
UN Climate Change Conference

WORKSHEET A

The United Nations Climate Change Conference taking place in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December is widely seen as the last chance to stop average global temperatures from rising by two degrees Celsius by the end of the twenty-first century.

Most of the world's scientists agree that global warming is a serious problem, that it is being caused by a buildup of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere due to human activities such as fossil fuel burning and deforestation, and that a two-degree temperature rise will have a disastrous environmental impact in some parts of the world.

There is much less agreement among the world's politicians, however, about how the burden of cutting total emissions of greenhouse gases should be shared. Many developing countries want the world's richest countries to reduce their emissions to at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020 – but the United States, for example, has been reluctant to make specific commitments, while the European Union aims to reduce emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2020 (and would aim for a bigger reduction if other countries made similar efforts).

It is undeniable that the world's most developed countries, despite having only a small proportion of the world's total population, have been responsible for a large proportion of greenhouse gas emissions, but fast-developing poorer countries with large populations are also contributing to the problem. China, in fact, is now the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases, with the United States in second place.

It now seems unlikely that the Copenhagen conference will produce an international environmental treaty in which countries adopt legally binding commitments with regard to emissions cuts. If there is an agreement, it will probably just be on basic principles – namely that developed nations must make substantial cuts to their emissions, that developing countries must agree to limit the future growth of their emissions, and that rich countries must provide financial help to poor countries to help them achieve their targets and cope with the effects of global warming.

Time, of course, is running out. In fact, the most pessimistic scientists think it is already too late to stop global temperatures rising by at least five degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Because global warming leads to a rise in sea level, some areas of land might already be underwater by 2100. The Maldives, a group of low-lying islands in the Indian Ocean with a population of about 300,000, are particularly threatened – a fact the president of the country recently called attention to by holding a cabinet meeting on the ocean floor, five meters underwater, with all the ministers wearing scuba diving equipment. It was a memorable publicity stunt, but will it have any positive effect?

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't determine (D).

1. The United States is the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases.
2. There has never previously been an international environmental treaty involving legally binding commitments with regard to greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Global warming affects sea level.
4. The European Union has a specific aim with regard to reducing its emissions of greenhouse gases.
5. Most of the world's scientists agree that a two-degree temperature rise will have a disastrous environmental impact everywhere.
6. The Maldives are mountainous.
7. Most of the world's scientists are still not sure about the cause of global warming.
8. Most countries have already refused to sign any international environmental treaty involving legally binding commitments.

Exercise 2

Answer the questions below.

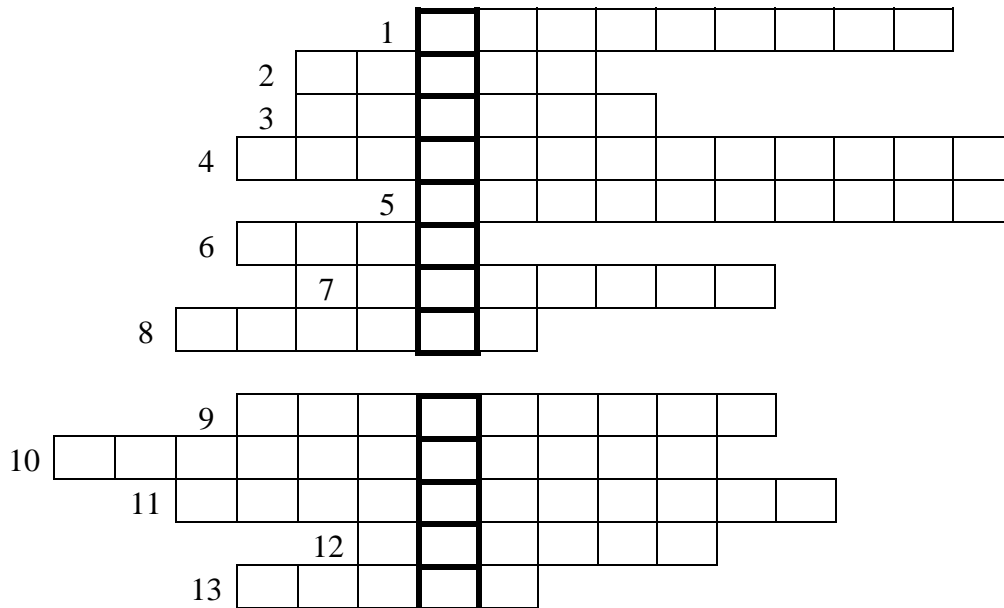
1. What do the world's politicians not agree about?
2. What target do many developing countries want the world's richest countries to adopt?
3. Why did the president of The Maldives recently hold an underwater cabinet meeting?
4. What will probably *not* be achieved at the Copenhagen conference?
5. What prediction do the most pessimistic scientists make?
6. In what way were the ministers in the government of The Maldives unusually dressed during their recent cabinet meeting?
7. What has caused the buildup of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere (according to most scientists)?
8. What are the three principles on which there might be agreement in Copenhagen?

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the world's third-biggest producer of greenhouse gases, behind China and the United States, will read from top to bottom.



1. Most scientists agree that greenhouse gas _____ cause global warming.
2. The underwater cabinet meeting in The Maldives was a publicity _____.
3. Many people think the _____ of cutting emissions should not be equally shared but instead that richer countries need to do more than developing countries.
4. _____ has contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases.
5. Agreeing on _____ is not the same as making legally binding commitments.
6. In Copenhagen it might be agreed that richer countries have to provide money to help poorer countries _____ with global warming.
7. The underwater cabinet meeting in The Maldives was a way of _____ attention to the country's situation.
8. The president of the Maldives and his ministers wore scuba _____ equipment.
9. The United States has so far been _____ to set specific targets for emissions reductions.
10. Developed nations must make _____ cuts to their emissions.
11. Hopefully some specific _____ with regard to emissions reductions will be made in Copenhagen.
12. The burning of _____ fuels produces greenhouse gases.
13. The Maldives are low-_____ islands.