

# CONFIDENTIAL: JOURNALISTS



**TO:** Journalists at the United Nations World Climate Summit

**SUBJECT:** Briefing on goals

You are a journalist and have the responsibility of communicating the outcomes of the United Nations climate negotiations to the public. You understand the power and responsibility of your position – the stories you share can influence public opinion, political will, and even how well negotiators from one part of the world understand those from other regions.

**Goals:** Your goal is to ask insightful questions, to inform society about the decisions that are being made at the summit, and to help shed light on the negotiating process and its implications for society at large. The ‘code of ethics’ for journalists dictates that your reporting upholds the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability.

**Context:** The scientific consensus is clear: over 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is happening, that it is caused primarily by use of fossil fuels, and that its impacts could be devastating.<sup>1</sup> While climate change may eventually impact all sectors of society, reporting on it is currently relegated to science and environment desks, which are being cut across news organizations. Both the public and most news editors lack an understanding of the scale and urgency of climate change, making it difficult to get resources and attention for covering this issue.

**Opportunities:** Increasingly, a changing climate will signify a period of rapid societal change—whether because of climate impacts and damages, a rising social movement demanding action, or an economy shifting away from fossil fuels and towards renewables. For journalists, change and upheaval represent opportunities. The public needs to know about the science underlying the causes of climate change, how people are responding, and where there are opportunities and risks. While climate change is still under-reported, a few news organizations are realizing that it may be the next big story.

**Public opinion:** The majority of people believe climate change is real and caused by human activity. Despite this majority view, climate change is still considered to be a controversial, or at least uncomfortable, topic and is rarely raised in casual conversation. It ranks near the bottom of most people’s priorities and is a long-term, slowly changing, and complex topic that does not fit conveniently into sound bites or entertaining stories. In today’s world of fast-paced world of 24-hour news, it is difficult to keep the public engaged with this issue.

**Actions: You will be responsible for speaking at live coverage events during the negotiations.** Your role is to inform and engage, exposing controversy and exciting events that could be of interest to your audience, the public. While you don’t hold the power to make decisions, your power to influence decisions may be greater than any suspect. You should:

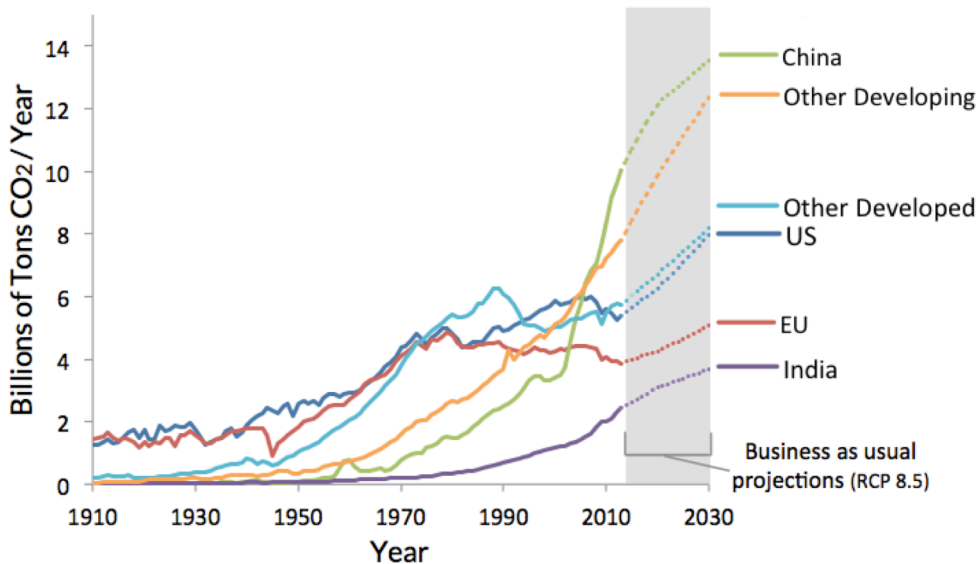
- Find ways to communicate key scientific points in engaging and interesting ways that people can relate to. Do your own research and ask the UN technical staff for help if needed.
- Keep a close ear to delegates’ conversations among each other, as well as their official public statements. Look for opportunities to expose questionable or controversial decisions, misinformation, or clear self-interest.
- Highlight and accentuate disagreements, drama, or displays of emotion to keep the interest of your viewers.

