

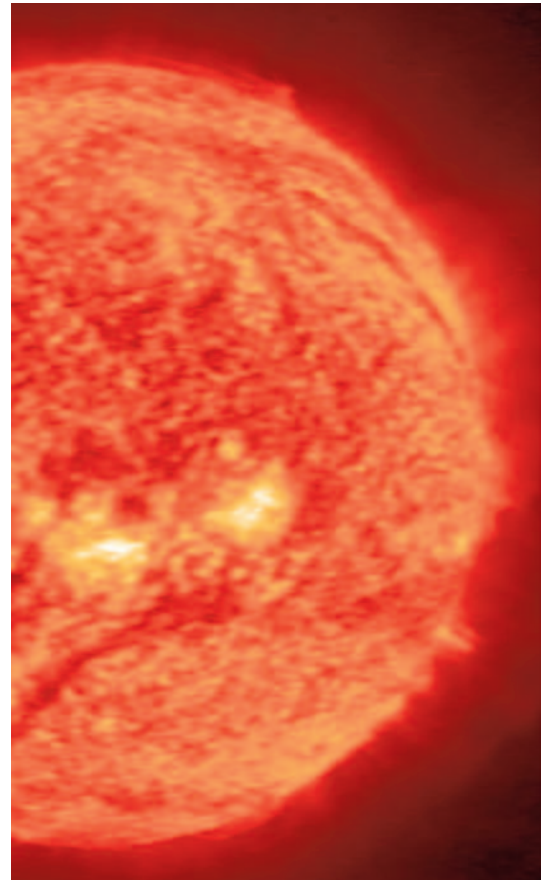
# THE CHANGING CLIMATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE - REPORT FROM COPENHAGEN

By Lillian Kortlandt

**When the long-awaited United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) on Climate Change ended in Copenhagen last December, many were disappointed in the result, but most parties agree the conference brought about a much-needed move in the right direction. The conference left in its wake a new accord and a tremendous challenge for all countries, including the U.S., to curb their greenhouse gas emissions.**

The Copenhagen COP continued a long international drive to address climate change, an effort that began in Rio de Janeiro during the Earth Summit in June 1992. According to Yvo de Boer, the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Copenhagen event had several high-priority goals:

1. A specific commitment by industrialized countries (often classified as the Annex I and Annex II countries, including the U.S., Australia, the U.K., Canada and many other developed nations) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. A commitment by some of the largest developing countries, such as China, Brazil and India, to limit the rise of their emissions.
3. A commitment from developed countries to help finance the reduction of emissions in developing countries, as well as new agreements for technology sharing and climate adaptation relief.
4. An agreement on how these finances will be managed and how much oversight involved parties will have on funding.



Negotiating parties for the UNFCCC met on December 7, 2009 at the Bella Center to kick off the largest COP the UN has ever hosted. Drama quickly unfolded in the divide between the goals of developed and developing nations. At the root of these conflicts stands the Kyoto Protocol, which established a two-track approach for developed and developing nations to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. While most of the developing countries still prefer this approach, the glaring hole in Kyoto could not be ignored: the U.S. never signed on to Kyoto because Congress never ratified the treaty. Without the participation of the largest per-capita greenhouse gas producer and second-largest greenhouse gas emitter (behind China), many felt it was time to start over with a new document that might bring the U.S. on board.



Tensions erupted early. Within the first few days, the tiny island nation of Tuvalu (a vocal underdog throughout the COP) suspended the conference for almost a day on procedural grounds, with the support of many other low-lying island nations. Tuvalu and other island states are expected to be the most at-risk if average global temperatures increase by more than two degrees Celsius, a change that scientists agree would raise sea levels to the point where these islands would be submerged. Rising global temperatures would also dramatically increase oceanic storm intensity. From this point on, attendees from many nations called for a continuation of the course set out in Kyoto, arguing that it is the developed countries who are to blame and therefore should shoulder the greatest burden in reversing greenhouse gas emissions.

