



Accepting the Truth about Climate Change

In the 1980s, evidence of climate change was mounting. Governments and the rest of the international community were realizing the threat climate change was posing, and that they had to do something about it. Because of the global nature of this environmental challenge, they knew it was necessary for countries to work together to combat it.

The **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** took effect in 1994. This international agreement has been formally accepted by 192 countries (with four additional countries as observers). Under the Convention, the 192 governments monitor and report the greenhouse gases they produce, develop climate change strategies, and cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

By 1995, governments had begun negotiations on a Protocol – an international agreement that was linked to the existing treaty, but could stand on its own. The text of the Protocol was adopted unanimously in 1997 in the Japanese city of Kyoto and it entered into force on 16 February 2005 when enough countries under the UNFCCC ratified it.

The **Kyoto Protocol** commits industrialized countries to reduce or limit their greenhouse gas emissions and reach mandatory emission targets by 2012. **Why only industrialized countries?** The Protocol focuses on industrialized countries because they are responsible for most of the past and current greenhouse gas emissions. They also have much of the knowledge and money to reduce them. However, developing nations are projected to emit more greenhouse gases (GHGs) than industrialized nations by 2015.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, each country has its own emissions reduction target. These targets range from -8 per cent to +10 per cent of the countries' individual 1990 emissions levels "with a view to reducing their overall emissions of such gases by at least 5 percent below existing 1990 levels in the commitment period 2008 to 2012." Clearly, the Kyoto Protocol is only a first step and in itself it is not enough to stop the climate from changing. Future mandatory targets are expected to be established for "commitment periods" after 2012, and will be discussed in the upcoming Copenhagen Convention in December 2009.



To compensate for the sting of mandatory, binding targets, the Protocol offers **flexibility in how countries may meet their targets**. This flexibility is offered in the form of 'flexible mechanisms', a subject of much discussion and debate. There are three types of flexible mechanisms, the first being international emissions trading. For the compliance period of 2008 to 2012, those countries under the Protocol that emit less than their quota of GHGs may sell those emissions to countries that have emitted over their quota. The other two types of flexible mechanisms are: Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs) and Joint Implementation (JI). Both of these mechanisms work on the same idea: to invest in projects that reduce GHG emissions in another country where the cost to do so is less than doing so domestically. This process gives industrialized countries with reduction targets a break on the economic cost of reaching those targets. In the case of the Clean Development Mechanism, the industrialized country is investing in projects that take place in developing countries, while Joint Implementation projects take place in other industrialized countries.

Source: *What does it say in the Kyoto Protocol?* Ministry of Climate and Energy of Denmark. COP 15 UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties website: http://en_cop15.dk/climate+facts.