



Annual UN Climate Change Summit Convenes in Madrid

The United Nations is hosting a Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change for the next two weeks in Madrid, Spain. The 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) will address how governments can tackle climate change and get their countries to net zero emissions. This conference comes two months after the Climate Action Summit was called by the UN Secretary-General to focus attention on the climate emergency and find solutions to reverse climate change. The conference was due to be hosted in Santiago, Chile, but was moved to Madrid at the last minute due to civil unrest in the Chilean capital.

During the conference, countries will engage in dialogue on how to stay on course for meeting the regulations decided by the climate agreement signed in Paris. In the Paris deal, countries agreed to reduce carbon emissions in an attempt to limit the global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. The treaty also dictated that global emissions of greenhouse gases must peak in 2020 at the latest, before beginning to decrease. 195 nations signed the Paris Accord at the conclusion of the negotiations, and two more countries have since signed the treaty, bringing the signatories to 197 nations. At COP25, countries are scheduled to discuss their progress toward meeting the goals agreed to in Paris. Namely, reducing emissions to a net of zero is on the agenda, given that the Paris agreement on emission reduction will begin this coming year. The conference will also set the groundwork for a convention scheduled to be held next year in the United Kingdom. That event will see countries decide specific steps that will be taken to combat the long-term effects of climate change.

COP25 is being held as scholars warn that the effects of climate change will soon cross the threshold of being irreversible. Warnings from leading climate scientists have become increasingly urgent recently, as greenhouse gas emissions cause the planet's condition to worsen. International negotiations to address the issues have been slow-going, especially given the political ramifications in play. For example, President Trump has repeatedly criticized any effort to address climate change, as he pushes for less regulation on the fossil fuel industry in the United States. Elsewhere, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has belittled conservation efforts in his country, despite the Amazon rainforest burning at an alarmingly rapid rate. Bolsonaro has been hysterical in deflecting the blame from his government onto culprits as far-fetched as NGOs and actor Leonardo DiCaprio.

One problem with the conference is the presence of polluting corporations in attendance. Spain's largest polluter, electric power company Endesa, paid a \$2 million sponsorship fee to be a primary sponsor for COP25. Activists argue that this is unacceptable, as their presence at the conference will coincide with subtle lobbying efforts aimed toward government officials which will slow down the process. Coca Cola is another big-money sponsor of the event, despite the company being a massive source of pollution by producing over 100 billion plastic bottles a year. Activists argue the presence of these corporations is part of a larger problem in which efforts to address climate change are sabotaged by large polluting corporations.