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The New York Times
Wednesday, January 18, 2012

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Global Warming & Climate Change

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Steen Ulrik Johannessen/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Updated: Dec. 21, 2011

Global warming has become perhaps the most complicated issue facing world leaders. Warnings from the scientific community are becoming louder, as an increasing body of science points to rising dangers from the ongoing buildup of human-related greenhouse gases — produced mainly by the burning of fossil fuels and forests.

Global emissions of carbon dioxide jumped by the largest amount on record in 2010, upending the notion that the brief decline during the recession might persist through the recovery. Emissions rose 5.9 percent in 2010, according to an analysis by the Global Carbon Project, an international collaboration of scientists. The increase solidified a trend of ever-rising emissions that scientists fear will make it difficult, if not impossible, to forestall severe climate change in coming decades.

However, the technological, economic and political issues that have to be resolved before a concerted worldwide effort to reduce emissions can begin have gotten no simpler, particularly in the face of a global economic slowdown.

For almost two decades, the United Nations has sponsored global talks, known as the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), an international treaty signed by 194 countries in 1992 to cooperatively discuss global climate change and its impact.

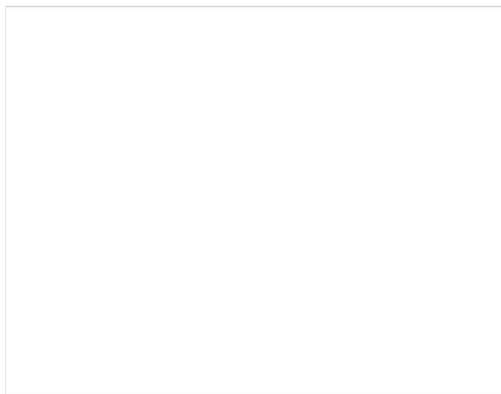
The conferences operate on the principle of consensus, meaning that any of the participating nations can hold up an agreement. In recent years, the meetings have often ended in disillusionment. The conflicts and controversies discussed are monotonously familiar: the differing obligations of industrialized and developing nations, the question of who will pay to help poor nations adapt, the urgency of protecting tropical forests and the need to rapidly develop and deploy clean energy technology.

The negotiating process itself has been under fire from some quarters, including the poorest nations who believe their needs are being neglected in the fight among the major economic powers. Criticism has also come from a relatively small but vocal band of climate-change skeptics, many of them sitting members of the United States Congress, who doubt the existence of human influence on the climate and ridicule international efforts to deal with it.

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