

## COP-21 & Developing Countries \_ 2

For anyone convinced that humans must urgently and substantially reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions if they are to avoid potential catastrophe, the failure of the UN climate change summit in Copenhagen in 2009 was a serious setback. However the UN summit in Paris last year was a disaster.

Copenhagen was only a setback because, although it failed to produce the universal agreement to reduce GHGs that many had expected, it left the door open to further negotiation. That was confirmed at the UN climate summit in Durban in 2011 (COP-17) where it was agreed to work towards a new legally-binding agreement in Paris in 2015 (COP-21) – an agreement the West intended should include GHG reduction commitments from all countries.

But that didn't happen: the terms agreed in Paris exempted so-called "developing" countries from any obligation, moral or legal, to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – terms exceptionally unlikely to be renegotiated. Yet developing countries are responsible for over 65% of global emissions<sup>1</sup> and the quantity of GHGs they emit is most likely to increase as, for example, they continue to build coal-fired power plants.<sup>2</sup> That's why Paris was a disaster. Moreover it's a disaster exacerbated by the probability that two major "developed" countries – Russia and Japan, responsible for about 9% of global GHG emissions – will continue to burn (even increase) their current levels of fossil fuels.<sup>3</sup>

The USA and Europe are responsible for most remaining emissions. But, as that's less than 25% of the global total, there's little they can do, short of closing down their economies altogether, that could make a significant contribution to an overall reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> Individual country's emissions (to 2014):

<http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=CO2ts1990-2014>

<sup>2</sup> For example see <http://tiny.cc/1eigdy>, <http://tiny.cc/uzhgdy> (Benjamin Sporton's comments), <http://tiny.cc/j0hgdy> and <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-power-coal-idUSKCN0ZT09B>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://tiny.cc/jbigdy> and <http://tiny.cc/i1dh6x>

The developing countries' exemption arises from the following:

1. **Two key documents:** last year's Paris text<sup>4</sup> and its "parent treaty", the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ("the Convention")<sup>5</sup>. (Note: there's nothing in the Paris text that changes or overrides the essential status and content of the Convention.)

2. **The Convention's distinction between "developed" and "developing" countries** – a distinction unchanged since 1992. Developing countries comprised the vast bulk of countries represented in Paris, representing about 82% of humanity including essentially all the world's poorest people, most of whom have either no or inadequate access to the power sources taken for granted in the West. But they also included major economies such as China, India, South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Iran, all of which (except arguably the latter two) are far more powerful than they were when the Convention was enacted.

3. **Articles 4.7 of the Convention and 4.4 of the Paris text:** the former allows developing countries to give overriding priority to "*economic and social development and poverty eradication*", whereas the latter merely encourages them "*to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances*".

Western negotiators had intended that Paris should have a very different outcome. Hence this statement in 2014 by Ed Davey, UK Secretary of State responsible for climate change negotiations:

*"Next year in Paris in December ... the world will come together to forge a deal on climate change that should, for the first time ever, include binding commitments to reduce emissions from all countries."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The agreed Paris text: <http://tiny.cc/a3hgdy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://tiny.cc/rlavdy>

And John Kerry, US Secretary of State, commented:

*... The fact is that even if every American citizen biked to work, carpooled to school, used only solar panels to power their homes, if we each planted a dozen trees, if we somehow eliminated all of our domestic greenhouse gas emissions, guess what – that still wouldn't be enough to offset the carbon pollution coming from the rest of the world.*

*If all the industrial nations went down to zero emissions -- remember what I just said, all the industrial emissions went down to zero emissions -- it wouldn't be enough, not when more than 65% of the world's carbon pollution comes from the developing world.<sup>7</sup>*

But developing country negotiators, led by China and India, ignored the West's (in the event feeble) demands. And Western negotiators, determined to avoid another debacle such as COP-15 in Copenhagen, didn't press the issue. Hence the Paris agreement's failure to achieve the West's most basic aim: that powerful emerging economies should be obliged to share in emission reduction.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAtiygrbTSg>