

OGMUN - SHSID

Model United Nations Conference

牛津大学-上海中学国际部国际模拟联合国大会

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United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31)



#BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Letter to Delegates

Dear Delegates,

We are very much looking forward to meeting you all at the conference. Climate change is the most pressing problem the world faces today; sea level rise, alongside rapid changes to our ecosystems are causing severe damage to countries across the globe. The scarcity of resources that climate change is exacerbating could lead to further conflict and division, as people affected by rising sea levels find their homes and livelihoods swept away. Such changes will force people to migrate to safer territories, causing tensions over demand for land. Limiting the increase in global temperature is essential to address this challenge.

The Conference of the Parties (COP31) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a central event for global climate governance. It serves as a platform for nations to collaborate on strategies to mitigate climate change, adapt to its impacts, and secure a sustainable future. Central to its discussions are the balancing of growth and sustainability and the disagreements between different regions on how to address the climate crisis.

We cannot wait to hear your ideas and discussion on this topic, and hope that in doing so, we will be able to contribute constructively to the global discussion of these issues. We hope that everyone will engage in the debates, especially if this is your first time attending MUN!

Sincerely,

SHSID OGMUN team

Introduction to the Committee

The COP31 Committee is the upcoming edition of the Conference of the Parties that acts as the decision-making body for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). All 198 members meet annually to review and update the status of the convention, fulfilling pledges made at previous conferences.⁴ The COPs are among the largest annual meetings convened by the United Nations, highlighting its importance given the increasing urgency of the climate crisis. As UNFCCC Executive Secretary Simon Stiell said: “Every tenth of a degree of global heating matters. Every year matters. Every choice matters. Every COP matters.”⁸

The first Conference of the Parties (COP) was held in Berlin in 1995, following the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit. The motivation behind its inception was to provide a basis for international climate change negotiations, following the recognition of scientific evidence of human impact on the climate. Despite a deliberate lack of concrete targets, the convention has a consistent goal to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere in order to prevent “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”¹⁷ Subsequent COPs continued this mandate, serving as a vessel to discuss climate change, negotiate solutions, and assess the world’s progress in mitigating and preventing climate change.

All member states of the UNFCCC are represented at the COP and, as previously mentioned, serve as the supreme decision-making body of the Convention. Their mandate includes reviewing and changing the Convention, as well as any other legal instruments adopted by the COP to further the goals of mitigating and preventing climate change. The primary objective of each COP meeting is to review the national communications and emissions inventories submitted by each member party. Whilst this is where the headlines are made, a lot of the underlying work is also done by the CMP and CMA, the supreme governing bodies of the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement, as well as the permanent subsidiary bodies: the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and

Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). Each governing body (COP, CMP, and CMA) can also create ad hoc subsidiary bodies to address pressing issues and assist in the governance of the Convention. These governing and subsidiary bodies meet separately from the COP in both independent meetings and their own conferences, and are also represented in COP meetings, alongside other stakeholders. The representation of non-state members is necessary for the Convention, as key stakeholders, such as NGOs or private companies, need to be informed of the decisions of states and be given the opportunity to communicate key information. However, the inclusion of certain lobbying groups in COP meetings has come under heavy criticism from NGOs and climate activists, as record numbers of fossil fuel lobbyists have started attending the conferences - some stakeholders worry that allowing them to lobby during COP meetings undermines the mandate of the Convention and actively stalls climate action. COP meetings are also often criticised for the carbon-emitting actions of those attending the meetings, such as private flights, which are often seen as dismissive of the Convention's mandate and, according to some, demonstrative of the disassociation between policymakers and climate change. Lastly, major criticism comes from the fact that COP agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, are not legally binding, and can be withdrawn from by party states at any time.

We have seen this happen with major parties, such as the USA, which is currently undergoing a process, ordered by President Donald Trump, to withdraw from the Paris Agreement for the second time since 2020 by the end of the year.

The Conferences have established and implemented a number of accords, the most influential being the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015). The former binds developed countries to "limit and reduce GHG emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets,"¹⁵ This was in effect over the 5 years from 2008-2012 and was adopted for a second commitment period through the Doha amendment. Meanwhile, the latter prescribes a more radical universal commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to restrict global warming to 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels until the end of the century.

It is important to consider the future direction of the conference, especially following the outcome of the promises made in Paris. In order to remain within

the 1.5-degree threshold, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 and decline 43% by 2030.¹⁰ This means that the next few years will be pivotal for deciding the feasibility of this goal. If the trajectory is on an encouraging path, the priority will be constructing frameworks that can sustain climate commitments into the future. Otherwise, world leaders and institutions must adapt to potentially irreversible conditions and implement an alternative goal that can be realistically achieved. COP31 presents an opportunity for reflection and renewed ambition.

