

Guide to climate negotiations terminology

Second edition



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Climate negotiations terminology

Welcome to this guide to the terminology used in climate negotiations and their outcomes.

The guide is designed as a companion for government and non-government participants in the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the negotiators of the Least Developed Countries Group. It offers an in-depth look at the specialised terminology used in climate negotiations, focusing on the key terms and expressions unique to the field of climate law.

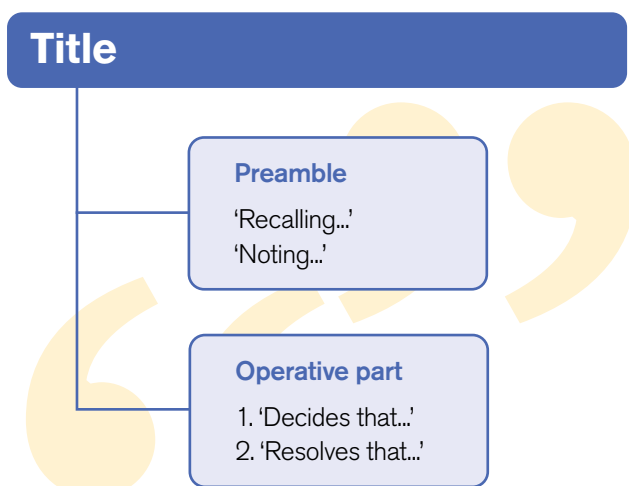
Now in its second edition — published nearly a decade after the original — this updated guide builds on the foundation of its predecessor. It introduces new terms, buzzwords and expressions that have emerged since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and incorporates fresh textual examples.

1. The structure of climate texts

Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) are international treaties relating to the environment. They typically establish a governing body known as the Conference of the Parties (COP), which adopts decisions to support an agreement's implementation. In relation to the UNFCCC, the COP is the governing body of the convention. The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement have separate governing bodies: the Conference of Members to the Protocol (CMP) and the Conference of Members to the Agreement (CMA), however COP serves as the meeting for these three governing bodies.

The structures of treaties and COP decisions are similar, comprising a preamble and an operative part, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1. The structure of treaties and COP decisions



The preamble:

- Provides the history and the context of the agreement or decision that follows
- Guides the interpretation of the agreement or decision
- Does not create legal obligations on its own
- Can reflect differences of views, including conflicting ideas, and
- May be used strategically to accommodate any particular language preferred by the parties without creating binding commitments.

The operative part:

- Constitutes the core of the agreement or decision
- Represents what parties have agreed to
- Focuses on the actions to be adopted by parties and other stakeholders, and
- May also call for the creation of new institutions or the undertaking of certain studies.

Relationship between the two parts:

- When the language of a treaty or COP decision is ambiguous or disputed, the preamble may be used to interpret the intentions of the decision makers.
- If there is a direct conflict between the preamble and the operative part, the operative text prevails.

2. Bindingness in climate law

Bindingness refers to a situation where a promise, agreement or decision must be obeyed or carried out. The language used in climate documents can determine whether an action becomes binding, thereby committing a party to implement it. However, assessing the binding nature of a specific action is often more nuanced and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Factors to consider include:

- **The nature of the legal instrument:** treaties are binding on those countries that become parties to them, but other documents usually are not. COP decisions do not set legally binding commitments on parties unless explicitly authorised in the treaty. Other COP outcomes, such as political declarations or reports, are not generally considered legally binding.

However, this factor needs to be assessed in light of the content of each document. Whilst a treaty is legally binding on parties, not all its provisions will necessarily create legally binding obligations. The Paris Agreement contains a combination of legally binding obligations, softer norms and aspirations. For instance, a provision like Article 10(1) of the Paris Agreement that says that 'Parties share a long-term vision' on technology development and transfer does not impose a particular course of action. Instead, it endorses common perspectives for further action.

As for COP decisions, they do not, as a general rule, set legally binding commitments. However, they might be authorised to do so when the treaty confers on its organs (ie COP, CMA) the power to implement its provisions. For instance, Article 4(8) of the Paris Agreement on communicating nationally determined contributions (NDCs), references COP decision 1/CP.21 and 'any relevant decisions' of the CMA, thus strengthening their binding ability.

- **The place of the term in the instrument:** the operative part of a treaty has the capacity to generate rights and obligations, while the preamble does not create independent legal obligations.

- **The content:** bindingness will depend on whether the provision has the ability to generate norms. If it does not impose obligations on states or establish standards for their conduct, it will not independently create rights and duties for the parties involved.
- **The language:** attention needs to be paid to whether terms have the capacity to create rights and obligations ('shall'), or, instead, make recommendations ('should') or promises ('will'), and whether qualifying language that dilutes normative strength ('as appropriate', 'decides to invite', etc...) is used.
- **The subjects:** attention needs to be given to the addressee of a provision. A provision mentioning 'each party' creates an individual duty on each State, while a reference to 'all parties' might create a collective duty. Provisions addressed to 'developed country parties' or 'developing country parties' create rights or obligations for specific groups.
- **The regime of oversight and accountability:** the presence or absence of a system of accountability (with, for instance, compliance procedures) does not impact the binding nature of a norm but is likely to improve compliance.

3. Drafting text language

This section presents terms commonly used when drafting text (COP decisions or treaties) without aiming to be exhaustive. It explains the meaning of each term and highlights their normative implications.

3.1 Basic drafting text language

May

May

Permissive and discretionary language. It does not create an obligation on the party carrying out the action but rather offers a possibility or alternative course of action.

Example: "A Party **may** at any time adjust its existing nationally determined contribution with a view to enhancing its level of ambition ..."

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(11)

Should

Should

Indicates a recommendation or guidance, suggesting that something is expected or advised but not required. Regularly used to indicate the non-binding status of a commitment.

Examples: "The Parties **should** protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."

– UNFCCC, Article 3(1)

"Developed country Parties **should** continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets. Developing country Parties **should** continue enhancing their mitigation efforts ..."

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(4)

Shall

Shall

Means that an action is required.

1. Used in a treaty, the term indicates that the following action is obligatory or binding.

Example: "Each Party **shall** prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions that it intends to achieve. Parties **shall** pursue domestic mitigation measures, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions."

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(2)

2. Followed by qualifying language, such as 'as appropriate', 'as necessary', 'shall endeavour' or 'shall strive', the term requires parties to attempt to do something.

Examples: "Each Party **shall, as appropriate**, engage in adaptation planning processes and the implementation of actions ..."

– Paris Agreement, Article 7(9)

"The secretariat, in implementing the international registry, **shall strive** to minimize its development and operational costs while ensuring that the international registry meets the necessary security and quality expectations."

– Decision 6/CMA.4, Matters relating to cooperative approaches referred to in Article 6, paragraph 2, of the Paris Agreement, Annex I
– Guidance relating to decision 2/CMA.3, annex, chapter VI (Recording and tracking), para. 14

Must

Must

Means that the action is required and almost always binding. It could create binding commitments in the context of a treaty; however, it is rarely directed explicitly at parties and is rather used in the passive voice (as in 'measures must be taken'), often to strengthen overall goals and obligations.

Example: "Emphasizes that just and equitable transition encompasses pathways that include energy, socioeconomic, workforce and other dimensions, all of which **must** be based on nationally defined development priorities and include social protection so as to mitigate potential impacts associated with the transition ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 51

Will

Will

1. Means that the action is going to take place with certainty. Anticipates a future fact in assertive, rather than mandatory, language.

Examples: "Reiterates that the impacts of climate change **will** be much lower at the temperature increase of 1.5°C compared with 2°C ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 8

"The efforts of all Parties **will** represent a progression over time, while recognizing the need to support developing country Parties for the effective implementation of this Agreement."

– Paris Agreement, Article 3

2. Used as obligatory language in the context of less formal agreements, such as the arrangements between the COP and the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Example: "The COP **will**, after each of its sessions, communicate guidance to the GCF."

– Decision 5/CP.19, Arrangements between the Conference of the Parties and the Green Climate Fund, Annex
– Arrangements between the Conference of the Parties and the Green Climate Fund, para. 3

And

And

All connected clauses/provisions must be satisfied cumulatively.

Example: “As nationally determined contributions to the global response to climate change, all Parties are to undertake **and** communicate ambitious efforts ...”

– Paris Agreement, Article 3

Or

Or

Only one of the connected clauses/provisions must be satisfied.

Example: “Also decides to launch a process to develop a protocol, another legal instrument **or** an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties...”

– Decision 1/CP.17, Establishment of an Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, para. 2

3.2 Preambular terms

This section presents verbs found in the preambles of treaties or COP decisions to set the context within which decisions have been taken. They take the form of a present participle (‘acknowledging’) or an adjective (‘mindful’).

Acknowledging

Acknowledging

Admitting something to be true or real or recognising the existence or occurrence of a certain fact.

Examples: “**Acknowledging** that the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries...”

– UNFCCC, preamble

“**Acknowledging** that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights...”

