

CAN THE PARIS AGREEMENT PREVENT DANGEROUS GLOBAL WARMING?

James Jacob

Rubber Research Institute of India, Kottayam-686 009, Kerala, India

Received: 26 November 2018 Accepted: 21 December 2018

Jacob, J. (2018). Can the Paris Agreement prevent dangerous global warming? *Rubber Science*, 31(3): 259-270.

Paris Agreement of 2015 aims at limiting global warming to “well below 2°C above the pre-industrial level” and thus indirectly acknowledges that 2°C warming is dangerous for the planet. It took 23 years since the Rio Earth Conference of 1993 to come to a treaty to this effect. How realistic are the emission reduction commitments made by the nations at Paris? Are they adequate to keep global warming below 2°C?

One of the main criticisms of the Paris Agreement is that the voluntary pledges made by many countries are unrealistic, difficult and costly to implement and even if implemented, the benefits will not add up to meeting the Agreement’s objectives. Analysing global emissions trends, the present study shows that the planet is left with only another 900 Gt CO_{2e} for future emissions and a further warming of 1°C from the present level. This could happen by as early as mid-2030s unless deep emission cuts are made immediately. This will not be possible without affecting economic growth, unless a far higher share of energy comes from low carbon or non-fossil sources. Many countries have pledged to reduce carbon intensities by increasing their share of highly expensive low-carbon energy. This will make a disproportionately large financial burden on vulnerable countries and poor people living in developing countries whose energy consumption is meagre now, but they require more access to cheap power to eradicate poverty, establish infrastructure and improve living standards. With the US withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, mitigation cost for the rest of the world will go up.

A close analysis of the emission trajectories of major nations shows that China followed by the US, and not India, are the two countries that can make a significant dent in global emissions. The present study also shows that far more than what is promised in the Paris Agreement will be required to prevent dangerous climate change while the much needed economic growth is sustained in the poor and developing countries. This is possible only if those developed countries that have contributed the most to historical emissions will release more carbon space for the developing world. Unfortunately, the Paris Agreement is silent on this crucial point.

Key words: Climate change, Global warming, Nationally determined contributions, Paris Agreement.

Covenant with the future

When the Paris Agreement was adopted at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by its 196 Parties on 12 December 2015 in Paris (UNFCCC, 2015a), the then UN Secretary-General Ban

Ki-moon described it as “a new covenant with the future”. Article 2.1 (a) of the Agreement defines its key objective as “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-