Good luck. How the story is told of who wins and loses in these negotiations is up to you.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cook J. 2013. The scientific consensus on climate change. *Europhysics News* 44:29-32.

## CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions from Fossil Fuels (and Cement)

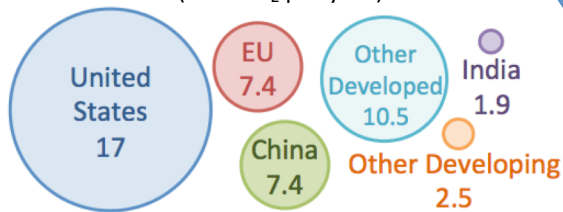


Approximately three-quarters of the total CO<sub>2</sub> released by burning fossil fuels since the start of the Industrial Revolution came from the developed nations.

Sweden sustained annual emissions reductions of 4.5% to reduce their dependence on oil (1976-1986). France and Belgium saw similar reductions around this time. Otherwise, most significant historical emission reductions have come from financial or political crises. According to a UNEP report, a 3.5% annual reduction rate is extremely ambitious.

Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, primarily from fossil fuels, for each region from 1910 to 2013 (solid lines), as well as projected emissions through 2030 under a business as usual scenario (dotted lines).

## Emissions per person in 2013 (tons CO<sub>2</sub> per year)

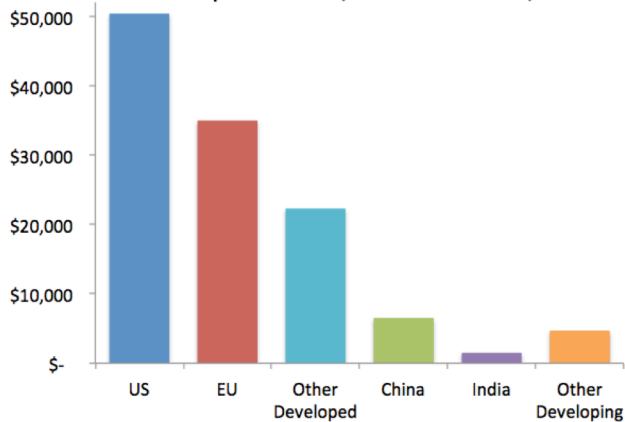


CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per person in the US, EU, and other developed countries are far higher than emissions in the developing countries (i.e., India, and other developing countries). With less than 5% of the world's population, the US alone generates 15% of global emissions.

GDP per person in the US is more than 7.5 and 35 times higher than in China and India, respectively.

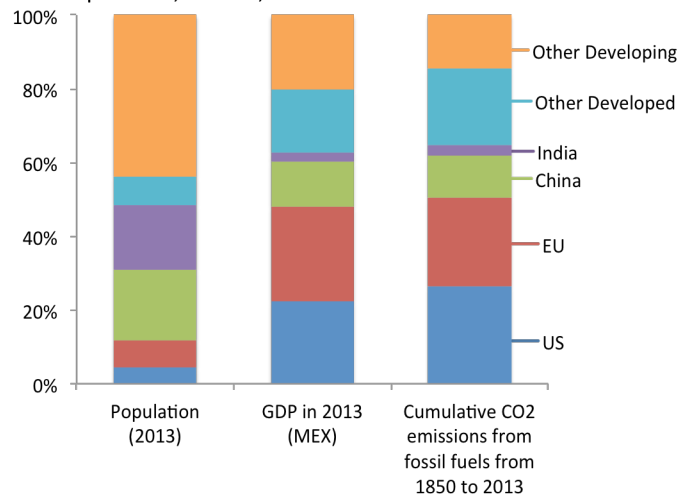
China, India, and other developing countries are home to 81% of the world's population, but only 35% of the world's wealth and 29% of the world's cumulative emissions.

## GDP per Person (2010 US Dollars)



Wealth, as measured by 2013 levels of GDP per person (in 2010 US\$ MEX/Year) distributed across the regions.

## Population, wealth, and cumulative emissions



The distribution of global population, GDP (both in 2013) and total cumulative emissions from 1850 to 2013 across the regions.