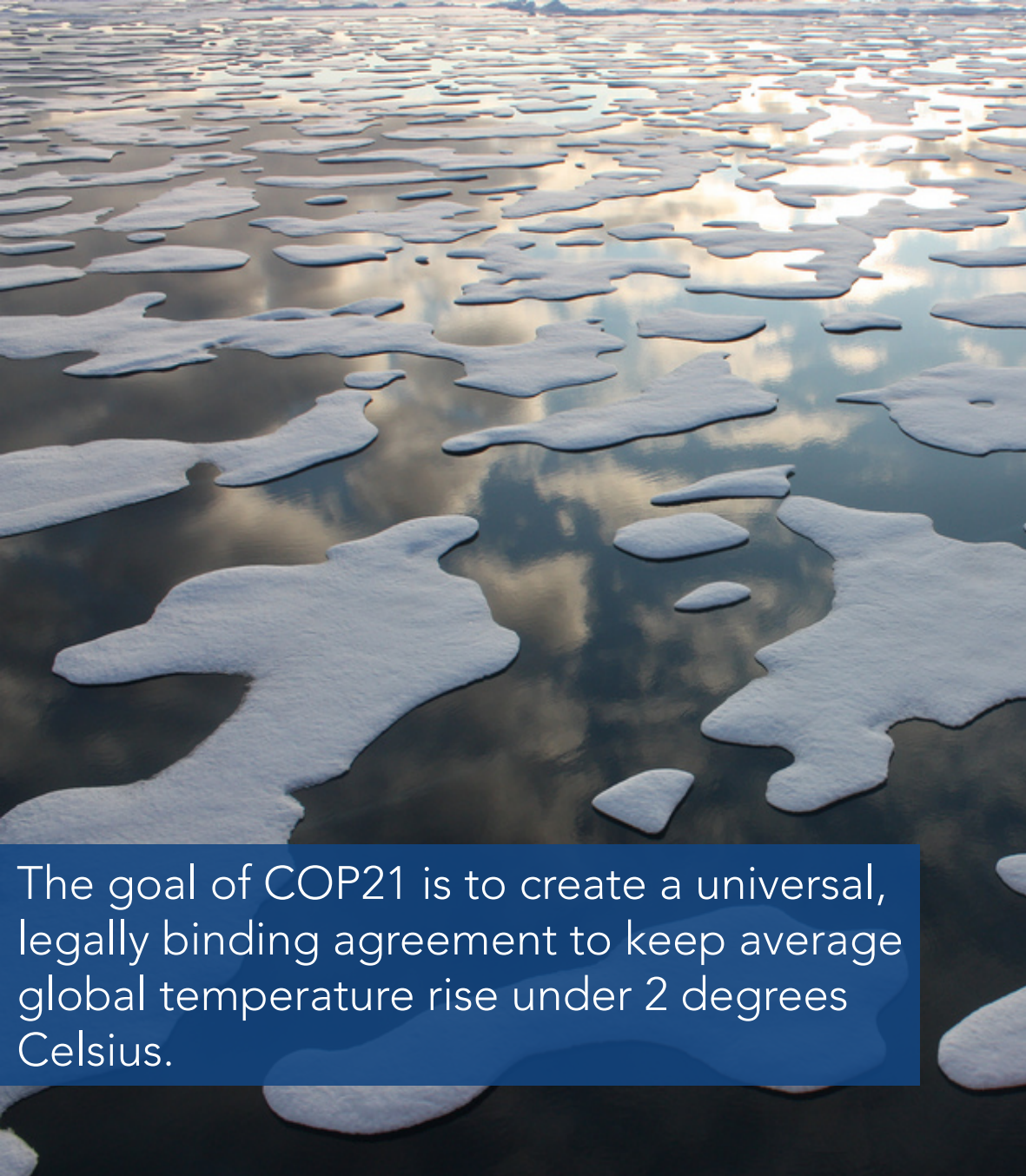


A QUICK START GUIDE TO THE ROLE OF THE ARCTIC IN COP21



THE ARCTIC INSTITUTE
CENTER FOR CIRCUMPOLAR SECURITY STUDIES



The Paris Climate Conference (COP21) will be taking place November 30 to December 11.

