating a Safe, Equitable World

As the world looks to establish a global agreement to address climate change in 2020 and beyond, we must simultaneously establish a new world view for that time period. We want a world that is not just resilient in the face of a changing climate, but one that is safe, prosperous, equitable and even thriving in this new reality. To get there, we have to lay the groundwork today.

First, we must address the reality that climate change is already occurring and global human society is already experiencing significant and uneven effects. While mitigation is our ultimate goal, we must also immediately take greater action to adapt to the current situation, ensuring our cities and communities are as resilient as possible. Unfortunately, the finances and technology needed to do so are not equally distributed across the globe, and often leave the most vulnerable with inadequate resources. Advanced nations should lead the way in providing the framework for scaling up deployment of key technologies such as renewable energy and energy efficiency as well as important practices such as resilient infrastructure design. These nations must also mobilize jointly to realize significant investments—both public and private—in climate finance, adhering to the commitment of \$100 billion per year by 2020.

Second, we must ensure that a transition to a new, cleaner global economy is not unduly burdensome to certain populations. Transforming and developing clean industries must be done with a complementary strategy to empower workers to access the jobs created in those industries and to support workers and their families in that transition. Strong policies on Just Transition, such as those laid out by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), can aid governments in demonstrating to their citizens that climate change solutions are not just good environmental policy – but are the foundation of good social and economic policy in the 21st century. The building blocks of a solid Just Transition policy include: sustainable investments and decent work promotion, social protection, assessment and anticipation of employment impacts, local economic diversification, skills' development support and tripartite negotiations.

## Leading By Example

The United States, as an economic, political and social leader, must also be a climate leader. President Obama has taken a commendable step forward with the release of his Climate Action Plan, and the United States must use this as a foundation to encourage more ambitious action—both internally as well as in international circles.

Domestically, President Obama has committed to strong mitigation action by regulating pollution from power plants as well as addressing potent, short-lived pollutants such as methane and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). He has also opened the door for innovation by encouraging investments in energy efficiency and low- and zero-carbon technologies, and by subsequently directing the federal government to be at the forefront of integrating many of these technologies and practices. Recognizing the threat that climate change poses to American citizens, infrastructure and resources, the President has also laid out a comprehensive approach to build a more resilient America for the future. In the international sphere, the Obama Administration has committed to coordinate and cooperate both in multi-lateral efforts, such as the UNFCCC process, as well as through bi-lateral agreements on mitigation efforts. Action through these multifaceted approaches is the means to which the global community can adequately address climate change. We look forward to the full implementation of the Climate Action Plan and urge that this be only the first step to dedicated U.S. leadership on the global stage for climate action.



**The BlueGreen Alliance is a national, strategic partnership between labor unions and environmental organizations dedicated to expanding the number and quality of jobs in the green economy.**

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