COP30, the most recent COP, marked the 30th meeting of the 198 parties, prompting a moment of retrospection for the achievements of the conferences so far. As the host of COP30, Brazil played a key role in shaping the debate surrounding the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as adapting to its effects. Brazil has always been central to climate change resolution, through multiple channels. Geographically, Brazil has felt the brunt of the impact of climate change since it houses the Amazon Rainforest. As the largest rainforest and carbon sink in the world, the Amazon is an essential natural mitigator of climate change. It absorbs around 600 million tonnes of carbon per year,⁶⁸ however, its role as a sink is being threatened by incessant deforestation and mining practices. A decline in plant diversity, plant cover and intact soils decreases its ability for carbon capture.¹ In the absence of this vital mitigation mechanism, Brazil must rely even more on adaptive practices in order to adapt to new conditions. Politically, it was also the birthplace of the UNFCCC, as the outcome of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development¹⁷. Informally known as the Earth Summit, the keystone conference was held in Rio de Janeiro and solidified the importance of addressing climate change, while linking the endeavour to advancing economic development in countries particularly impacted by extreme weather events.

The COP has in recent times been one of the most important United Nations meetings of the year. As delegates for this conference, you will be on the front lines of possible solutions and new partnerships. Use this opportunity not only to debate, but also to imagine a future that is both ambitious and achievable.

Adapting to a Future Beyond 1.5 Degrees

Background of the Problem

The topic of climate change has been regarded with increasing urgency on the global stage. Global warming is principally a naturally occurring phenomenon driven by complex atmospheric and oceanic cycles. However, the last 50 years have shown an unprecedented increase in average temperatures beyond natural variability. This is in direct correlation with an increase in anthropogenic emissions. Greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere increased by 70% between 1970 and 2004, explicitly caused by human activity³. The buildup of these gases in the atmosphere is deregulating the natural functioning of ecosystems and essential processes. The incessant rise in global temperatures is one of the clear outcomes of this disruption to natural processes. Therefore, imminent restorative and adaptive actions were needed by the global community.

This is where the COPs enter as a vital forum for panel discussions, exhibits, cultural events and renewed pledges⁸. Through negotiations, nations establish collective frameworks such as the Global Goal on Adaptation, while capacity-building sessions help developing countries access tools, knowledge, and funding for locally tailored responses. Exhibitions and side events spotlight real-world success stories, indigenous practices, and nature-based solutions that would otherwise remain peripheral. Furthermore, cultural dialogues and civil society engagement at COPs humanise the adaptation challenge, reminding negotiators that climate change is not only a scientific or economic issue, but a deeply social and humanitarian one¹⁴. While COPs have varied in effectiveness, they provide the only truly global, multilateral forum for climate governance under the UNFCCC framework.

The Paris Agreement is, without doubt, one of the biggest achievements made through the collaboration between the countries making up the UNFCCC. It was the first time in history that all participating nations adopted a universal, legally binding agreement to combat climate change, aiming to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to keep it at

1.5°C above pre-industrial levels⁵⁰. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses a baseline of 1850-1900 to define the pre-industrial period, because it is the earliest period with reliable large-scale measurements. These outline the baseline temperature of the world before industrialization initiated the rapid growth of greenhouse gases⁴⁴. It is rare that such a comprehensive agreement can be reached between such a diverse collection of states with minimal compromise on urgency and action requirements. However, beyond initial cooperation, the implementation of actionable policies is required for genuine progress towards climate stability. Otherwise, environmental degradation continues through the status of Business as Usual (BAU), meaning the risk of climate collapse lingers and potentially becomes amplified.

Historical Solutions

Our current position is largely a consequence of the emissions of a small number of highly industrialised contributors. The G7 owe nations \$13 trillion in loss and damage to the environment in the Global South, as revealed by Oxfam ahead of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan⁶². The Oxfam International Interim Executive Director Amitabh Behar emphasises that this due must be paid as a “moral obligation,” rather than an act of benevolence or charity. Persistent climate inequality has manifested through varying resilience capabilities of nations in the face of extreme weather events, as well as difference in speed of technological advancements to achieve national sustainability. The COPs have played a vital role in minimising the divide, by amplifying the voices of developing countries, establishing the Paris Agreement universally and facilitating collaborative solutions. Despite multiple pledges still unfulfilled, the signs of progress are evident.