It appeared to many that the U.S. was notably less vocal at this COP than in years past. With the Obama administration's pledge to tackle greenhouse gas emission domestically, and with the ball already slowly rolling in Washington, the U.S. seemed almost the "good guy" during the first week of the COP – or at least a less obstructive party. By the second week, however, many countries were beginning to vocalize their frustration with the U.S. for not committing to specific emissions cuts. This task is a tricky one for the U.S., since any agreements made at the COP would still have to be ratified by Congress and until then would not be binding. The U.S. decided instead to use its power to pressure action from China, and to commit to contributing "its share" of funding. Not everyone was satisfied with this gesture, but most countries appeared pleased to see the U.S. taking more of a leadership role at this COP.

Meanwhile, during week two, the Bella Center was filling up quickly as more observer groups and parties arrived. A logistical nightmare ensued as more than 35,000 people attempted to gain

access to a facility with a capacity for 15,000. Security was increased as more heads of state arrived during the later part of the week, and by the final two days of the COP less than 5% of the preregistered private individuals (representatives of NGOs, businesses, schools, etc.) were allowed into the Bella Center. By Friday, most were left to watch streaming webcasts of speeches and press conferences inside the COP.

President Obama arrived mid-morning on Friday to give a speech about the new U.S. commitment to create clean energy jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions domestically, and then quickly ducked out a back door to attend several closed-door meetings with other heads of state. The result of these meetings was the Copenhagen Accords. The President called this simple and brief document "the foundation for international action in the years to come." At its core, it is a new mission statement for the international community. The major points of this new text are:

1. The parties acknowledge the need take action to keep global temperatures from increasing beyond two degrees Celsius.
2. The parties recognize the need for developed countries to roll back their global emissions much sooner than developing nations, and promise to set targets for 2020.
3. Developing countries agree to slow and reverse their increase in greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Developed countries "shall provide adequate, predicable and sustainable financial resources, technology and capacity-building to support the implementation of adaptation action in developing countries." To this end, specific funding mechanisms were established through programs addressing deforestation, technology sharing and a Copenhagen Green Climate Fund.



While Secretary de Boer’s goals may not have been fully realized, this accord is certainly a good starting point. The question remains as to whether it is too little, too late. With very few specific targets or legally binding agreements, only history will show whether or not Copenhagen was the turning point in the global battle to address climate change. Many experts claim that our window to make a meaningful impact on climate change is closing quickly, and now all eyes will now be focused on the U.S. to see if domestic legislation cutting greenhouse gas emissions will pass. From there, the battle will only become more difficult, as parties are left to flesh out the specifics in this accord in advance of the 2010 COP16 in Mexico.

The Willis Environmental Practice follows climate change issues and related regulatory developments and periodically issues publications on the subject. The publications listed below are available at [www.willis.com](http://www.willis.com).

- **“The Floodgates are Opening: Three Branches of US Government Address Greenhouse Gas Emissions” – November, 2009**
- **“Climate Change – Leading the Way at Willis” – May, 2008**
- **“Feeling the Heat: How Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards and Trading Systems are Creating Risks and Opportunities Around the Globe” – November, 2007**

## CONTACTS

For more information about this or other environmental issues, visit our [website](#) or contact:

### **Michael Balmer**

617351 7530  
[michael.balmer@willis.com](mailto:michael.balmer@willis.com)

### **Brian Hendry**

412 586 3530  
[rick.hawkinberry@willis.com](mailto:rick.hawkinberry@willis.com)

*Lillian Kortlandt attended the COP with a team of fellow students from Vermont Law School, who were selected during a competitive application process. She holds a BA in Biology and is a degree candidate for both a JD and a Masters in Environmental Law and Policy at the Vermont Law School. She has focused her work on climate change, wildlife policy and international environmental law. She has clerked for Earthjustice and the Vermont U.S. Attorney’s Office, and she currently serves as the Administrative Editor for the Vermont Journal of Environmental Law. Lillian is the daughter of a Willis of Pennsylvania, Inc., Managing Partner, Linda Kortlandt.*