



## *Harvard Model Congress Europe 2010*

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### **GROUP OF EIGHT**

#### **Global Warming and the Post-Kyoto Agenda: Update**

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#### **Introduction & Summary of the Problem**

According to the **IPCC**, the global climate is heating up due in large part to excessive **anthropogenic** greenhouse gas emissions. This phenomenon is known as **the Greenhouse Effect**. Much of the increase in carbon emissions can be directly linked to the ongoing process of industrialization all around the world. The factories, vehicles, and mines that have accompanied economic development often use technology which causes heavy pollution, particularly when technology is primitive as it usually is in developing areas. Indeed, the burning of **fossil fuels** has been the greatest contributor to recent rising carbon dioxide levels. These conditions have led to a significant increase in global temperature (0.6°C over the past 30 years), a decrease in snow cover of roughly 10%, average global sea levels have risen (~20cm during the 20<sup>th</sup> century), droughts have become more extreme, precipitation in some regions has become much heavier, heat waves & tropical cyclones are becoming more intense, and scientists have documented climate-induced changes in more than 420 physical processes and biological ecosystems. And while global warming is widely accepted by nearly the entire scientific community, the issue of contention is whether humans are responsible for global warming and whether it is possible to slow down the climate change process. The Fourth IPCC Assessment Report (2007) concluded that “Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic [greenhouse gas] concentrations” (IPCC 4).

If nothing is done to combat this problem, the future prospects for the world’s climate range from bad to worse; according to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), “Even the minimum predicted shifts in climate for the 21st century are likely to be significant and disruptive.” The effects of global warming are bound to make the world less livable and economically viable for humans. Thus, it is crucial that we take a proactive approach on this issue and start making changes now. Fortunately, many people are becoming more conscious of the implications of climate change. There has been a shift, even among businesses, towards reducing and **offsetting** greenhouse gas emissions. These trends in public opinion, like the trends in meteorological data, have been recognized by governments, which are becoming keener to address the issue.

**IPCC**—*inter-governmental panel on climate change*

**anthropogenic** – *caused by human beings; produced during human economic activity*

**Greenhouse Effect**- *the process by which the earth is heated due to the absorption of infra-red radiation*

**fossil fuels**- *A non-renewable natural resource made formed from decomposing organisms. Important fossil fuels include oil and coal*

## The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was the first major international action taken by governments to combat the release of the anthropogenic greenhouse gases that scientists blame for causing global warming. The Kyoto Protocol, negotiated in 1997 and which came into full effect in 2005, specifies a target of 5.2% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from industrialized countries between 1990 and 2012. It was designed with a set of five principal concepts in mind:

1. *Commitments*: The force of the agreement lies in **legally binding targets** for the highly developed ‘Annex I’ (industrialized) countries, and general commitments for other members.
2. *Implementation*: Policies and measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must be designed by Annex I countries. Credits to emit more gases will be given to countries that utilize the three mechanisms available.
3. *Minimizing impacts* of climate change on developing countries by donating to an adaptation fund.
4. *Accounting reporting, & review* of the protocol.
5. *Compliance*: Enforcing compliance with commitments under the treaty, through a compliance committee.

**legally binding tar- gets- Goals that have legal repercussions and penalties if not met**

In addition to these agreed-on principles, the Kyoto negotiations led to the idea of a set of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” This meant that different countries were given different emissions targets, reflecting:

- a) their contribution to historical and current global emissions,
- b) their per capita emissions, and
- c) their current level of development and future prospects for industrialization.

The Kyoto Protocol places a heavier burden on industrialized countries for three key reasons. First, because it was these countries that produced most of the greenhouse gases emitted over the past few centuries. Second, these countries currently have high per capita emissions, and third, as these countries are already rich and do not have to make large sacrifices in terms of future development to reduce emissions. This avoids the unfairness of constraining the development potential of the poorer countries with binding emissions targets. Thus developing countries such as China and India were not given strict targets for emissions.