Historical COPs have all contributed towards the creation of a more sustainable society, albeit at a slower rate than is necessary to remain within the 1.5-degree threshold. Pledges made before COP21 can be categorised as being more catered towards developing countries. COP3 saw the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol,

which legally bound emission targets for developing countries, while COP8 established the Delhi Declaration on the needs of the poorest⁵. These indicate the initial emphasis on amplifying previously overlooked perspectives in an effort to increase the equity of international influence.

This had mixed results, considering that unilateral declarations and exclusionary emission targets compartmentalised industrialising and industrialised nations further. This inhibited the possibility of a unified response because each type of nation was prescribed different solutions. Also, the developing world faced considerable technological obstacles, considering the absence of appropriate infrastructure to begin decarbonisation⁶⁶. They are also pressed by alternative and equally imminent issues involving economic development and fulfilment of basic human rights. Without stable sociopolitical foundations, it is impossible to implement lasting sustainable development independently.

COP21 is seen as the turning point and the most vital edition to consider for COP31's context. The Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, setting a new precedent of collaboration for further climate negotiations. Their impact was encapsulated by the Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-moon, who announced that "for the first time ever, every country in the world has pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience, and join in common cause to take common climate action."⁵⁰ Calling this a "resounding success for multilateralism"⁷ and through his repetition of the word common, Ban Ki-moon emphasised the need for all participating countries to collaborate in their solutions.

Therefore, we have now reached the point where no one country or continent can salvage the climate independently. The requirement of a unified effort can only be achieved through a universal forum like the COPs. Since this forum is comfortably established, we must now use it to enforce the implementation of climate solutions.

Current Situation

To limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030⁷⁵. The climate has always thrived in a state of dynamic equilibrium, returning to a sustainable average through negative feedback loops. However, we are facing the increasingly likely eventuality that the Anthropocene is causing a rapid succession of positive feedback loops that are moving the climate to its extreme limits.

Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees reduces the severity of many side effects of climate change. It is essential to remain within the boundaries of the critical threshold, beyond which comes a point of no return for climate stability.

The COPs since 2015 have been a mixture of implementation and reinforcements of the Paris Agreement, often with borderline postponement actions that divert attention from the increasingly unlikely prospect of meeting the 1.5°C target. Initially blinded by the blanket success of a unanimous climate agreement, some key absences in the initial draft were overlooked. For example, timelines for carbon credit trading schemes under Article 6 were left undefined, and consequences of mismanagement were unspecified⁷⁶. These oversights created a regulatory grey area that delayed the operationalisation of global carbon markets for several years². Additionally, this leniency allowed some countries to take advantage of the system and overplay their climate commitment, as later discussed in the case of Australia. Certain lapses have since been addressed to varying degrees of success. For example, COP26 (Glasgow, 2021) finally delivered a long-awaited consensus on the rulebook for Article 6⁵³, which establishes clearer guidelines for operation and more accounting safeguards.

Nevertheless, concerns remain surrounding the true impact of its implementation.

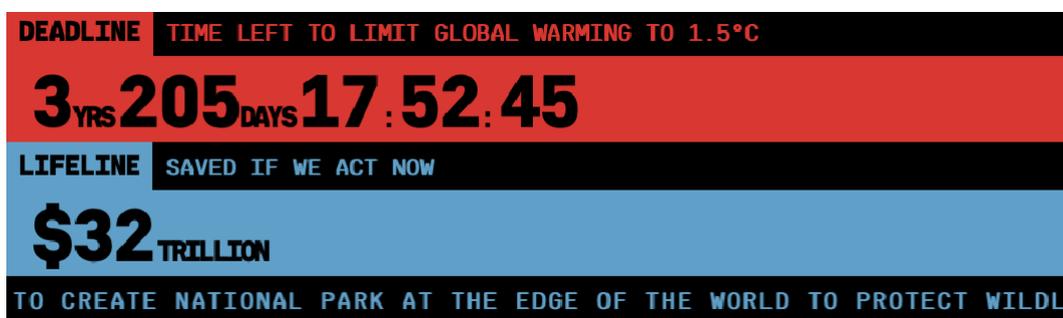
The largest genuine marker of whether we can remain within the 1.5-degree threshold is determined by whether global emissions have already peaked in 2025. Most countries have been reporting falling emissions for at least a decade, including Britain, USA, Germany and Japan. This leaves the BRIC countries to

reach their peak emissions and also begin the contraction of their non-renewable industries. The new analysis for Carbon Brief shows that China's emissions were down 1% in the latest 12 months⁶. This is a symbolic turning point for the world's biggest emitter.