COP21 is a part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an intergovernmental treaty developed to address climate change. Parties to the Convention meet regularly to take stock of progress and to consider further actions to address the climate change threat. This will be the 21st meeting of the parties hosted under the UNFCCC.

The most important agreements negotiated under the UNFCCC so far are:

- The Kyoto Protocol (1997)
- The Marrakesh Accords (2001)
- The Bali Road Map (2007)
- The Copenhagen Accords (2009)
- The Durban Platform (2012)

The goal of COP21 is to create a universal, legally binding agreement to keep average global temperature rise under 2 degrees Celsius.

Photo: Creative Commons, NASA



Arctic sea ice minimum is declining at a rate of 13.3 % per decade. (NASA.)

Ice-free summers are likely to happen within 20 years. This will cause major changes in ocean ecosystems. It also means that there is less ice to reflect sunshine back out into space, making the Arctic ocean even warmer.

Thawing permafrost leads to releases of carbon and methane into the air, further contributing to global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Arctic is warming with twice the rate of anywhere else on the planet.
(National Oceanic & Atmosphere Administration)

Photo: NASA

Who is representing the Arctic in COP21?

Arctic states

Arctic indigenous groups

Research community

The UN climate talks is a state-driven process, so participating national governments have a near exclusive role.

Photo: United Nations



 ○ Canada

 ○ USA

 ○ Russia

 ○ Norway

 ○ Denmark

 ○ Sweden

 ○ Finland

 ○ Iceland

United States

○ Photo: US Department of State

Often, political decisions and agreements resulting from COP's do not refer to specific regions. However, the Arctic states, led by the United States as the current Arctic Council Chair, will bring attention to the sensitivity of the Arctic through conferences and events during and before COP21.



The Council has contributed to climate change research, such as in the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2004.) It also has task forces and expert groups on issues relating to climate change in the region.

The Arctic Council has a limited impact under the UNFCCC framework. However, Secretary of State John Kerry has made climate change one of the top priorities for the US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

In August 2015 President Obama went to Alaska to participate in the GLACIER conference in order to bring attention to the regional implication of climate change.

The Arctic Council does not have observer status to the UNFCCC.

“With almost a third of the country belonging to the Far North, Russia has a special responsibility for the Arctic”

– *Vladimir Putin*



Ministers of the Nordic countries signed a declaration in October 2015 calling for game-changing global action during COP21. The effects of global warming was explicitly pointed out in this declaration.

The Nordic countries will be organizing a series of events during COP21 under the heading “New Nordic Climate Solutions”

President Putin has also stated that Russia must keep a balance between economic activity and environmental protection in the Arctic.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council will join with the Saami from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia in an Arctic indigenous delegation. They will advocate for help to adapt to climate change.

Photo: Creative commons

Quote: BarentsObserver 9/17/15



Arctic indigenous groups are estimated to constitute about 10 % of the population living in the Arctic. Impacts of climate change are threatening the livelihood, culture, and safety of many of these groups.

These groups are key actors in regional environmental governance and climate change observation through traditional knowledge. They have had a special role in previous international climate negotiations, and will similarly have a role in COP21.

The International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) is the joint indigenous people's caucus in the climate negotiations, where Arctic indigenous groups are represented. Some of these groups have observer status to the UNFCCC.

The IIPFCC will host caucus meetings, side events, press conferences, exhibitions and generally coordinate lobby and advocacy action during COP21.

Photo: UN photos



The Arctic has mainly been mentioned in climate negotiations in presentations by scientists and the research community. It is often coined as **the canary in the global coal mine of climate change.**

The Arctic Council's Monitoring and Assessment Program has informed the UN Climate talks on scientific findings of warming of the Arctic.

There is much anticipation for what affects the decisions made at COP21 will have on the Arctic, both for mitigating future climate change by limiting emissions and providing assistance in adapting to changes today.

What impact will COP21 have on the Arctic's future?

Photo: NASA