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Editorial: All nations must do their part to fight climate change – including Canada

By Montreal Gazette Editorial Board, Montreal Gazette December 16, 2014



Members of representative commissions of the countries participating in the climate change conferences, attend the seventh plenary meeting of the COP20 on December 13, 2014 in Lima, as they continue working on a final document draft. The UN 20th session of the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP20) and the 10th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP10), which should have finished Friday, extended their negotiations Saturday.

Photograph by: CRIS BOURONCLE , Montreal Gazette

The United Nations [climate talks that wrapped up in Lima, Peru](#) saw — for the first time — all nations, rich and poor, sign on to the battle to slow global warming. This is a historic step.

But the [compromises made to get everyone on board resulted in weakened language](#) in an agreement intended to set the stage for a crucial summit in Paris in late 2015. Hard decisions have been delayed in the process. For instance, although each of the 190 countries represented in Lima has agreed to draft its own plan for reducing emissions, they are free to be as ambitious or cautious as they want in tackling climate change. They also have given themselves a great deal of latitude as to how they choose to report on what progress they are making toward their targets.

This doesn't bode well for a meaningful deal in Paris, even as new [research from the Worldwatch Institute](#) shows the current rate of carbon emissions is unlikely to keep Earth's temperature from climbing by 2 C degrees, seen as the threshold for irreversible damage. The plan's effectiveness in achieving results seems likely to depend not on any obligations, but largely be dependent on political will and domestic conditions. Moreover, many countries, including Canada, have yet to put forward concrete long-term emissions targets, despite a looming deadline in March 2015.

Canada has long advocated that a new accord include all the world's polluters, especially those from the developing world. Now that they are on board, Canada has one less excuse for its own inaction. However the lowest-common-denominator language that emerged from the Lima meeting does not suggest that Canada has any reason to fear being pressured into taking tough measures.

A recent government report revealed Canada [is going to miss its Copenhagen commitments](#) to cut emissions to 17 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020, made at the last major round of negotiations. From slashing budgets for monitoring, to failing to introduce emissions regulations for the oil and gas sector promised since 2006, the Conservative government's unapologetic record on climate change is well documented — not just by environmental groups, [but by federal watchdogs, too](#).

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has often used concern for Canada's economic well-being to justify his government's inaction, and has said the U.S. must take similar steps in its booming oil industry. Now that the worldwide price of crude has cratered, Harper said last week any such action would be "crazy economic policy." He likewise seemed unmoved by U.S. [President Barack Obama moving to cut coal](#), a major source of emissions in the U.S., and forging a historic, if largely symbolic, [climate pact with China](#).

The outcome of the Lima talks lays bare the schism between rich and poor countries that has long been a roadblock to concerted climate action — even while glossing over some of those differences to get developing nations on board.

Harper's excuses mirror the arguments of the developing world, which have accused rich countries of hypocrisy for demanding they curb their reliance on cheap fossil fuels to grow their economies, when industrialized nations built theirs without such restrictions. The Lima deal will not stop them from following Canada's example: paying lip service to fighting global warming while not backing up their promises with any real measures.