– Paris Agreement, preamble

Affirming

Affirming

Stating that something is true and agreeing on it.

Example: “**Affirming** the importance of education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and cooperation at all levels on the matters addressed in this Agreement ...”

– Paris Agreement, preamble

Appreciating

Appreciating

Expressing satisfaction or gratitude and recognising the value of a certain situation or action, thus stimulating its continuation and replication.

Aware of/being aware of

Example: “**Appreciating** the contributions made by developed country Parties to the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund to date ...”

– Decision 12/CP.18, National adaptation plans

Aware of/being aware of

Having knowledge of a situation or fact and reminding parties of its relevance to the context of the decision. The phrase is typically used in reference to previous COP decisions to restate and highlight them as relevant background information to the decision.

Examples: “**Aware of** the role and importance in terrestrial and marine ecosystems of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases ...”

– UNFCCC, preamble

“**Being aware of** the relevant provisions of decisions 18/CMA.1 and 19/CMA.1 ...”

– Decision 19/CMA.3, Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts

Bearing in mind that

Bearing in mind that

Emphasizing facts, issues and/or a treaty's provisions that must be taken into consideration while addressing the decision.

Example: “**Bearing in mind that**, in accordance with Article 12, the purpose of the clean development mechanism is to assist Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention in achieving sustainable development...”

– Decision 3/CMP.1, Modalities and procedures for a clean development mechanism as defined in Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol

Cognizant of

Cognizant of

Same as ‘Aware of’.

Example: “**Cognizant of** decision 2/CMP.17 and its annex”

– Decision 1/CMP.18, Guidance relating to the clean development mechanism

“**Cognizant of** the efforts and concerns of civil society, in particular of youth and indigenous peoples, in calling for urgent and ambitious global climate action ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action

Conscious of

Conscious of

Noticing the existence of something and being aware of its importance in the context of the decision. Similar to ‘Aware of’.

Example: “**Conscious of** the valuable analytical work being conducted by many States on climate change ...”

– UNFCCC, preamble

Considering

Considering

Similar to 'Bearing in mind'; it means that any given point is being taken into consideration in the decision. It may be related to facts or scientific data, documents, decisions and reports, or principles and treaty provisions. Matters considered are often recommendations and conclusions of the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol or Paris Agreement bodies or other organisations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Examples: "**Considering** that reports on activities implemented jointly have provided a rich opportunity for learning-by-doing and that no further reports have been submitted by Parties since 2006 ..."

– Decision 22/CP.18, Activities Implemented Jointly under the pilot phase

"**Considering** the importance of ensuring coherence between the participation of women in the UNFCCC process and the principles and objectives of international instruments and relevant multilateral processes ..."

– Decision 23/CP.18, Promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations and in the representation of Parties in bodies established pursuant to the Convention or the Kyoto Protocol

Emphasizing

Emphasizing

Giving special significance or importance or drawing attention to a particular issue.

Example: "**Emphasizing** the intrinsic relationship that climate change actions, responses and impacts have with equitable access to sustainable development and eradication of poverty ..."

– Paris Agreement, preamble

Endorsing

Endorsing

Supporting an idea or a previous decision or document.

Example: "**Endorsing** Decision 1/CP.15 on the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action and Decision 1/CMP.5 that requests the Ad hoc Working Group on Further Commitments of Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol to continue its work ..."

– Copenhagen Accord, FCCC/CP/2009/11/Add.1, p.5

Expressing concern

Expressing concern

Strong diplomatic language to express displeasure.

Example: "**Expressing serious concern** that the warming of the climate system is unequivocal and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia, as indicated by the findings contained in the contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ..."

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further Advancing the Durban Platform

Having concluded that

Having concluded that

Means that the COP or other entity has carried out an assessment and then reached a decision.

Example: "Having reviewed Article 4, paragraph 2(a) and (b), of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and,

Having concluded that these subparagraphs are not adequate ..."

– Decision 1/CP.1, The Berlin Mandate: Review of the adequacy of Article 4, paragraph 2(a) and (b), of the Convention, including proposals related to a protocol and decisions on follow-up

Having considered

Having considered

Something has been carefully evaluated or thought out in order to make a decision.

See 'Considering'.

Example: "**Having considered** the relevant recommendations of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice ..."

– Decision 19/CP.23, Training programme for review experts for the technical review of biennial reports and national communications of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention

Having taken note of

Having taken note of

Having recognised the existence of an agreement, a statement, a report or some findings without expressing approval for its content.

Example: "**Having taken note of** the terms of reference of the first comprehensive review of the implementation of the framework for capacity-building in developing countries ..."

– Decision 2/CP.10, Capacity-building for developing countries (non-Annex I Parties)

Having reviewed

Having reviewed

Having looked at or examined something.

Example: "**Having reviewed** the progress and performance of the Adaptation Committee ..."

– Decision 5/CP.22, Review and report of the Adaptation Committee

Mindful

Mindful

Being aware and conscious of something relevant to the decision. Has been used in a similar fashion as 'Bearing in mind', to reference relevant treaty provisions or past COP decisions.

Examples: "**Mindful** of its decision that the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action will consider elements for a draft negotiating text no later than at its session to be held in conjunction with the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties (December 2014) with a view to making available a negotiating text before May 2015 ..."

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further advancing the Durban Platform

Noting/noting with concern/noting with satisfaction

1. Acknowledging something. See 'Having taken note of'.

Examples: "Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and **noting** the importance for some of the concept of "climate justice", when taking action to address climate change ..."

– Paris Agreement, preamble

2. Noting 'with concern' or 'with grave concern' adds emphasis on the gravity of the situation in question, with an underlying intention to act in response. Usually, it relates to facts or information that came to the attention of the COP or a subsidiary body.

Example: "Noting with concern the findings in the contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which highlights that accelerated implementation of adaptation action in this decade is important for closing adaptation gaps ..."

– Decision 2/CMA.5, Global goal on adaptation

3. Noting 'with satisfaction/appreciation' acknowledges and expresses approval or gratitude for specific actions, achievements, or developments.

Example: "Notes with appreciation the efforts of the Standing Committee on Finance to strengthen its engagement with stakeholders in the context of its workplan ..."

– Decision 5/CP.28, Matters relating to the Standing Committee on Finance, para. 15.

Reaffirming

Agreeing on an issue or decision already made and repeating it to maintain it as still being true. It is used to endorse previous positions on a particular state of affairs and can be applied to principles, objectives, treaty provisions and past outcomes.

Example: "Reaffirming the outcomes of all previous sessions of the Conferences of the Parties, Conferences of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and Conferences of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, including decisions 1/CP.26, 1/CMP.16 and 1/CMA.3 (the Glasgow Climate Pact) ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan

Recalling

Highlighting a previous action, decision or statement. It brings back matters previously considered and is used to refer to provisions in climate treaties or previous COP decisions to which the decision relates.

Example: "Also **recalling** decisions 2/CP.27, paragraph 2, and 2/CMA.4, paragraph 2, by which new funding arrangements were established for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to loss and damage ..."

– Decision 1/CP.28, Operationalization of the new funding arrangements, including a fund, for responding to loss and damage referred to in paragraphs 2–3 of decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4

Recognizing

A synonym of 'Acknowledging'.

Example: "Also **recognizing** the specific needs and special circumstances of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change ..."

– Paris Agreement, preamble

Reiterating

A synonym of 'Reaffirming'. Usually applied to restate facts rather than beliefs.

Example: "**Reiterating** that the full, meaningful and equal participation and leadership of women in all aspects of the UNFCCC process and in national- and local-level climate policy and action is vital for achieving long-term climate goals ..."

– Decision 15/CP.28, Gender and climate change

Stressing

See 'Emphasizing'.

Example: "**Stressing** the urgency for completion of the work programme under the Paris Agreement resulting from the relevant requests contained in section III of decision 1/CP.21 in order to accelerate its implementation ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.1, Matters relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement

Taking into account/taking full account

See 'Considering'.

Example: "**Taking into account** the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities ..."

– Decision 3/CP.25, Enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan

"**Taking full account** of the specific needs and special situations of the least developed countries with regard to funding and transfer of technology ..."

– Paris Agreement, preamble

Underlining

Underlining

See ‘Emphasizing’ and ‘Stressing’.

Example: “**Underlining** the critical role of multilateralism based on United Nations values and principles, including in the context of the implementation of the Convention and the Paris Agreement, and the importance of international cooperation for addressing global issues, including climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake

Urging

Urging

Strongly insisting and encouraging parties to take action related to the context of the decision.

Example: “... **urging** Parties to accelerate their efforts to advance implementation of the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan ...”

– Decision 20/CP.26, Gender and climate change

Warning

Warning

Alerting about a potential danger, risk or undesirable outcome.

Example: “**Warning** that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies ...”

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further advancing the Durban Platform

Welcoming

Welcoming

Receiving or accepting positively. Normally used where the COP has received information from its bodies or other entities which informs the present decision. It also positively greets outcomes, initiatives and contributions.

