

## What's happening?

Every year the United Nations holds a climate change summit. This year's summit is in Paris from November 30 to December 11. The summit is supposed to clinch a new deal to address climate change which would kick in from 2020.

## Why the United Nations?

Countries decided the United Nations would drive the process to deal with climate change. It's been difficult, and some think a genuine solution is out of reach.

## So it's all about countries?

Yes. This system looks at national actions, rather than working with individuals, regions or industries.

## Who will go to the summit?

You need an official pass to go inside. Some world leaders will call in, also ministers. It's a busy mix of diplomats, bureaucrats, activists and businesspeople.

## What's going to happen at the summit?

Countries have agreed they want to limit global warming to 2°C. Most countries have already announced their national pledges to reign in greenhouse gas emissions after 2020. They don't add up; the world would [get hotter by more than 2°C](#). This summit is about agreeing on a

## A plain-language guide to the UN climate talks

Written by The Conversation USA

---

treaty to lock in these targets, and setting up a process for countries to ratchet up their targets over time.

### So the summit is set to fail?

Well, it won't clinch a deal to keep warming to 2 degrees - not unless world leaders surprise everyone by drastically beefing up their targets. It's likely to land somewhere between a "negotiations stalled" and a "good step forwards". If it acts as a high-profile shop-front that encourages governments back home to do more to reduce emissions, that would help.

### Why is this proving so hard?

Most governments seem to want climate change addressed, but they often want someone else to do the hard work. Governments worry that cutting emissions will cost them money (and votes), so they tend to want others to go first, and they look for excuses to lag behind (although there are signs these attitudes are changing). Also, the United Nations is working on a consensus model - everyone has to agree - which gets bogged down easily.

### So should I give up hope?

No. If people around the world decide they want this problem dealt with, governments will move faster. There's a lot going on among some provinces, cities and businesses to cut emissions. And change, when it comes, can come quickly.

\_This post was originally published on the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute's [COP21 blog](#)

### Disclosure

*Cathy Alexander worked for current Australian Environment Minister Greg Hunt MP for six months in 2011, when he was in opposition.*

## A plain-language guide to the UN climate talks

Written by The Conversation USA

---

**Read more** <http://theconversation.com/a-plain-language-guide-to-the-un-climate-talks-51287>