# CRS Insights

Climate Summit 2014: Warm-Up for 2015
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On September 23, 125 heads of state and governments, as well as business, religious, community, and civil society leaders, gathered in New York City for Climate Summit 2014. The Summit was hosted by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and branded as an event "to galvanize and catalyze climate action." While it may have accomplished little in its quest for deeper government commitments than already pledged, it provided a platform for private and nonprofit organizations to announce a wide variety of actions, including pledges of U.S. $200 billion to finance climate-related actions, mostly from investors and other private entities, and that may move markets and secure future greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions. The European Union pledged U.S. $18 billion of the total.

The Summit came 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 agrees, according to its schedule, by the end of 2015, on a new accord to address climate change in the post-2020 period. Nations that "are ready to do so" will announce their "intended nationally determined contributions" 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 all Parties regardless of their different mitigation levels.

The Summit spotlighted 125 leaders in a warm-up round before their announcements in 2015. While President Obama appeared at the Summit, a number of key Heads of State did not attend, such as China's President Xi Jinping and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Their absence added doubts about their willingness to commit to GHG reductions necessary to slow significantly scientists' projections of human-induced global warming. The formal statements by these governments and others would sustain the "developed" versus "developing" country bifurcation of responsibilities. Many low-income nations reiterated calls for leaders to fulfill their multinational pledge to mobilize up to $100 billion in financing by 2020 in the politically binding Cancun Agreements. Many leaders' statements suggested that the 2015 negotiations may remain mired in old positions that have impeded the UNFCCC's effectiveness.

The first government speaker, Environment Commissioner Connie Heddegaard of the European Union, reiterated the region's intention to reduce EU GHG emissions by 40% below the 1990 level by 2030. This is an interim value in the proposed EU Framework on "the cost-effective track" toward its objective of reducing GHG emissions to at least 80% below the 1990 level by 2050.

President Obama stated that the United States will accomplish his policy goal of reducing U.S. GHG emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020, and cited proposed and promulgated regulatory actions by the Environmental Protection Agency and additional initiatives designed to achieve future emission reductions. The President announced a new Executive Order on Climate-Resilient International Development. It reinforced the long-standing message that the United States will provide experts, information, and some financial resources to assist low-income countries to mitigate or adapt to climate change, but provide only limited public funds toward the multinational pledge of $100 billion annually by 2020.

Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of China had—both literally and figuratively—the last say. Many observers consider that the commitments of China, India, and a score of additional lower- to middle-income countries will determine the effectiveness of the forthcoming agreement and continued interest in the United Nations process. Zhang pointed out that China's policies reduced its carbon intensity below the 2005 level by 28% in 2013, well on the way to meeting China's target of 40-45% by 2020. However, in a position dating back to the original UNFCCC negotiations—when China emitted one-tenth of global GHG emissions rather than its current one-quarter share—China maintained a distinction between undefined "developed" versus "developing" countries that may be a dead-end for the treaty. Without deep commitments to reduce GHG emissions in absolute terms from the rapidly growing, high-emitting nations, GHG abatement in the highest income countries would do little to slow global warming in this century.

Governments alone have limited powers to reduce emissions and enhance the resilience of their citizens. The Secretary-General broadened the scope of engagement in the Summit to encompass businesses, community groups, women, youth, and indigenous leaders. Many held events or announced measures to address climate change voluntarily. One was the People's Climate March on Sunday, September 21 in New York City. It drew nearly 400,000 participants, supplemented by 2,808 associated events in 166 countries.

Among announcements, the United Nations estimated that U.S. $200 billion was offered, mostly from banks and private investors, to finance climate actions. In addition, on September 22, the World Bank Group trumpeted a "carbon price leadership coalition" of 73 national governments, 11 regional government and more than 1000 companies and investors that support policies to put a price on carbon emissions. It reported that "[t]ogether, these government supporters represent 52% of global GDP, 54% of global GHG emissions, and almost half the world's population. The supporters include emitters like China, Russia and the European Union, and growing economies like Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa." Thousands of businesses and cities stated voluntary targets and actions, including Mars, Proctor & Gamble, Hewlett Packard, General Mills, General Motors, and many other U.S. firms.

The U.S. Congress remains divided on how federal policy 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 drew 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 did not play their best cards at this juncture in the climate negotiations. It remains to be seen whether this early round built or reduced confidence for coming rounds: a few leaders suggested that they may be playing to gain advantage in a competitive game of winners and losers, while others appear to offer meaningful commitments to cooperate in 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 (GCCI): Budget Authority and Request, FY2010-FY2015*, by Richard K. Lattanzio.