What exactly happens at a climate summit?

Every year in the late autumn, a UN climate conference takes place somewhere in the world. As the official name is COP, short for “Conference of the Parties” — meaning the party who have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Thousands of people go for two weeks to discuss measures against climate change. But what exactly does it all mean?

First World Climate Conference

In 1979, the idea of a UN Climate Conference was first put forward. The conference was supposed to arrive at a UN declaration on climate change. But due to the failure of the conservative governments of the time, there was no agreement. The next conference was held in 1982.

Norwegian Conference

In 1984, the Norwegian government hosted what is seen as the first real climate conference. This was the launch pad for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It was signed in 1992.

“Earth Summit”

1992 was a turning point for the climate change movement. This is where the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed. It was a global agreement to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

COP 1 to COP 3

The first three climate summits only met once every two years. This was due to the limited national ministries responsible for the climate. It was also due to the lack of financial resources and infrastructure that was needed to develop an effective climate strategy.

COP 4 to COP 9

The COPs became more frequent due to the increased global understanding of the climate change problem. This meant that the COPs were attended by a wider variety of actors, including NGOs and Civil Society Organizations.

Second World Climate Conference

In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was signed. The protocol was a legally binding treaty that aimed to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 5% compared to 1990 levels. It was a milestone in the fight against climate change.

COP 10 to COP 13

The COPs continued to add more countries and actors to the climate conversation. This meant that the COPs were attended by a wider variety of actors, including NGOs and Civil Society Organizations.

COP 14 to COP 19

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The climate talks at the COPs are divided into three meetings: Pre-COP, COP and CMP.

Pre-COP

The Pre-COP is a meeting where the Parties to the UNFCCC meet to discuss the agenda and logistics of the COP. This is usually held a few weeks before the COP.

COP

The COP is the main meeting where the Parties to the UNFCCC meet to negotiate and adopt decisions on climate change issues.

CMP

The CMP is the meeting where the Parties to the UNFCCC meet to negotiate and adopt decisions on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

Pre-COP, COP and CMP are usually held in different locations, although sometimes they are held in the same country.

The COPs are usually attended by representatives from Parties to the UNFCCC, including governments, NGOs, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The COPs are also attended by observers, including representatives from the media and the public.

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