Get to know UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a group of 195 governments (officially called ‘parties to the convention’) that negotiate legally binding international laws regarding climate change. Understanding past UNFCCC successes and failures is key to understanding the importance of pushing for big action in 2015.

### 2015

The Conference of the Parties will meet in Paris to create new legally binding agreements to keep global warming below 2 degrees celsius, which will be implemented in 2020. In the current political climate, it is unlikely the United States Congress will ratify a climate change agreement.

### 2014

Climate Summit in New York at the United Nations General Assembly is held for government officials, heads of state, and private organizations to announce ‘ambitious’ actions. The event is intended to gain political support for 2015 agreements; at the Conference of the Parties in Lima the initial draft text for 2015 agreements must be submitted.

Non-binding emissions pledges were taken in Copenhagen.

### 2013

Parties meet in Warsaw, agree to begin or intensify domestic plans for national contributions for December 2015 agreement that will keep global warming below 2 degrees celsius. Agreed on loss and damage mechanism to aid developing countries already vulnerable to climate change. Parties agree that the Green Climate Fund will be ready by late 2014.

### 2009

Kyoto Protocol enters force. Kyoto Protocol is the first legally binding international climate agreement. Low carbon Asian nations, such as China and India, sign up to the treaty. According to the U.N website, the summit will ‘catalyze ambitious action’ to reduce emissions and strengthen political will for the signing of a new climate agreement in 2015. What defines ‘ambitious’ action is unclear, but a large chunk of the summit is set aside for announcements from heads of state regarding domestic climate policy. Climate policy experts say this is a chance for corporations, governments, and non-governmental organizations wishing to be seen as leaders in climate change policy.

### 1997

Parties signed the Kyoto Protocol, the first binding global agreement to lower Greenhouse Gas emissions. The United States signed the protocol.

### 1995

First Conference of parties at Berlin.

### 1994

UNFCCC enters into force.

### 1992

Countries agree to form UNFCCC at the Earth Summit in Rio.

### 1994

UNFCCC enters into force.

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**Why are people marching?**

With a deadlocked congress and dwindling support for climate change policy in the United States, civil society organizations are using this summit to show there is overwhelming demand for the U.S to sign and ratify the 2015 agreement.

Next December, the Conference of Parties will be creating a new, more aggressive international climate agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. Kyoto was the first international climate agreement, signed by the Parties in 1997. The United States signed the protocol; however, the treaty was never ratified by the U.S. Senate, making Kyoto non-binding in the U.S.

**What will happen at the Climate Summit this September?**

According to the U.N website, the summit will ‘catalyze ambitious action’ to reduce emissions and strengthen political will for the signing of a new climate agreement in 2015. What defines ‘ambitious’ action is unclear, but a large chunk of the summit is set aside for announcements from heads of state regarding domestic climate policy. Climate policy experts say this is a chance for corporations, governments, and non-governmental organizations wishing to be seen as leaders in climate change policy.

**Are these agreements effective?**

International climate agreements are important and necessary to progress towards slowing climate change, but often they privilege the interests of national and global elites. Climate justice advocates insist that social justice should be at the center of climate policy and demand that those most affected by climate change -- small island nations, indigenous people, and poor populations in both urban and rural areas -- have a powerful voice in climate deliberations. See our DifferenTakes by Martha Psowski, ‘Is this the Future We Want? The Green Economy vs Climate Justice’ for an example.