

International climate agreements

Climate change is a global concern. Governments around the world have been working together and negotiating agreements to tackle the causes and effects of climate change for several decades. Canada and the U.S. are part of these agreements, which provide guidance, goals and international accountability for our governments. International cooperation allows governments to share knowledge and expertise and to work together to address inequality and injustice.



MCC photo/Isaac Alderfer

How are climate agreements made?

Most international climate agreements are made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (**UNFCCC**). Established in 1992, the UNFCCC brings more than 190 countries together every year for a Conference of the Parties or **COP**, where world leaders gather and key climate agreements are negotiated. Another important body is the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change (**IPCC**), formed in 1988. The IPCC reviews and condenses the work from thousands of scientists around the world¹.

These summaries are created so that policymakers have all the up-to-date information they need on the realities and risks we're facing and ways to adapt or mitigate the causes.

1. ipcc.ch/

MCC photo/Laura Pauls-Thomas

Above photo: In countries like Cambodia, MCC partners help farmers like Yum Sopharl adapt to climate change. But more support for adaption efforts is needed.

Right photo: In 2021 a group of cyclists called the Climate Riders spent two months riding across the U.S. to learn and raise awareness about the issue of climate change. They ended in Washington D.C. where they met with government representatives to speak about their climate concerns.





MCC photo/Christy Kauffman

Countries, like Zimbabwe, that have historically very low emissions often face the worst effects of climate change.

What are the most important agreements?

Canada and the U.S. have signed onto dozens of environmental agreements that address a range of issues, such as biodiversity, ozone depletion and pollution. There are four key climate agreements that have shaped the way our governments are responding to this crisis. The terms our governments agreed to in these treaties then influence decisions on policy and budgets.

The Kyoto Protocol. The first global climate treaty was signed in 1997 and addressed a key question: Who is responsible for taking action on climate change? The parties considered the emissions records of countries that industrialized earlier, such as the U.S. or U.K., and agreed that the greatest responsibility for climate action should be with those most responsible for the causes of climate change (i.e. those with the highest emissions over time). This is called the **Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility**² and it forms an important base for other climate treaties.

The Copenhagen Accord. In 2009, countries with historically higher emissions jointly committed to providing USD 100 billion annually in climate funding by 2020³. This funding is an important part of the responsibility of wealthier countries: to assist those who are impacted most by climate change but contributed less to its causes.

The Paris Agreement. The 2015 Paris Agreement is a landmark international agreement on climate action, which nearly every country has signed on to. A key aspect of the Paris Agreement was formally establishing the goal of limiting global warming to **1.5°C** above pre-industrial levels⁴. This number was set based on scientific estimates to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. This agreement reaffirmed the financial responsibilities of higher-income countries, but unlike the Kyoto Protocol, it calls on *all* countries to reduce their emissions significantly, mitigating climate change as much as possible.

The UAE Consensus. Agreed to in December 2023, this is the most recent climate treaty that Canada and the U.S. are part of. This treaty is significant because it includes the first formal global consensus that all countries must **transition away from fossil fuels** and towards renewable energy sources.⁵ It also includes the launch of the Loss and Damages Fund, which further establishes the financial responsibilities of high-emitting countries towards those suffering the most from climate change.

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2. https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol
3. unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/l07.pdf
4. unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf
5. cop28.com/UAEconsensus