

# *General Assembly*

## *Topic Brief I*

*Following up on the Kyoto Protocol:*

*Discussing solutions to global climate issues*

## Overview

The Kyoto Protocol was an international treaty which extended the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that commits state parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on the scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and that human-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are driving it.

"Climate Change" refers to big, long-lasting changes in how the weather works all around the world. According to NASA Science, we already see effects scientists predicted, such as the loss of sea ice, melting glaciers and ice sheets, sea level rise, and more intense heat waves. Kyoto Protocol applies to 6 greenhouse gases; carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride.

The Kyoto Protocol is legally binding (A legally binding agreement is a contract between parties that outlines specific rules or restrictions), unlike The Paris Agreement. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted on 11 December 1997. Owing to a complex ratification process, it entered into force on 16 February 2005.

Lastly, the Kyoto protocol has had minimal success throughout the years, as there has been limited participation from major world contributors, such as China and the United States.

## Timeline:

1997 - The Kyoto Protocol is adopted.

The first legally binding treaty requiring developed countries to cut emissions, introducing carbon trading and the Clean Development Mechanism.

2005 - Kyoto Protocol enters into force.

Countries begin binding emission reductions, though the process is uneven.

2015 - Paris Agreement adopted

196 countries commit to limit global warming to "well below" 2 °C, aiming for 1.5 °C, through nationally determined contributions. Entered into force in 2016.

## 2021 - Glasgow Climate Pact

First global pledge to phase down coal, finalize carbon market rules, and push for stronger NDCs.

## 2022 - COP 27, Sharm el-Sheikh

Loss-and-Damage Fund established to help climate-vulnerable nations.

## 2023 - COP 28, Dubai

Parties agree to accelerate a transition away from fossil fuels and triple renewable energy capacity by 2030.

## 2025 - COP 30, Brazil (still scheduled)

Expected to assess progress and strengthen post-2030 commitments.

Key terms:

1. Kyoto Protocol: operates as the first legally binding treaty to decrease the level of greenhouse gas emissions (1997)
2. Greenhouse Gases: The major cause of global warming (CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O).
3. Emission reduction targets: Targets made by developed countries to reduce their emissions on a legally binding basis.
4. Countries Annex I: Nations with binding commitments.
5. Non-Annex I Countries: Developing countries with no binding targets.
6. Clean Development Mechanism: Kyoto scheme that enables investments to be made in emission reduction projects in third-world countries.
7. Carbon Trading / Emissions Trading System: Market-based mechanism to purchase and sell emission rights.
8. Carbon footprint: The sum total greenhouse gases emitted by a being or an organization (person, company, or even nation).
9. The reduction of climate change: aims at reducing or eliminating greenhouse gases.
10. Climate Change Adaptation: Response to the climate-related effects.
11. Sustainable Development: This concept means that the current generation should not meet the needs of their demands at the expense of future generations.

12. Paris Agreement: a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted in 2015 by 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris.

### **Relevant parties:**

1. UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change): responsible for organizing the Kyoto Protocol and subsequently the Paris Agreement.
2. IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change): gave scientific evidence on climate change, which was the guiding evidence in Kyoto.
3. United States (USA): signed but never ratified, thereby decreasing the impact of Kyoto.
4. European Union (EU): Strongest advocate, has led the reduction of emissions, carbon trade.
5. Japan: Staged the Kyoto Protocol conference (1997) and Annex I country.
6. Russia: Kyoto was ratified in 2004 by Russia and is now legally binding.
7. China: Non-Annex I country with no binding targets under Kyoto, but subsequently became the largest emitter in the world.
8. India: Non-Annex I country, but also highlighted the issue of development, but also got involved in CDM projects.

### **Useful Resources**

"Kyoto Protocol." UNFCCC, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d., [unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol). Accessed 25 Aug. 2025.

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"Success or Failure? The Kyoto Protocol's Troubled Legacy." Climate Foresight, n.d., [www.climateforesight.eu/articles/success-or-failure-the-kyoto-protocols-troubled-legacy/](http://www.climateforesight.eu/articles/success-or-failure-the-kyoto-protocols-troubled-legacy/). Accessed 25 Aug. 2025.

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