



## **UN Conference of the Parties 15 (COP 15)**

The UN Conference of the Parties 15 (COP 15) will convene in Copenhagen, Denmark on 5 December 2009. This climate change meeting could be the most influential yet. At a time of unequivocal human-induced change to our earth's climate, world leaders have decisions to make that could alter the future of the planet.

In 1990, the UN General Assembly began work on a climate change convention, which would become the United Nations Framework Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC). To date, 192 countries have ratified this Convention.

The goal of the UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions at a level that prevents human-made climate change. Every year, the countries who have ratified the UNFCCC meet to review the Convention's goals and the progress toward achieving them. One of the tools being used to reach those goals is the Kyoto Protocol, to which the Parties (countries) agreed in 1997.

There have been 14 Conferences of the Parties, with the last being held in Poznan, Poland from the 1 December to 12 December, 2008. Of recent importance was the Bali Action Plan, created as a result of the Conference of the Parties No. 13 in Bali, Indonesia from 3 December to 15 December, 2007. The plan recognizes the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that say the signs of climate change are clear and that they are definitively caused by human production of greenhouse gases. In light of these findings, the Bali Action Plan calls for a new, more aggressive agreement to mitigate climate change – one that will replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012. The goal is to reach this agreement at COP 15.

Although there is currently disagreement among countries over what a new shared vision for climate change would look like, there are a number of important issues to be discussed at COP 15 to help shape that vision.

For example, with the goal to set ambitious long-term targets for emissions reduction comes the discussion of whether short- and medium-term goals are needed. One could argue that with just long-term targets, countries may not have clear milestones to pursue in the years between.

A large question of importance for COP 15 will be to determine how forests must be managed in relation to climate change. There are groups that argue that the conservation of forests should be one of the possible projects for a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The Clean Development Mechanism allows industrialized countries under the Kyoto Protocol to invest in carbon-reducing projects in other countries, where the cost to implement them is less. The carbon reductions made under these projects can be counted towards that industrialized country's Kyoto commitments. The world's forests contain large amounts of sequestered carbon that is released when they burn or can no longer be drawn out of the atmosphere if they are cut down. Their continued mismanagement will eventually become one of the tipping points should climate change continue to advance.

Other discussions at COP 15 will revolve around technology transfer to and financial help for developing countries attempting to tackle climate change. As well, decisions must be made on how to deal with companies that relocate to developing countries that do not have commitments to reduce greenhouse gases.

This high-level climate change meeting promises to deliver heated debates and plenty of informed discussions as countries attempt to reach an agreement that is sure to have ramifications for us all – particularly the world's children and young people.

Sources: *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* and *The Negotiations in 2009*. Ministry of Climate and Energy of Denmark. COP 15 UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties website:  
<http://en.cop15.dk/climate+facts>