Examples: “**Welcoming** the decision by a number of Parties included in Annex I to inscribe quantified emission limitation and reduction commitments for the second commitment period in the third column of Annex B ...”

– Decision 1/CMP.8, Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol pursuant to its Article 3, paragraph 9 (the Doha Amendment)

“**Welcoming** the annual report of the Committee to the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement ...”

– Decision 24/CMA.4, Rules of procedure of the committee to facilitate implementation and promote compliance referred to in Article 15, paragraph 2, of the Paris Agreement

Whereas

Whereas

Similar to ‘Considering’; means ‘because of’ a particular fact that is being considered. Widely used in bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs).

Example: “**Whereas**, UNDRR and UNOPS submitted a joint proposal dated 31 March 2023 ... regarding the hosting of the Santiago network secretariat ...”

– Decision 2/CP.28, Santiago network for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, Annex

Box 1. Examples of preambular terms used beyond the UNFCCC

Concurring

Agreeing with something, generally another decision.

Example: “**Concurring** with the view of the Maritime Safety Committee that...”

– Resolution A.304(VIII) adopted on 23 November 1973, International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974

Convinced of/that

Strong assertion that shows widespread acceptance of facts or positions as a premise to the actions that are going to be called for in the decision text.

Example: “**Convinced that** changes in climate have an impact on development ...”

– United Nations General Assembly Resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988, Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind

Maintaining that

Supporting a current system or position.

Example: “**Maintaining that** the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change ...”

– United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/150 of 16 February 2011, Protection of coral reefs for sustainable livelihoods and development

Observing

Used in a similar manner as ‘Acknowledging’ and ‘Conscious of’.

Example: “**Observing** that current natural resources governance is gravely hampered by ill-planned development ...”

– African Commission on Human and People's Rights, Resolution 224 on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Natural Resources Governance, May 2012

3.3 Decision verbs

This section provides a list of verbs frequently used in the operative part of COP decisions.

Adopts

Adopts

Wording used when the COP agrees on a new text; means that parties accept and incorporate a document, agreement or amendment into their overall treaty commitments.

Example: “**Adopts** the modalities and procedures for the operation and use of the public registry referred to in Article 4, paragraph 12, of the Paris Agreement as contained in the annex ...”

– Decision 5/CMA.1, Modalities and procedures for the operation and use of a public registry referred to in Article 4, paragraph 12, of the Paris Agreement, para. 1

Agrees upon/ agrees to

Agrees upon/agrees to

Means that all parties support the decision. Less formal and slightly weaker than ‘Decides’. Used to denote agreement between parties.

Example: “**Agrees to** the arrangements between the Conference of the Parties and the Green Climate Fund contained in the annex, thereby bringing the arrangements into force ...”

– Decision 5/CP.19, Arrangements between the Conference of the Parties and the Green Climate Fund, para. 4

Approves

Approves

Means to accept or to ‘agree to’, and is often used to endorse budgets, staffing plans or conclusions from governing bodies.

Example: “**Approves** the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, amounting to EUR 56,889,092 for the purposes specified in table 1 ...”

– Decision 21/CP.23, Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, para. 1

Authorizes

Authorizes

Gives authority or official power to someone or another body. This verb is usually used to allow another body (other than the COP) or the Secretariat to carry out a function that it would normally undertake for itself, such as establishing advisory panels or exercising discretionary budget powers.

Example: “**Authorizes** the Executive Secretary to make transfers between each of the appropriation lines set out in table 1, up to an aggregate limit of 15 per cent of total estimated expenditure for those appropriation lines ...”

– Decision 21/CP.23, Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, para. 10

Calls for

Calls for

Expresses a request or appeal directed towards parties to take specific actions. It reflects the collective will of the COP and can serve as a guideline for future actions.

Example: “**Calls for** urgent, incremental, transformational and country-driven adaptation action based on different national circumstances ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 51

Calls upon/calls on

Calls upon/calls on

Asks certain parties, all parties, or another entity to undertake an action.

Examples: “**Calls upon** Parties to make their contributions to the core budget for the year 2018 in a timely manner, bearing in mind that contributions are due on 1 January of each year in accordance with the financial procedures for the Conference of the Parties ...”

– Decision 20/CP.23, Administrative, financial and institutional matters, para. 5

“**Calls on** international entities, including financial institutions, to continue supporting the development and implementation of measures to avert, minimize and address the adverse impacts of climate change ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 13

Clarifies

Clarifies

Restates previous decisions or conclusions for the purpose of making them better understood, giving a clearer context to the decision to come, especially in relation to technical issues.

Example: “**Clarifies** that, for the second commitment period, starting from 1 January 2013, Parties not included in Annex I continue to be able to participate in ongoing project activities under Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol and in any project activities to be registered after 31 December 2012 in accordance with the provisions of the annex to decision 3/CMP.1 ...”

– Decision 1/CMP.8, Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol pursuant to its Article 3, paragraph 9 (the Doha Amendment), para. 12

Confirms

Confirms

Similar to ‘Reiterating’. Restates and endorses previous arrangements and conclusions, enhancing their validity.

Example: “**Confirms** that the Standing Committee on Finance shall serve the Paris Agreement...”

– Decision 3/CMA.1, Matters relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, para. 6

Decides that/to

Decides that/to

1. Parties have collectively agreed to undertake an action and, therefore, command it. Any such pronouncement commits parties and is the most robust action the COP can take.

Example: “**Decide that** the Fund will be serviced by a new, dedicated and independent secretariat ...”

– Decision 1/CP.28, Operationalization of the new funding arrangements, including a fund, for responding to loss and damage referred to in paragraphs 2–3 of decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4, para. 3

2. Followed by weaker or imprecise terms, it may also command a soft and vague action:

Example: “**Decides** ... to invite all Parties to initiate or intensify domestic preparations for their intended nationally determined contributions ...”

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further advancing the Durban Platform, para. 2b

Defines

Defines

Describes and explains something. It may be used to establish and consequently shape new concepts, principles, institutions or mechanisms.

Example: “**Defines** a new market-based mechanism, operating under the guidance and authority of the Conference of the Parties ...”

– Decision 2/CP.17, Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention, para. 83

Emphasizes

Emphasizes

Underlines a situation or idea without particularly doing something about it.

Example: “**Emphasizes** the continued challenges that developing countries face in accessing financial, technology and capacity-building support ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 12

Encourages

Encourages

Suggests or expresses hope that another party or entity will take action on something. A weaker variant of ‘Urges’. In practice, it is the equivalent of ‘hoping’ that someone will do what they are ‘encouraged’ to do. A very common expression.

Examples: “**Encourages** entities ... to collectively channel adequate and predictable results-based finance in a fair and balanced manner ...”

– Decision 9/CP.19, Work programme on results-based finance to progress the full implementation of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16 paragraph 70, para. 5

“**Encourages** Parties to apply a participatory approach to adaptation planning and implementation ...”

– Decision 9/CP.24, Report of the Adaptation Committee, para. 8

Endorses

Endorses

See ‘Endorsing’.

Example: “**Endorses** the workplan of the Standing Committee on Finance for 2019 ...”

– Decision 4/CP.24, Report of the Standing Committee on Finance, para. 2

Establishes

Establishes

Widely used to create, for example, mechanisms, bodies, processes and commitments.

Example: “**Establishes** the Warsaw international mechanism for loss and damage, under the Cancun Adaptation Framework ...”

– Decision 2/CP.19, Warsaw international mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with climate change impacts, para. 1

Expresses

Expresses

1. ‘Expresses its appreciation/gratitude’: Usually applied to thank countries for hosting the COP or to acknowledge the support given by the United Nations or other organisations.

Example: “**Expresses its appreciation and gratitude** to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the scientific community for providing the 2019 Special Reports ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 6

2. ‘Expresses concern or disappointment’: a statement signalling that the COP is unhappy with an action or omission, for instance, in relation to finance.

Example: “**Expresses serious concern** that the goal of developed country Parties to mobilize jointly USD 100 billion per year by 2020 in the context of meaningful mitigation action and transparency on implementation has not yet been met ...”

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 36

Insists

Insists

To be emphatic, firm or resolute on a matter of desire, demand or intention. It strongly expresses the COP’s expectation that the intention should be complied with. However, it does not necessarily impose a binding obligation on parties to act in accordance with that intention.

Example: “**Insists** that action related to adaptation follow an assessment and evaluation process, ... so as to prevent maladaptation and to ensure that adaptation actions are environmentally sound and will produce real benefits in support of sustainable development ...”

– Decision 5/CP.7, Implementation of Article 4, paragraphs 8 and 9, of the Convention (decision 3/CP.3 and Article 2, paragraph 3, and Article 3, paragraph 14, of the Kyoto Protocol), para. 2

Invites

Invites

Requests the presence, participation or engagement of parties or another entity in a diplomatic way. However, it leaves the invitee with complete discretion over whether to accept or comply with the solicitation.

