

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

[UPSC Notes]

What is UNFCCC?

UNFCCC is an acronym that expands to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This body focuses on securing and saving the climate from the harmful emissions released by human beings into the atmosphere. According to UNFCCC, climate change is a change in the climatic conditions that occurs due to the interference of human activities and creating a disturbance in the balance of atmospheric composition, which in turn out to bring the variation in the climate over a comparable time period.

The Convention has near-universal membership (197 Parties) and is the parent treaty of the 2015 Paris Agreement. The main aim of the Paris Agreement is to keep the global average temperature rise this century as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The UNFCCC is also the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

UNFCCC Secretariat

The UNFCCC Secretariat was established in 1992 when countries adopted the UNFCCC. The original secretariat was in Geneva. Since 1996, the secretariat has been located in Bonn, Germany. At the head of the secretariat is the Executive Secretary, a position currently held by Patricia Espinosa.

The secretariat provides technical expertise and assists in the analysis and review of climate change information reported by Parties and in the implementation of the Kyoto mechanisms. It also maintains the registry for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) established under the Paris Agreement, a key aspect of the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Objectives of UNFCCC

The UNFCCC's objectives are:

- To stabilize the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere by thereby preventing harmful human interference in the climate system.
- To keep the global average temperature rise this century as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels”
- This objective should be achieved within the given time frame to help the ecosystem adapt itself naturally to the changing climate and ensure that food production is not at risk and all the activities go on in a sustainable manner.

Achievements of UNFCCC

Right from the arrival of UNFCCC, it has successfully achieved many targets and many are still going on. Let's take a look at the achievements of UNFCCC-

- Originally only rich nations were required to cut emissions under the Kyoto Protocol which became a point of contention. However, this discrepancy was resolved with the signing of the Paris agreement in 2015.
- Climate changes are now widely recognized which was not the case during the 1990s. Unfccc initiatives have contributed much to increasing public awareness with respect to climate change.
- UNFCCC has proved to play an important role in enhancing the learning, understanding, and scientific knowledge about climate change over the past two decades.
- Another achievement of UNFCCC is that it has successfully achieved the target of creating the plans to save the climatic change crisis and implementing them under the National Adaptation Programs of Action.
- UNFCCC takes various measures for developing countries to curb the problem of climate change by initiating some innovative ideas like Clean Development Mechanism.
- The establishment of UNFCCC in itself is a great achievement as, with its establishment, the countries have started paying attention to climate change as a problem, and have started to think about it to save the earth.
- UNFCCC has been helpful to developing and underdeveloped nations to reduce the climate crisis by providing them with help in the form of financial aid, technological help, and organizing meetings and discussions at the global level.

UNFCC COP

A total of 26 COP (Conference of Parties) have been held since the inception of UNFCC. The list of UNFCCC Conference of Parties is given below:

| COP | Year and Place |
|-------------|--------------------|
| UNFCCC COP1 | 1985, Berlin |
| UNFCCC COP2 | 1996, Geneva |
| UNFCCC COP3 | 1997, Kyoto |
| UNFCCC COP4 | 1998, Buenos Aires |

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| UNFCCC COP5 | 1999, Bonn |
| UNFCCC COP6 | 2001, The Hague |
| UNFCCC COP7 | 2001, Marrakesh |
| UNFCCC COP8 | 2002, New Delhi |
| UNFCCC COP9 | 2003, Milan |
| UNFCCC COP10 | 2004, Buenos Aires |
| UNFCCC COP11 | 2005, Montreal |
| UNFCCC COP12 | 2006, Nairobi |
| UNFCCC COP13 | 2007, Bali |
| UNFCCC COP14 | 2008, Poznan |
| UNFCCC COP15 | 2009, Copenhagen |
| UNFCCC COP16 | 2010, Cancun |
| UNFCCC COP17 | 2011, Durban |
| UNFCCC COP18 | 2012, Doha |
| UNFCCC COP19 | 2013, Warsaw |

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| UNFCCC COP20 | 2014, Lima |
| UNFCCC COP21 | 2015, Paris |
| UNFCCC COP22 | 2016, Marrakesh |
| UNFCCC COP23 | 2017, Bonn |
| UNFCCC COP24 | 2018, Katowice |
| UNFCCC COP25 | 2019, Madrid |
| UNFCCC COP26 | 2021, Glasgow |

Shortcomings of UNFCCC

Though UNFCCC is one of the most important organizations on climate change, it does have some shortcomings. The shortcomings include

- **Non-Inclusive:** Scientists completely agree that today's most dangerous pollutants in the environment are microscopic in nature and they are particularly awaited from the angels and power plants but the Kyoto Protocol out rightly ignores these pollutants which is not a good sign.
- **Slow Progress:** The UNFCCC has not been able to convince the United States of America to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This signifies that the USA being the largest emitter of greenhouse gases is kept away from the commitments and is not obliged to follow them.
- **Unsustainable Targets:** In the past century, the world has gone warmer by nearly 1 degree centigrade and the Paris contributions are still inefficient to maintain 2 degrees Celsius.
- **Unsatisfactory Response:** Many countries want a 1.5 degree Celsius target which includes the leaders of low-lying Nations facing sea level Rises that are unsustainable in the warming world.
- **Financial Constraints:** Several Pacific Island Nations have pointed out that the agreement requires rich countries to pledge \$B100 per year of funding beyond 2020 which is ideally not enough.
- **Non-Binding Agreement:** As a result of the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the agreement punishes the United States and will definitely cost America in terms of laws of millions of jobs, and the rest of the world has been placed under more pressure to achieve the Paris climate agreement goals.

- **No Enforcement Mechanism:** The Paris agreement has no enforcement mechanism because each country must determine plans and report its own actions to mitigate Global Warming.

