

CRS Insights

Climate Summit 2014: Warm-Up for 2015

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September 22, 2014 (IN10153)

On September 23, more than 120 Heads of State and Governments, as well as business, religious, community, and civil society leaders, will gather in New York City for [Climate Summit 2014](#). The Summit is hosted by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and branded as an event "to galvanize and catalyze climate action." The meeting comes two months before the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—the COP's last full session before it is due to agree, by the end of 2015, on measures to address climate change in the post-2020 period. Nations agreed to announce their contributions to this new agreement in the first quarter of 2015. The U.S. Department of State outlined on September 18 its [proposal](#) for certain elements of the negotiations, including a due-date of 2025 for GHG reductions and equal clarity from Parties about their differentiated mitigation contributions.

While President Obama plans to speak at the Summit, a number of key Heads of State will not attend, such as China's President Xi Jinping and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Their absence may exacerbate concerns about their willingness to commit to GHG reductions necessary to slow significantly scientists' projections of human-induced global warming.

Ban Ki-Moon initiated the summit because, in his view, "[2014 is a pivotal year for generating the action and momentum that will propel us forward](#)" to address climate change under the United Nations. His intention is "to generate political will toward a meaningful universal climate agreement in 2015, and advance action on the ground that will reduce emissions and build resilience to the impacts of climate change." United Nations spokespeople anticipated that "announcements at the Summit will be aimed at mobilizing finance for climate action, increasing the use of renewable energy, increasing energy efficiency, reducing deforestation, promoting climate smart agriculture, building resilience, reducing pollutants, and promoting climate action in the world's cities."

The sessions on "National Action and Ambition Announcements" will spotlight leaders in a warm-up round before the nations that are 'ready to do so' announce, in early 2015, their intended contributions to the post-2020 agreement. Key announcements may be denominated in quantified pledges to abate GHG emissions on specified timelines, and to mobilize financing for actions of low-income countries. After the Secretary-General, the first speaker will be Environment Commissioner Connie Hedegaard, representing the European Union. The EU already has proposed a 2030 Framework for the region that would reduce EU GHG emissions by 40% below the 1990 level by 2030—an interim value on "the cost-effective track" toward its objective of reducing GHG emissions to at least 80% below the 1990 level by 2050.

Among the approximately 120 leaders speaking, President Obama will present fourth to last. He may reiterate his policy goal of reducing U.S. GHG emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, then to about 80% below by 2050. He is unlikely to announce an interim emissions goals for 2030 or specific measures to help mobilize financing, as part of the multinational pledge by Parties, in the Cancun Agreements in 2010, of up to \$100 billion annually by 2020.

Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of China will have—both literally and figuratively—the last say. Without deep commitments to reduce GHG emissions in absolute terms from the rapidly growing, high-emitting nations, GHG gas abatement in the highest income countries would do little to slow global warming in this century. Many observers consider that the commitments of China, India, and a handful of additional lower-income high-emitting countries, will determine the effectiveness of the forthcoming agreement and continued interest in the United Nations process.

Governments alone, however, have limited powers to reduce emissions and enhance the resilience of

their constituents. The Secretary-General broadened the scope of engagement in the Summit to encompass businesses, community groups, women, youth, and indigenous leaders; the summit is likely to highlight how nongovernmental actors are innovating to address GHG mitigation, deforestation and land degradation, and resilience to expected environmental changes. Organizers expect announcements of initiatives by businesses and business groups, and by coalitions of governments, communities, and others.

Preceding this spotlight on leaders on September 23 were events by some stakeholders calling for policy and private actions. Most notable was the [People's Climate March](#) on Sunday, September 21 in New York City. It drew nearly 400,000 participants, representing a wide variety of organizations and individuals. Organizers reported 2,645 associated events in 156 countries.

The U.S. Congress remains divided on how this nation should address climate change. While few Members appear to doubt that the climate is changing, and many agree that human activities contribute to the changes, they do not agree on types, strength, or timing of acceptable policies.

The effects that the summit may have are unclear. Certainly it draws the attention of world leaders and treaty supporters to the slowly accumulating dilemma in a period when urgent international problems are making headlines and demanding decisions. Heads of State are unlikely to play their best cards at this juncture in the climate negotiations. On the other hand, this early round may build or reduce confidence among governments for the coming rounds: it may reveal whether each is playing to gain advantage in a competitive game of winners and losers, or whether each is seeking to cooperate toward a collectively superior solution. The distribution of efforts and of potential harm, shrouded by deep unpredictability, remains the pivotal dilemma in making policy choices.

For more information related to the U.N. climate convention, see CRS Report R40001, [A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), by Jane A. Leggett; CRS Report R41808, [International Climate Change Financing: Needs, Sources, and Delivery Methods](#), by Richard K. Lattanzio and Jane A. Leggett; CRS Report R41889, [International Climate Change Financing: The Green Climate Fund \(GCF\)](#), by Richard K. Lattanzio; and CRS Report R41845, [The Global Climate Change Initiative \(GCCII\): Budget Authority and Request, FY2010-FY2015](#), by Richard K. Lattanzio.

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