Examples: “**Invites** Parties to submit their views on the membership of the Paris Committee on Capacity-building by 9 March 2016 ...”

– Decision 1/COP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 77

“**Invites** Parties to provide support to developing countries for undertaking gender-related action and implementing the gender action plan ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 86

Notes

Notes

To pay particular attention to something. See ‘Noting’.

Example: “**Notes** the importance of aligning nationally determined contributions with long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 27

It can also be used negatively to express concern or disappointment:

Examples: “**Notes with concern** that the estimated aggregate greenhouse gas emission levels in 2025 and 2030 resulting from the intended nationally determined contributions do not fall within least-cost 2°C scenarios but rather lead to a projected level of 55 gigatonnes in 2030 ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 17

“**Notes with deep regret** that the goal of developed country Parties to mobilize jointly USD 100 billion per year by 2020 in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation has not yet been met ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.3, Glasgow Climate Pact, para. 44

Reaffirms

Reaffirms

To state again clearly and firmly.

“**Reaffirms** that, in the context of nationally determined contributions to the global response to climate change, all Parties are to undertake and communicate ambitious efforts as defined in Articles 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 13 of the Paris Agreement with a view to achieving the purpose of this Agreement as set out in its Article 2 ...”

– Decision 1/CP.24, Preparations for the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, para. 3

Recalls

Recalls

To repeat a fact, an invitation or a request. Used either to provide background or to confirm something.

Example: “**Recalls** that the provision of scaled-up financial resources should aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation, taking into account country-driven strategies, and the priorities and needs of developing country Parties ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 14

Recognizes

Recognizes

See ‘Acknowledging’ and ‘Recognizing’.

Example: “**Recognizes** the role of multilateralism and the Convention, including its processes and principles, in addressing climate change and its impacts;

Also **recognizes** the important advances made through the UNFCCC multilateral process over the past 25 years ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, paras 1–2

Recommends

Recommends

Advises parties, an entity or a body to undertake a given course of action. A weaker form of ‘Urges’.

Example: “**Recommends** that, in accordance with decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 61, the Conference of the Parties transmit to the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism the guidance contained in the decisions referred to in paragraph 4 above ...”

– Decision 3/CMA.1, Matters relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, para. 10

Reiterates

Reiterates

Repeats a fact that has been accepted previously to remind of its importance.

Example: “**Reiterates** that the impacts of climate change will be much lower at the temperature increase of 1.5 °C compared with 2°C...”

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 7

Requests

Requests

A very common verb to ask a party or an entity to do something, connoting favour or courtesy. Does not create a legally binding obligation upon the requested party. Commonly used to request information or measures from parties, UNFCCC bodies (such as SBSTA or SBI), or the Secretariat.

Examples: “Also **requests** the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to develop modalities and procedures for the operation and use of the public registry referred to in Article 4, paragraph 12, of the Agreement ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 29

“**Requests** the high-level champions to explore how to improve the work under the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action for enhancing ambition taking into account feedback from Parties and non-Party stakeholders ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 28

Resolves

Resolves

Same as ‘Decides’, meaning that a firm and solid decision has been reached after extensive discussion and wide acceptance by all involved parties.

Examples: “**Resolves** to enhance the provision of urgent and adequate finance, technology and capacity-building support by developed country Parties in order to enhance the level of ambition of pre-2020 action by Parties ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 114

“... **resolves** to pursue further efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 8

Stresses

Stresses

See ‘Emphasizes’.

Example: “**Stresses** that the increasingly complex and challenging global geopolitical situation and its impact on the energy, food and economic situations, as well as the additional challenges associated with the socioeconomic recovery from the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, should not be used as a pretext for backtracking, backsliding or de-prioritizing climate action ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 3

Takes note of

Takes note of

See ‘Noting’. Often used to reference documents external to the UNFCCC process. The most famous application of this expression is contained in Decision 2/CP.15, where the COP ‘takes note of’ the Copenhagen Accord rather than adopts it.

Examples: “**Takes note of** the Copenhagen Accord of 18 December 2009.”

– Decision 2/CP.15, Copenhagen Accord

“**Takes note of** resolutions adopted at the thirty-ninth session of the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization on 6 October 2016 ...”

– Decision 1/CP.22, Preparations for the entry into force of the Paris Agreement and the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, para. 20

Underlines

Underlines

See ‘Emphasizes’.

Example: “**Underlines** the urgent need to address, in a comprehensive and synergetic manner, the interlinked global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss in the broader context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the vital importance of protecting, conserving, restoring and sustainably using nature and ecosystems for effective and sustainable climate action ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 1

Urges

Urges

Strongly encourages action, although without the authority to enforce it properly. It is a compelling word used to to push for action, stronger than ‘Requests’. Has been used to call for action from non-UNFCCC bodies, such as the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), and from parties to comply with discretionary financial commitments or with something with which they should have already complied.

Examples: “**Urges** the institutions serving the Agreement to enhance the coordination and delivery of resources to support country-driven strategies through simplified and efficient application and approval procedures...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 64

“**Urges** developed country parties to maintain continuity of mobilization of public climate finance at increasing levels from the fast-start finance period in line with their joint commitment to the goal of mobilizing USD 100 billion per year by 2020 from a wide variety of sources ...”

– Decision 3/CP.19, Long-term climate finance, para. 7

Welcomes

Welcomes

An announcement of the COP’s appreciation and support for something. Same as ‘Welcoming’.

Example: “**Welcomes** the efforts of non-Party stakeholders to scale up their climate actions, and encourages the registration of those actions in the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action platform ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 117

Box 2. Examples of decision verbs used beyond the UNFCCC

Declares

Announces. Commonly used to make a political or unilateral statement.

Example: “**Declares** its support for the process ...”

– Convention on Biological Diversity, COP 2 Decision II/15: FAO Global System for the Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, para. 2

Determines

Decides something and imposes it rightfully. However, as in ‘decides’, the language may weaken when followed by a soft action.

Example: “**Determines** that necessary and timely action should be taken ...”

– United Nations General Assembly Resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988, Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind, para. 2

3.4 Action verbs

This section provides a list of verbs commonly found in the operative part of treaties or COP decisions that indicate an agreement on specific actions. These provisions may be directed at various stakeholders, including all the parties, some parties, the COP, subsidiary bodies or other international bodies.

To accelerate

To accelerate

To speed something up, usually a given process under the UNFCCC.

Example: "Calls upon Parties **to accelerate** the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 28

To adopt

To adopt

See 'Adopts'.

Examples: "Decides **to adopt** the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ..."

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 1

"Urges Parties **to adopt** a transformational approach to enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 34

To consider

To consider

Means that parties are required to reflect on an issue but not necessarily take any action.

Example: "Also notes the executive summary of the report on the doubling of adaptation finance and the recommendations therein and encourages Parties **to consider** implementing those recommendations, as appropriate ..."

– Decision 9/CMA.5, Matters relating to the Standing Committee on Finance, para. 16

To develop

To develop

To create, improve or make something grow or succeed. Indicates action towards something that will be made effective in the future.

Examples: "Facilitate the enhancement of the capacity of Parties, in particular developing country Parties, **to develop** and use impact assessment methodologies and tools for conducting their own assessments and analyses of the impacts of response measures ..."

– Decision 20/CP.27, Report of the forum on the implementation of response measures, para. 20(a)

"Further requests the Advisory Board of the Santiago network **to develop** its draft rules of procedure ..."

– Decision 6/CMA.5, Santiago network for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, para. 25

To enhance

To enhance

To further develop or improve something. Also requires further clarification on how this improvement will be carried out.

Example: "... calls on developed country Parties to increase support for long-term country-driven capacity-building interventions **to enhance** the effectiveness, success and sustainability of those interventions ..."

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 71

To establish

To establish

To create something. See 'Establishes'.

Example: "Decides **to establish** the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement ..."

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 7

To facilitate

To facilitate

To make it easier for something to happen. Directed at a party, institution or mechanism, requesting them to take all the necessary measures and arrangements for a given action to take place successfully.

Example: "Also requests the secretariat, in organizing the technical expert dialogues in 2023, **to facilitate** inclusive participation of all Parties, in particular developing country Parties, and balanced geographical representation ..."

– Decision 5/CMA.4, New collective quantified goal on climate finance, para. 14

To (further) elaborate

To (further) elaborate

To (further) develop something that already exists, usually a draft text, decision, document or some guidelines, by adding new inputs.

Example: "Requests the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement **to elaborate** ... guidance for accounting for Parties' nationally determined contributions ..."

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 31

To give (due) consideration

To give (due) consideration

Draws attention to the need for special consideration of a specific idea or circumstance. Has been used in the UNFCCC when granting differential treatment to recognise the needs of vulnerable countries.

Example: "Requests the Global Environment Facility **to give due consideration** in its sixth replenishment period to funding for small island developing States and the least developed countries in order to enable them to address their urgent needs and to comply with their obligations under the Convention ..."