With China also being the global leader in the expansion of renewable energy, this is encouraging for other countries, especially those still industrialising their economy, to do so in a sustainable manner. China is currently building twice as much new solar and wind capacity as the rest of the world combined⁸, which indicates revolutionary action irrespective of their commitment to the climate agreement. This encourages a new perspective: monitoring genuine sustainable actions over potentially performative oral pledges. A balance of actions and intentions is always necessary; however, it is a valuable question whether actions may be more heavily weighted.

Once we have established that actions determine the state of our future, we must determine whether these actions are sufficient to remain within the 1.5-degree threshold. The two most influential factors are speed of action and size of investment, according to Climate Clock²⁵. Depending on the combined strength of these factors, we alter the longevity of the planet.

The Climate Clock website has a permanent countdown for the deadline to limit global warming, which has been displayed in many central locations in cities like New York and Seoul to increase awareness and urgency. You can find the actual time left on the Climate Clock website.²⁵



Ultimately, it is highly likely that we do overshoot the 1.5-degree threshold; it matters by how much. Bill Gates said in 2022 that he saw no chance of the world staying within the threshold²⁷, alongside a number of media outlets that declared

it was 'time to say goodbye to 1.5C'44. Some predictions estimate the world is on track for an average temperature increase of 2.4 degrees this century¹¹. Others argue that a limit of 1.5 degrees is not aspirational enough, with CCAG suggesting a goal of less than 1C above preindustrial levels to truly agitate efforts⁴⁴. No matter which scientific or psychological reasoning is used to determine which prediction is most apt, the main intent is to encourage urgent action.

Overshoot is characterised by how much and for how long 1.5 degrees is exceeded, and we could bring the temperature back down again if the overshoot is not excessive¹⁸. Therefore, by minimising the overshoot, we can ensure that (some of) the damage done to the planet is reversible.

Relevant UN Actions

Within the United Nations framework, actions on climate adaptation are a core pillar of negotiations, running parallel to mitigation efforts. The central UN initiative is the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), a collective commitment established under the UNFCCC to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience, and reduce vulnerability to climate impacts. This goal is enshrined within the Paris Agreement, which explicitly includes strengthening resilience as one of its key objectives.

The UN, primarily through the COP, facilitates practical support for adaptation in developing nations. The source material highlights capacity-building sessions as a key mechanism where countries can access the necessary tools, knowledge, and, crucially, funding to develop and implement locally tailored adaptation responses. This process acknowledges that vulnerability and resilience are highly localised, requiring specific solutions rather than a

one-size-fits-all approach. These forums also serve to amplify the voices of developing countries, humanising the adaptation challenge and ensuring the perspectives of those on the "climate frontlines" are central to negotiations.

A significant portion of UN action on adaptation revolves around finance and

equity. Negotiating blocs such as the G77+China and the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) consistently use the UN platform to stress the historical responsibility of developed nations. Their advocacy centres on securing substantial and accessible finance for adaptation projects and technology transfer, framing it as a moral obligation rather than charity. These negotiations are a continuous and often contentious feature of the COPs, aiming to close the vast gap between the adaptation needs of the Global South and the funding currently available.

Furthermore, the UN is the arena for the critical discussion on Loss and Damage. Championed by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), this agenda addresses the unavoidable and irreversible impacts of climate change that extend beyond any country's ability to adapt. As the world confronts the likelihood of overshooting the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, the UN's work on establishing frameworks and financial mechanisms for Loss and Damage becomes an increasingly urgent form of action for a future where the limits of adaptation will be breached. This includes addressing humanitarian consequences such as food insecurity and climate-induced migration, creating a forum where international responsibility for these issues can be negotiated.

Proposed Solutions

How do we act moving forward, especially if it's unlikely, we meet the target?

It is vital that global warming expectations strike the appropriate balance between realistic and aspirational. Paradoxically, remaining attached to the 1.5-degree target has become part of the problem, by understating the urgency of the current situation. Therefore, if it becomes clear that 1.5 is an unrealistic target, the first thing to do is update the target with stricter controls to remain within the renewed boundaries. This is the most important implication of introducing a new target. If predictions are consistently inaccurate, they become irrelevant to policymakers. The narrative shift acts as the necessary trigger to reject the

'business as usual' mindset in favour of radical intervention, especially with regards to climate refugee citizenship, food security and distribution as well as financing climate commodities¹⁸.

Adapting to a future that exceeds previous expectations requires more extreme solutions, however it also expects more stringent mitigation measures. Otherwise, even renewed expectations of global warming will be surpassed, making predictions untrustworthy.