In addition to the targets it specifies, the Kyoto Protocol also designed and set up three ‘flexible mechanisms’ to be utilized by the Annex I (industrialized) nations to help them achieve their commitments. The first of these is Emissions Trading, a scheme that binds countries to an economically efficient **cap-and-trade system** of emissions permits. The second mechanism is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), an

**cap-and-trade sys- tem—approach to emissions control by providing a set number of rights to emit and then allowing the market to allocate these rights accordingly**

arrangement that allows countries to invest in projects that reduce emissions in developing countries, as an alternative to the more expensive and less efficient investments that could be made in their own countries, to reduce emissions. The third mechanism, Joint Implementation (JI), allows partnerships between two countries with emissions reductions targets, in which one country invests in cheaper emissions reduction projects in the other.

## **Recent Developments & Questions to be Addressed**

### *The Copenhagen Conference*

The 2009 Copenhagen Conference was held at the Bella Center in Copenhagen, Denmark, from December 7<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>. On the final day, The Copenhagen Accord was drafted by the US, China, India, Brazil and South Africa, and judged a "meaningful agreement" by the United States government. It was "taken note of," but not adopted, in a debate of all the participating countries the next day, and it was not passed unanimously. The document endorses the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol and recognizes that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the present & that actions should be taken to keep any temperature increases to below 2°C. Additionally, the Australian Government committed to reduce emissions by at least 5% by 2020, and the United States and Canada each committed to reducing their respective emissions by 17% below 2005 levels in the same time frame. However, the document is not legally binding and does not contain any legally binding commitments for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Thus many countries and non-governmental organizations were opposed to this agreement as it doesn't seem to be an adequate agreement for guiding future action.

As with the Kyoto Protocol, there were many criticisms of The Copenhagen Accord (unfortunately, perhaps even more). For whereas the Kyoto Protocol had concrete goals, strict monitoring measures, and strong international support (184 countries have ratified the treaty), The Copenhagen Accord seems to possess none of these things. The big criticisms of the Accord are that it is not legally binding, it sets no real targets to achieve in emissions reductions, it was drafted by only five countries, the deadline for assessment of the Accord was drafted as 6 years, by 2015, the mobilization of \$100 billion per year to developing countries will not be fully in place until 2020, there is no guarantee or information on where the climate funds will come from, there is no agreement on how much individual countries would contribute to or benefit from any funds, and of course that the Accord was only "taken note of" and not adopted. Thus, whereas the binding nature of the Kyoto Protocol punishes countries that do not reach their targets by requiring them to make up the difference plus 30% by a future date, the Accord does not contain these types of incentives. Therefore, many question the amount of effectiveness, if any, that The Copenhagen Accord will have at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. All of these concerns represent questions that still need to be addressed and answered.

## Conclusion

Climate change is one of the most politically controversial global issues today. Different governments at different times have divergent views on the seriousness of global warming, its causes, and what sacrifices ought to be made to prevent it. As a result, it is impossible to form a treaty that will satisfy everyone. However, that does not mean treaties do not have to be forged. Yes, bargains must be made (largely between developed and developing nations) to try and include as many countries as possible for this is not a fight that one country can win alone. The task that lies before you will therefore require a keen understanding and judgment, as well as the ability to compromise when necessary.

When proposing your own ideas for a successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol and the Copenhagen Accord, the Group of Eight must collectively determine what priority to place on greenhouse gas reductions. We must determine how to either incentivize compliance or enforce consequences for those countries that do not meet their emission reduction goals. Policies that constrain businesses from freely emitting greenhouse gases impose an economic cost which is likely to reduce economic growth in the short-run. However, we must remember to look at things in the long run as well. Recall that according to the 700-page Stern Report on the economic effects of climate change, the costs of investing now to reduce greenhouse emissions may be 1% of GDP, but impact of inaction could be worth up to 20% of global GDP in the long-term. The future of our planet is in your hands.

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