– Decision 4/CP.19, Report of the Global Environment Facility to the Conference of the Parties and guidance to the Global Environment Facility, para. 10

To intensify

To intensify

To strengthen, increase, accelerate or invigorate something. Usually followed by further details on implementation.

Example: “Requests the forum and its Katowice Committee on Impacts **to intensify** efforts to implement the recommendations outlined in relevant decisions of the Conference of the Parties ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 148

To invite

To invite

See ‘Invites’.

Examples: “**To invite** all Parties to initiate or intensify domestic preparations for their intended nationally determined contributions, ... and to communicate them well in advance of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties ...”

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further advancing the Durban Platform, para. 2(b)

“Requests ... **to invite** representatives of relevant UNFCCC constituted bodies and institutional arrangements under or serving the Paris Agreement and/or the Convention ...”

– Decision 8/CMA.4, Matters relating to the work programme under the framework for non-market approaches referred to in Article 6, paragraph 8, of the Paris Agreement, para. 18

To promote

To promote

To undertake a certain action, to support or encourage something, or to attract people's attention to something. Commonly used to highlight certain activities, but it does not indicate strong direct action.

Examples: “Reaffirming that Parties should cooperate **to promote** a supportive and inclusive international economic system that will lead to sustainable economic growth and development in all Parties ...”

– Decision 7/CP.24, Modalities, work programme and functions under the Convention of the forum on the impact of the implementation of response measures, preamble

“Invites Parties **to promote** the engagement of local communities in the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform with a view to enhancing their participation in the Facilitative Working Group and the Platform ...”

– Decision 2/CP.24, Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, para. 13

To request

To request

See ‘Requests’.

Example: “Takes note of the invitation by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement **to request** the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement to continue its consideration of possible additional matters relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement ...”

– Decision 1/CP.22, Preparations for the entry into force of the Paris Agreement and the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, para. 13

To strengthen

To strengthen

See ‘To intensify’.

Example: “... requests Parties that have not yet done so to revisit and **strengthen** the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2023, taking into account different national circumstances ...”

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 23

To take into consideration

To take into consideration

To acknowledge something and consider it when addressing a given question. It does not, however, indicate an intention to take further action.

Example: “Invites Parties, local communities and indigenous peoples **to take into consideration** the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform and its functions at the local, national and regional level in order to enhance the engagement and inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities ...”

– Decision 2/CP.24, Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, para. 16

3.5 Qualifying language

This section presents expressions commonly found in treaties and COP decisions that qualify a statement, either by narrowing its scope or providing more specific guidance.

Any future elaboration

Any future elaboration

Indicates that an issue is not closed and can be reconsidered in the future. This language is commonly used in the context of technical guidelines and terms of reference, which are intended to be adaptable.

Example: “These shall be submitted and reviewed in accordance with relevant decisions related to Articles 5, 7 and 8 of the Kyoto Protocol, and in accordance with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Revised 1996 Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories, **any future elaboration** of these guidelines, or parts of them ...”

- Decision 16/CMP.1, Land use, land-use change and forestry, Annex
- Definitions, modalities, rules and guidelines relating to land use, land-use change and forestry activities under the Kyoto Protocol, para. 12

As appropriate/if appropriate/as necessary/if necessary/as applicable/if applicable

Conditional words allowing parties, entities and bodies discretion in determining whether the action is appropriate, necessary or applicable.

Examples: “In the context of their nationally determined contributions, when recognizing and implementing mitigation actions with respect to anthropogenic emissions and removals, Parties should take into account, **as appropriate**, existing methods and guidance under the Convention, in the light of the provisions of paragraph 13 of this Article.”

- Paris Agreement, Article 4(14)

“Invites Parties to submit information on efforts and steps taken to implement the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan in their national reporting under the UNFCCC process, **as applicable** ...”

- Decision 3/CP.25, Enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan, para. 13

“... Parties were requested to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions **as necessary** to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal, taking into account different national circumstances ...”

- Decision 4/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme, preamble

As early as possible/as soon as possible

As early as possible/as soon as possible

Time condition that suggests an action will be taken immediately but is also limited by the condition of ‘possibility’, which gives great discretion to the party expected to take the action in question.

Example: “Urges Parties that have not yet communicated new or updated nationally determined contributions to do so **as soon as possible** in advance of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (November–December 2023) ...”

- Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 22

Bearing in mind

Bearing in mind

Giving thought to something, taking it into consideration while addressing an issue.

See ‘Bearing in mind’ as a preambular verb.

Example: “Acknowledges that Parties, individually or jointly, may develop and implement various approaches, including opportunities for using markets and non-markets, to enhance the cost-effectiveness of, and to promote, mitigation actions, **bearing in mind** different circumstances of developed and developing countries ...”

- Decision 1/CP.18, Agreed outcome pursuant to the Bali Action Plan, Framework for Various Approaches, para. 41

In a position to do so

In a position to do so

Phrase to identify parties or entities that have the capacity to undertake a given action, and calling upon them to do so.

Examples: “Reiterates its call to developed country Parties, the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism and any other organizations **in a position to do so** to provide support for the preparation and communication of the intended nationally determined contributions of Parties that may need such support ...”

- Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 15

In particular

In particular

Emphasising a topic or part of the sentence that is of special interest.

Example: “Acknowledges the important role of non-Party stakeholders in contributing to progress towards the objective of the Convention and the goals of the Paris Agreement, **in particular** by supporting Parties in reducing emissions and adapting to the adverse effects of climate change ...”

- Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 26

As appropriate/if appropriate/as necessary/if necessary/as applicable/if applicable

Including

Including

Similar to ‘In particular’; used to highlight one or more items within a broad list.

Example: “Reaffirms that the objective of the Paris Committee on Capacity-building is to address gaps and needs, both current and emerging, in implementing capacity-building in developing country Parties and further enhance capacity-building efforts, **including** with regard to coherence and coordination in capacity-building activities under the Convention ...”

– Decision 2/CP.22, Paris Committee on Capacity-building, para. 2

Mutatis mutandis

Mutatis mutandis

A Latin expression meaning ‘with the necessary changes having been made’. It is used to acknowledge that a comparison being made requires certain obvious alterations.

Example: “Decides that the second periodic review shall follow, **mutatis mutandis**, the modalities set out in paragraphs 80–90 of decision 1/CP.18, including a structured expert dialogue ...”

– Decision 5/CP.25, Scope of the second periodic review of the long-term global goal under the Convention and of overall progress towards achieving it, para. 6

Ready to do so

Ready to do so

See ‘To the extent feasible/possible’. This phrase indicates that the party responsible for taking the action determines their own readiness to proceed. The concept of being ‘ready’ implies being prepared or willing to undertake a task—both of which are inherently subjective states, often defined by the party itself.

Example: “To invite all Parties to initiate or intensify domestic preparations for their intended nationally determined contributions ... and to communicate them well in advance of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (by the first quarter of 2015 by those Parties **ready to do so**) ...”

– Decision 1/CP.19, Further advancing the Durban Platform, para. 2b

Subject to

Subject to

Means that the clause can be implemented provided that something is done or a condition is fulfilled beforehand (as a pre-condition) or in the course of the action (as a condition for continuation).

Example: “Requests that the actions of the secretariat called for in the annex be undertaken **subject to** the availability of financial resources.”

– Decision 2/CP.22, Paris Committee on Capacity-building, para. 8

Taking into account

Taking into account

Same as in ‘Bearing in mind’.

Example: “Recalls that the provision of scaled-up financial resources should aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation, **taking into account** country-driven strategies, and the priorities and needs of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and have significant capacity constraints, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 14

To the extent feasible/possible/practicable

To the extent feasible/possible/practicable

To take action within limits established by the party who takes the action.

Example: “Also encourages Parties to provide detailed information, **to the extent possible**, on the assessment of the economic and social impacts of the implementation of response measures ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 147

Towards

Towards

Used to indicate direction and approximation to a goal.

Example: “Acknowledges the important role of non-Party stakeholders in contributing to progress **towards** the objective of the Convention and the goals of the Paris Agreement ...”

– Decision 1/CP.25, Chile Madrid Time for Action, para. 26.

Well in advance

Well in advance

To do something ‘in advance’ means to do it ahead of time. ‘Well in advance’ suggests well ahead of a specific time.

Example: “Reiterates its invitation to all Parties that have not yet done so to communicate to the secretariat their intended nationally determined contributions towards achieving the objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2 as soon as possible and **well in advance** of the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties (November 2016) ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 13

Where necessary/where relevant/where appropriate

See 'As appropriate/If appropriate'. Limits action to necessity, relevance or appropriateness.

Example: "Congratulates Parties that have ratified, accepted, approved or acceded to the Paris Agreement, and invites those that have not yet done so to deposit their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, **where appropriate**, with the Depositary as soon as possible"

– Decision 1/CMA.1, Matters relating to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, para. 3

With a view to

With the intention to take action in the future.