The threat of a mass exodus of climate migrants highlights the need for a unified staggered migration programme now. Considering the likelihood of not meeting the 1.5-degree limit, it could be advisable that countries begin to act in support of each other voluntarily. This is before they are forced to take on more climate migrants than their infrastructure can handle.

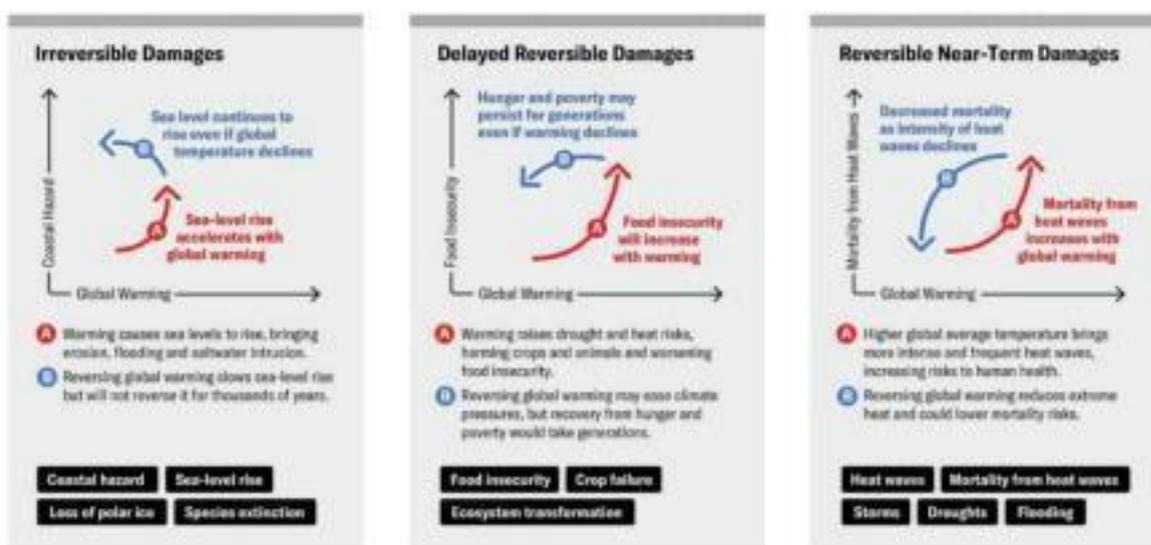
Australia has been leading the way with the initiation of the first official climate visa, named the Pacific Engagement Visa. 280 visas shall be granted each year to Tuvalu citizens, allowing them to permanently migrate to Australia with free passage between the two countries²¹. Tuvalu is the world's second lowest-lying country and is predicted to be predominantly submerged at high tide by 2050, according to NASA scientists. Since more than a third of Tuvalu residents have entered the ballot, it indicates excess demand for such visas in the future. It is encouraged that other countries introduce similar schemes.

Australia have been trailblazers for this kind of climate aid for a purpose. It is recommended that people migrate gradually from places under threat to avoid overwhelming international systems. It also reflects favourably on Australia's climate commitments, despite their questionable fulfilment of carbon emissions reduction³¹. Australia was accused of using a questionable climate loophole to meet their targets, which stands against the principles of the Paris Agreement⁵⁶. This highlights both the need for monitoring and closing loopholes, but also encouragement for countries to take similar independent action to support each other.

The protection of the climate works through the 'herd immunity' theory. Namely, if all the countries with the capabilities to reduce emissions do so, their actions can

protect the countries that do not yet have the appropriate climate infrastructure and mitigation measures in place. This reduces the urgency of global climate stress, allowing developing countries to develop their capabilities fully before needing to use them to adapt to a post 1.5-degree world.

The key stage to reach in the Green Revolution is beyond net-zero CO2 emissions, to net negative CO2 emissions. This is where human activities remove more CO2 from the atmosphere than they emit, which causes the overshoot to be reduced as global temperatures contract towards their natural levels¹⁸. It is essential that the global movement aims to reach this point, no matter how far the overshoot extends.



Questions a Resolution Must Answer

- What tipping points implied within a future beyond 1.5 degrees become irreversible?
- How will climate justice and intergenerational equity be addressed?
- What forms of adaptation are most urgent?
- How will adaptation be financed?
- What role should international institutions play versus individual countries?
- How will adaptation efforts be monitored and evaluated?
- How will adaptation and mitigation interact in a >1.5°C world?
- How will the resolution handle state responsibility and legal accountability?
- How does the resolution promote cooperation beyond borders?
- What is the core of the resolution that must be preserved at any cost?

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