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Ahead of climate talks, UN-led report outlines greenhouse gas emissions gap



23 November 2010 – A new United Nations-led report says that nations can deliver almost 60 per cent of the emissions reductions needed to keep global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius only if the pledges made at last year’s Copenhagen climate change conference are fully met.

The [report](#), coordinated by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), comes as governments prepare for the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún, Mexico, to be held from 29 November to 10 December.

The findings spotlight the size of the “emissions gap” between where nations might be in 2020 versus where the science indicates they need to be.

“The results indicate that the UN meeting in Copenhagen could prove to have been more of a success than a failure if all the commitments, intentions and funding, including fully supporting the pledges of developing economies, are met,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, pointing out that through negotiations, the current options on the table “can get us almost 60 per cent of the way” to ambition levels.

Under the Copenhagen Accord reached last December, commitments and pledges were made on emissions up to 2020, but these are widely seen to be insufficient to meet the 2 degree warming limit.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)) has found that to stave off the worst effects of climate change, industrialized countries must slash emissions by 25 to 40 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020, and that global emissions must be halved by 2050.

It is estimated that, in order to have a “likely” and cost-effective chance of pegging temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius or below over the course of the 21st century, global emissions will need to have peaked within the next 10 years and be around 44 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2020.

The report, jointly authored by over 30 leading scientists, also states that fully implementing the pledges of the Copenhagen Accord could cut emissions to around 49 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2020, leaving only a gap of 5 gigatonnes that would need to be bridged.

“The report underlines both the feasibility of emission reductions and the importance of international cooperation to raise the current inadequate level of ambition,” said Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)).

Ms. Figueres appealed for governments meeting in Cancún to “anchor the pledges they made in Copenhagen” and work swiftly to reduce emissions in order to remain below a 2 degree Celsius temperature rise.

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