Example: "Also invites relevant public and private entities to increase the gender-responsiveness of climate finance **with a view to** strengthening the capacity of women ..."

– Decision 3/CP.25, Enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan, para. 14

Without (further) delay

In a manner that is quick and effective. It can be used to request action by parties or by another body.

Example: "Strongly urges Parties that have not made contributions in full to the core budget for the current and/or previous bienniums to do so **without further delay**..."

– Decision 7/CMP.18, Administrative, financial and institutional matters, para. 11

4. Climate law buzzwords

This section presents a selection of 'buzzwords'— technical jargon that has gained popularity in climate negotiations and regularly appears in COP decisions. Care should be taken when determining their meaning, as their definition, interpretation and use can evolve over time. The list is not intended to be exhaustive; by nature, buzzwords change in response to the progression of negotiations and the political focus on specific issues.

Additionality

The quality of something that is added to, exceeds or goes beyond a given threshold. Something can only be additional where there is a parameter for comparison, a baseline scenario from which any change can be perceived.

In the climate regime, 'additionality' serves as a performance standard to ensure that emissions reductions or international financing are greater than a baseline scenario. The term is used in relation to market mechanisms to prevent double counting of emission reductions and guarantee that reductions in emissions are supplementary to what would have otherwise occurred.

Example: "Each mechanism methodology shall specify the approach to demonstrating the additionality of the activity. **Additionality** shall be demonstrated using a robust assessment that shows the activity would not have occurred in the absence of the incentives from the mechanism ..."

– Decision 3/CMA.3, Rules, modalities and procedures for the mechanism established by Article 6, paragraph 4, of the Paris Agreement, Annex, para. 38

Adequate and predictable (financing)

'Adequate' refers to a satisfactory or acceptable situation or item in terms of quality or quantity. 'Predictable' means capable of being known, seen or declared in advance.

Used together or separately, the two terms indicate the manner through which support (financial and otherwise) must be stipulated and delivered under the UNFCCC. 'Adequate' financing delivers the funding needed to achieve the objectives of the Convention. 'Predictable' financing provides a sustained and secure flow of funds over a long period to enable developing countries to plan for investments.

Examples: “The Conference of the Parties and the entity or entities entrusted with the operation of the financial mechanism shall agree upon arrangements to give effect to the above paragraphs, which shall include the following: ...

(d) Determination in a **predictable** and identifiable manner of the amount of funding necessary and available for the implementation of this Convention and the conditions under which that amount shall be periodically reviewed.”

– UNFCCC, Article 11(3)(d)

Adequate and predictable financing is one of the guiding principles of the Green Climate Fund, the operational entity of the UNFCCC Financial Mechanism:

“The Fund will play a key role in channeling new, additional, **adequate and predictable financial resources** to developing countries and will catalyze climate finance, both public and private, and at the international and national levels.”

– Decision 3/CP.17, Launching the Green Climate Fund, Annex – Governing instrument for the Green Climate Fund, para. 3

Ambition

Ambition refers to the desire and determination to meet an objective or achieve success.

In the context of the Paris Agreement, the term signifies the willingness and determination of states to undertake meaningful and progressive actions to combat climate change. The **NDC ratchet mechanism**, which requires parties to adopt more stringent greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction plans over time, enables continuous improvement to achieve the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement.

Examples: “Each Party’s successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible **ambition**, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(3)

“As nationally determined contributions to the global response to climate change, all Parties are to undertake and communicate **ambitious efforts** as defined in Articles 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 13 with the view to achieving the purpose of this Agreement as set out in Article 2. The efforts of all Parties will represent a progression over time, while recognizing the need to support developing country Parties for the effective implementation of this Agreement.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 3

Capabilities/capacities

Both words describe the ability or power to do or understand something and can be used interchangeably. However, a subtle distinction exists between them: ‘capacity’ carries a stronger connotation of current status, suggesting existing and factual abilities. In contrast, ‘capability’ leans toward the future, reflecting potential abilities that may be developed over time.

Examples: “Each Party’s successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective **capabilities**, in the light of different national circumstances.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(3). See also [Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities](#).

“Information submitted by each Party under paragraphs 7 and 9 of this Article shall undergo a technical expert review, in accordance with decision 1/CP.21. For those developing country Parties that need it in the light of their **capabilities**, the review process shall include assistance in identifying capacity-building needs.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 13(11)

Carbon budget

The ‘global carbon budget’ assesses carbon sources and sinks on a global level. It is commonly used to evaluate the maximum amount of net CO₂ emissions globally that would limit global warming to a certain level with a certain probability. The term ‘carbon budget’ can also be used in the context of a domestic or regional climate policy mechanism that places a restriction on the total amount of GHGs a country or region can emit over a specific period. The phrase ‘remaining carbon budget’ refers to the amount of CO₂ that can be emitted in the future to keep warming below a certain threshold.

Example: “In the context of the **carbon budget** consistent with 50 per cent likelihood of limiting warming to 1.5 °C (500 Gt CO₂), cumulative CO₂ emissions in 2020–2030 based on the latest NDCs would likely use up 87 per cent of the **remaining carbon budget**, leaving a post-2030 carbon budget of around 70 Gt CO₂, which is equivalent to approximately two years of projected total global CO₂ emissions by 2030.”

– CMA, ‘Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement: Synthesis Report by the Secretariat’ FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/12 (2023), para. 16

Box 3. Buzzwords in legal commentary

Bottom-up/top-down

Legal commentators regularly label the Paris Agreement as a 'bottom-up' mechanism, although the term does not appear in formal texts. Rather, the terms 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' are used to describe the design and substance of legal texts that implement the Convention.

A 'top-down' approach implies that decisions are taken by an upper-level authority and imposed on the lower levels. Conversely, a 'bottom-up' approach draws on many entities, their experiences and particular circumstances to make decisions, working towards unified collective action.

The terms are used to distinguish the designs of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. The Kyoto Protocol is generally seen to adopt a top-down approach by setting internationally agreed, binding, quantitative emission-reduction commitments for developed country parties. Conversely, the Paris Agreement is based on a different, 'bottom-up' logic, whereby parties unilaterally define their individual emission reduction pledges according to their national circumstances to achieve the global objectives of the Agreement.

Fair share

An equitable share of the contribution towards the global climate effort. While NDCs should be 'fair and ambitious' in the light of a Party's national circumstances (Decision 1/CP.21, para. 27), interpretations of what should be considered 'fair' vary significantly. Given the 'bottom-up' approach of the Paris Agreement, the treaty does not spell out to what extent a developed country's 'fair share' of effort should be greater than the effort required by developing countries.

The term 'fair share' is used to assess the level of ambition of individual NDCs in light of the global temperature goal and evaluate whether it aligns with the rationale of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities. The term 'fair share' is not found in official documents; it is referenced in discussions about equitable burden-sharing of climate mitigation efforts, with organisations such as Climate Action Tracker having developed a sophisticated burden-sharing methodology to assign a 'fair share' to each country based on their historical responsibilities and current capabilities.

Ratchet mechanism

A ratchet refers to something that makes a situation change or develop in one direction only.

The term 'ratchet mechanism' is used by legal commentators to refer to the way the Paris Agreement requires parties to increase their mitigation targets by reviewing their NDC every five years (Article 4(3), (9)). The ratchet mechanism encourages parties to take increasingly ambitious action in order to fulfil the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)

Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)

The concept of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities is a fundamental principle of international climate law. It encompasses two key pillars of climate action: first, it signifies a collective global commitment to share the responsibility for protecting the climate; second, it acknowledges that actions will vary depending on states' historical contributions to climate change and their economic and technological capacities to address the issue. The principle is referenced throughout the Paris Agreement, serving as a guiding principle for its implementation (Article 2(2)), and for each party's NDC (Article 4(3)). See also Capabilities/capacities; national circumstances.

Examples: "The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their **common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities**.

Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof."

– UNFCCC, Article 3(1)

"This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of **common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities**, in the light of different national circumstances."

– Paris Agreement, Article 2(2)

Contributions

Contributions

'Contributions' has taken several meanings in the context of the UNFCCC. It can be used:

- To indicate financial donations or voluntary actions
- To refer to parties' participation in common efforts towards a certain end, as in the 'contribution of efforts to combat climate change
- Occasionally, to refer to the share of responsibility for a certain result, as in the 'contribution' to climate change impacts
- And, in the context of the Paris Agreement, to refer to climate plans presented as NDCs that embody the voluntary efforts determined by each party to reduce GHG emissions, as opposed to legally-binding targets.

Examples: “These policies and measures will demonstrate that developed countries are taking the lead in modifying longer-term trends in anthropogenic emissions consistent with the objective of the Convention, ... taking into account ... the need for equitable and appropriate **contributions** by each of these Parties to the global effort regarding that objective.”

– UNFCCC, Article 4(2)(a)

“Each Party shall prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined **contributions** that it intends to achieve.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(2)

“Note with appreciation the financial pledges, totalling USD 70.6 million, made ... to the Least Developed Countries Fund and urge additional **contributions** to the Fund ...”

– Decision 10/CP.27, Matters relating to the least developed countries, para. 11

Equity

Equity refers to the quality of being equal or fair. The concept of equity is strongly anchored in the Paris Agreement. It drives its implementation (Article 2(2)), informs the NDC process (Article 4(1)) and is at the heart of the global stocktake (Article 14(1)). However, the definition of equity is contested and interpretations of what this implies for Parties vary significantly. Broadly speaking, it refers to a fair and just distribution of responsibilities, benefits and risks of climate action. ‘Intra-generational equity’ recognises the historical emissions by developed countries and the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries, while ‘inter-generational equity’ is concerned with the fair use and conservation of the environment to meet the needs of present and future generations. See also Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities; fair share.

Examples: “The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of **equity** and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.”

– UNFCCC, Article 3(1)

“This Agreement will be implemented to reflect **equity** and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 2(2)

Emissions gap

The gap between:

(i) Parties’ pledges to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and

(ii) The reductions needed to achieve the 2°C/1.5°C temperature goals of the Paris Agreement. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) publishes the *Emissions Gap Report* annually in the lead-up to the COP. The report tracks the gap between the emissions reductions expected from countries’ current pledges and the reductions required to limit global warming in accordance with the temperature goals set by the Paris Agreement.

Example: “Notes with concern the findings in the latest version of the synthesis report on nationally determined contributions that implementation of current nationally determined contributions would reduce emissions on average by 2 per cent compared with the 2019 level by 2030 and that significantly greater emission reductions are required to align with global greenhouse gas emission trajectories in line with the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement and recognizes the urgent need to address this **gap**”.

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 21

Just transition

A broad concept in climate policy that aims to ensure that the shift towards a low-carbon economy is fair and inclusive. Initially focused on minimising the economic and social impacts of climate mitigation policies on workers, the concept has expanded to address wider issues of inequality, vulnerability and opportunity across social, economic and political spheres. Central to a just transition is the creation of decent work opportunities and the acknowledgement that countries and communities have different capabilities and needs as they navigate the transition to sustainable development.

Examples: “Taking into account the imperatives of a **just transition** of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities ...”

– Paris Agreement, preamble

“Emphasizes that **just and equitable transition** encompasses pathways that include energy, socioeconomic, workforce and other dimensions, all of which must be based on nationally defined development priorities and include social protection so as to mitigate potential impacts associated with

Liability

the transition, and highlights the important role of the instruments related to social solidarity and protection in mitigating the impacts of applied measures;

Decides to establish a work programme on just transition ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, paras 51–2

Liability

Refers to the state of being legally responsible for something. In the context of international climate law, it refers to holding states that have significantly contributed to climate change accountable. This would involve the recognition of an internationally wrongful act and form the basis for compensation. As a negotiation forum, the UNFCCC does not directly address these questions that fall under the remit of international courts and tribunals, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

Example: “Agrees that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any **liability** or compensation ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, para. 51

Means of implementation

Means of implementation

Implementation refers to taking actions with the view to fulfil or accomplish something.

In the climate regime, ‘means of implementation’ (MoI) refers to the combination of financial resources, capacity building, and technology development and transfer needed to implement climate treaties, especially in developing countries.

Example: “Underlines that, despite overall progress on mitigation, adaptation and **means of implementation** and support, Parties are not yet collectively on track towards achieving the purpose of the Paris Agreement and its long-term goals ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 2

National circumstances

National circumstances

An expression used to account for the variations in the situation of different countries, both in terms of impacts and capabilities. In the Paris Agreement, the phrase qualifies the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’.

While it is not further defined, it creates space to further differentiate between parties beyond the developed/developing country divide and to accommodate variations dynamically in national situations over time.

Examples: “This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different **national circumstances**.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 2(2)

“Each Party’s successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different **national circumstances**.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(3)

Nature-based solutions

Nature-based solutions

Actions that protect, manage and restore ecosystems and simultaneously provide social, economic and environmental benefits. The UNFCCC regime increasingly recognises that biodiversity loss and climate change are interlinked and that actions such as planting forests and mangroves or restoring coral reefs and peatlands can mitigate both climate change and biodiversity loss.

Example: “Recalls that, in the context of the provision of adequate and predictable support to developing country Parties, Parties should collectively aim to slow, halt and reverse forest cover and carbon loss ...”

Encourages Parties to consider, as appropriate, **nature-based solutions** or ecosystem-based approaches, taking into consideration United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/5, for their mitigation and adaptation action while ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards ...”

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, paras 47–8

Net zero

Net zero

A situation where anthropogenic CO₂ or, more broadly, GHG emissions are balanced globally by removals (for instance, via carbon sinks such as forests and oceans) over a specified period. It is a synonym for carbon neutrality. The term is not used in the Paris Agreement, but the long-term objective of parties in Article 4(1) to ‘achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century’ describes a ‘net-zero’ situation.

Example: “Highlights that about USD 4 trillion per year needs to be invested in clean energy technologies by 2030 to be able to reach **net zero** emissions by 2050 ...”

– Decision 1/CP.27, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 33

Non-market approaches

A broad term referring to mechanisms that do not rely on the market. Article 6(8) of the Paris Agreement recognises the additional benefit of non-market approaches (NMAs) in implementing NDCs and encourages coordination across a variety of climate mitigation and adaptation solutions to support their maximum impact. Examples include economic and fiscal instruments, such as carbon taxes or minimum feed-in tariffs for renewable energy; building, emissions control, and other regulations; voluntary agreements between industry and government; and information, education, and awareness programmes. The Glasgow Committee on Non-market Approaches established at COP26 oversees the development of Article 6(8).

Example: “Parties recognize the importance of integrated, holistic and balanced **non-market approaches** being available to Parties to assist in the implementation of their nationally determined contributions, in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, in a coordinated and effective manner, including through, inter alia, mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology transfer and capacity-building, as appropriate. These approaches shall aim to:

- (a) Promote mitigation and adaptation ambition;
- (b) Enhance public and private sector participation in the implementation of nationally determined contributions; and
- (c) Enable opportunities for coordination across instruments and relevant institutional arrangements.”

– Paris Agreement, Article 6(8)

Non-party stakeholders

A stakeholder is an entity with an interest in a given matter. The climate regime acknowledges that actors who are not parties to the treaties might have an interest in climate action. This phrase generally refers to actors that cannot be subject to international law but can nevertheless contribute to accelerating climate action, such as cities and regions, civil society, Indigenous communities or businesses. Since the establishment of the Lima–Paris Action Agenda at COP 20 to demonstrate the commitment of non-state actors to climate action, the need to mobilise and engage with non-party stakeholders has gained momentum.

Example: “Agreeing to uphold and promote regional and international cooperation in order to mobilize stronger and more ambitious climate action by all Parties and **non-Party stakeholders**, including civil

society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities, local communities and indigenous peoples ...”

– Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, preamble

Party-driven

A core principle of the UNFCCC process whereby the parties themselves control the direction and outcomes of negotiations, rather than other actors such as the Secretariat, the Presidency or Co-Chairs. The emphasis on a ‘party-driven’ process arose after the 2009 Copenhagen conference, which faced criticisms for its lack of transparency and inclusiveness, as key decisions were made behind closed doors by a select group of parties.

Example: “The work continues in accordance with the agreed core principles, namely:

- (a) That the process is **Party-driven**;
- (b) That the process is built upon inputs from Parties;
- (c) That any outputs of the process will reflect such inputs from Parties.”

– Reflections on progress made at the fifth part of the second session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, Note by the Co-Chairs, 7 July 2014, para. 3

Phase-out/phasedown (of fossil fuels)

The terms ‘phase-out’ and ‘phasedown’ have been employed in relation to the use and production of fossil fuels, the largest contributor to climate change. The phrases were used for the first time in the COP 26 decision that called for a “phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies” and a “phasedown of unabated coal-fired power” but were not defined. According to their dictionary meaning, ‘phase-out’ refers to the process of gradually removing or stopping the use of something, while ‘phasedown’ is less radical, as it involves gradually reducing the use of something but not necessarily eliminating it entirely. The phrase ‘transitioning away’ from fossil fuels is used to describe the gradual replacement of fossil fuels by renewable energies.

Example: “Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the **phasedown** of unabated coal power and **phase-out** of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition ...”

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 16

Readiness

Readiness

The state of being fully prepared for something or the willingness to do something.

'Readiness' in the UNFCCC regime is largely used in the context of capacity building, including for finance. It indicates the technical and institutional preparedness of parties for planning, accessing, delivering and monitoring climate finance.

Example: "The Fund will provide resources for **readiness** and preparatory activities and technical assistance, such as the preparation or strengthening of low-emission development strategies or plans ..."

– Decision 3/CP.17, Launching the Green Climate Fund, Annex – Governing instrument for the Green Climate Fund, para. 40

Response measures

Response measures

Refers to the impacts of the implementation of response measures, recognising that actions taken to address climate change can have various social, economic, political and environmental consequences. These impacts may include, for example, changes to workers' incomes, rising food prices, restrictions on exploiting newly discovered natural resources, or effects on biodiversity due to the adoption of new energy production methods.

Examples: "Recognizing that Parties may be affected not only by climate change, but also by the **impacts of the measures taken in response** to it ..."

– Paris Agreement, preamble

"Parties shall take into consideration in the implementation of this Agreement the concerns of Parties with economies most affected by the impacts of **response measures**, particularly developing country Parties."

– Paris Agreement, Article 4(15)

Safeguards

Safeguards

Environmental and social safeguards are measures designed to help project developers identify, evaluate, prevent and mitigate negative environmental and social impacts and risks during a project's implementation and operation. Safeguards play a crucial role in addressing the negative consequences of climate measures, particularly in relation to market mechanisms and financial institutions.

Examples: The Cancun Agreements established specific safeguards for the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) framework, which supports developing countries in reducing emissions and enhancing carbon sequestration through various forest management strategies:

Safeguards - continued

"When undertaking the activities referred to in paragraph 70 of this decision, the following **safeguards** should be promoted and supported:

- (a) That actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements; ...
- (c) Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities ..."

– Decision 1/CP.16, The Cancun Agreements: Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention, Appendix I, para 2.

"Emphasizes the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems to achieve the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through forests and other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases and by protecting biodiversity, while ensuring **social and environmental safeguards** ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.4, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, para. 18

Scale up

Scale up

To enlarge something so that it becomes bigger in size or amount than it used to be. This may refer to increasing the production capacity of an industry, expanding a market, or broadening the scope of a programme, for example. The phrase is regularly used in the UNFCCC regime to refer to the need to increase and accelerate the mobilisation of climate finance, investments, and technology development and transfers.

Examples: "Strongly urges the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism to make full use of their current replenishment, calls on multilateral development banks and other financial institutions to further **scale up** investments in climate action and calls for a continued increase in the scale, and effectiveness of, and simplified access to, climate finance, including in the form of grants and other highly concessional forms of finance ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 83

"Highlights the persistent gaps and challenges in technology development and transfer and the uneven pace of adoption of climate technologies around the world and urges Parties to address these barriers and strengthen cooperative action ... to rapidly **scale up** the deployment of existing technologies, the fostering of innovation and the development and transfer of new technologies ..."

– Decision 1/CMA.5, Outcome of the first global stocktake, para. 103

5. Basic international law definitions

Agreement

Agreement

A generic definition refers to the positive outcome of international cooperation ('an agreement has been found'). It can also refer to a wide range of international instruments, including treaties and non-legally binding texts.

Consensus

Consensus

Means that no objection is made to a given decision. As the UNFCCC does not have agreed voting rules, almost all decisions must be adopted by consensus. The Draft Rules of Procedure (FCCC/CP/1996/2) do not define consensus. Nevertheless, practice shows that if one or very few parties object to the adoption of a decision, it does not necessarily mean that no consensus has been reached. Consensus thus falls somewhere in between 'majority' and 'unanimity', which requires that all parties vote in favour of a decision. The president or chair of the session assesses whether a consensus has been reached, and any party can challenge this decision.

COP decision

COP decision

A framework convention requires a flexible process that allows for gradual progress and refinement of the means to implement its provisions. In the context of the UNFCCC, annual meetings in the form of COPs provide this opportunity, enabling parties to adopt a range of decisions. These decisions typically include administrative measures, proposals, recommendations, and guidelines. COP decisions do not have the authority to impose new substantive obligations on parties, such as financial commitments. Instead, they represent the ongoing effort to implement the Convention and advance its ultimate objective.

Cover decision

Cover decision

A decision not tied to any specific agenda item that spans various issues that parties want to address. COP 25, COP 26, and COP 27 each adopted such a cover decision.

Entry into force

Entry into force

The point at which an international treaty becomes legally binding on the parties that have agreed to it. This occurs after the treaty meets specific conditions, such as a required number of countries ratifying or accepting it, as outlined in the treaty's provisions.

Framework convention

Framework convention

A framework convention is a type of international treaty that is very common in relation to environmental affairs. Its procedural and programmatic structure sets out a general scope (the Convention) to be detailed and progressed into actions under other instruments (protocols, annexes and related agreements).

Legally binding

Legally binding

A binding promise, agreement, or decision must be obeyed or carried out. In the context of legal instruments, it means that the agreement is legally enforceable. Treaties, such as the Paris Agreement, are legally binding, although the content of the obligations inside the treaties might be 'soft'.

Principle

Principle

Principles provide guidance on and inform the implementation of a treaty's provisions. They play an essential role in the development of international environmental law, often providing the basis for multilateral cooperation. Examples of climate principles include 'common but differentiated responsibilities', 'sustainable development' and 'precaution'. While they generally do not impose or prescribe actions that are binding on parties, some principles of international law have achieved binding force by consolidating into customary international law.

Protocol

Protocol

A subsequent and separate legally binding agreement that adds to or modifies an existing convention. In international environmental law, a protocol complements a framework treaty with specific substantive obligations that implement the general objectives of the umbrella convention. Examples include the Montreal Protocol, under the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, and the Kyoto Protocol, under the UNFCCC.

Provisional application	<p>Provisional application</p> <p>A situation giving immediate effect to all or some of the provisions of a treaty prior to the completion of all internal and international requirements for its entry into force. It is an interim measure with a set of legal rights and obligations, allowing the treaty to be applied as if it were already in force.</p>	Treaty	<p>Treaty</p> <p>An international agreement intended to create legal rights and duties between two or more parties (state or international organisation), usually expressed in written form and governed by international law. The term 'treaty' is a generic term encompassing all instruments that are binding in international law. These can be called by different names, including treaty, convention, agreement, covenant, charter, statute, pact and protocol.</p>
Ratification	<p>Ratification</p> <p>Transposition of a treaty into a state's domestic legal system. After the adoption of a treaty, the final instrument is signed by authorised representatives of states wishing to become parties. However, this is not sufficient for the agreement to be effective and binding to all parties. Parties must ratify the treaty: the process will vary depending on each state's constitution, which usually means that the treaty will have to be submitted for parliamentary approval or be subject to other internal domestic processes. Fulfilling these steps indicates the state's consent to be bound by the treaty.</p>		
Reservation	<p>Reservation</p> <p>A unilateral statement made by a state to exclude or modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that state. Reservations allow states to agree to a treaty while not applying certain provisions. A treaty may contain a provision forbidding reservations; this is generally the case for multilateral environmental agreements, including the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.</p>		
Soft law	<p>Soft law</p> <p>'Soft law' usually refers to non-legally binding agreements that intend to hold a State or international organisation to a certain form of behaviour. Soft law texts, such as COP decisions, create expectations that are not binding but can be difficult to ignore. While treaties are 'hard law' because they are binding on all parties, some provisions can offer considerable flexibility: they are sometimes qualified as 'soft law' because they offer no clear standard for compliance.</p>		

6. Common abbreviations in climate negotiations

The list below provides definitions for acronyms and abbreviations that are commonly used in international climate negotiations.

AAU	Assigned amount unit
AC	Adaptation Committee
AF	Adaptation Fund
AFB	Adaptation Fund Board
APA	Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement
AR6	IPCC Sixth Assessment Report
CBDR-RC	Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CMA	Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement
CMP	Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol
COP	Conference of the Parties
CTCN	Climate Technology Centre and Network
EGTT	Expert Group on Technology Transfer
EST	Environmentally sound technologies
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
ITMOs	Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes
JI	Joint implementation
JTWP	Just Transition Work Programme
KP	Kyoto Protocol
L&D	Loss and damage
LCIPP	Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform
LDCs	Least developed countries
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
LEDS	Low emission development strategies

LMDCs	Like-Minded Group of Developing Countries
LULUCF	Land use, land-use change and forestry
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
MoI	Means of implementation
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MRV	Measurable, reportable and verifiable
NAMA	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPA	National Adaptation Programme of Action
NbS	Nature-based solutions
NCQG	New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance
NDC	Nationally determined contribution
NMA	Non-market-based approaches
PAMs	Policies and measures (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions)
QELRC	Quantified Emission Limitation Or Reduction Commitment
QELRO	Quantified Emission Limitation Or Reduction Objective
REDD+	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
SBI	Subsidiary Body for Implementation
SBSTA	Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technologic Advice
SCF	Standing Committee on Finance
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SDM	Sustainable Development Mechanism
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TEC	Technology Executive Committee
WIM	Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General



Updated list of abbreviations available here in English and French

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Toolkit

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Climate change

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Language is powerful. In multilateral agreements, every word is chosen strategically and with intent. This is especially true in climate change negotiations, where acronyms, buzzwords, and legal terms can be complex, overwhelming, and, at times, even misleading.

This guide is a supporting tool to better understand and use language in the UNFCCC negotiations.

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