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**Can UN climate policy still influence climate reality?  
Paris Agreement now needs clear  
rules, and higher ambition**

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# The Current Column

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## Paris Agreement now needs clear rules, and higher ambition

Bonn, 26 November 2018. With the 2015 Paris Agreement, currently supported by 184 countries, UN diplomacy successfully demonstrated that it can unite countries in the fight against climate change and its impacts. Accordingly, during the past 3 years, experts have been intensively elaborating guidelines on how to implement it. These joint rules (also referred to as the "Paris Rulebook") shall now be adopted at the upcoming climate conference, which starts next week in Katowice, Poland.

The rules are important for a successful implementation of the agreement. The goal is to secure transparency as well as comparability and thus a fair burden sharing on actions taken by countries. More importantly, the rules shall facilitate the monitoring and assessment on whether countries achieve the targets set in the Paris Agreement, which ultimate objective is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep the global average temperature to well below 2°, if possible 1.5°, Celsius above pre-industrial levels. However, as some changes in the climate are already irreversible, it's not only about emission reduction targets any longer. The opportunities of the Kyoto Protocol are long gone. Countries now also have to raise their ambitions on adaptation to climate change and furthermore check whether their investments are "Paris-compatible", i.e. help reducing emissions and impacts of climate change. Developed countries furthermore have to demonstrate how they assist developing countries and scale up their climate finance. Until mid-November, 180 countries have submitted respective nationally determined contributions (NDCs) on how they want to do that.

Whether Katowice will deliver the Rulebook, and implementation guidelines for future, revised NDCs, is however uncertain. Only last September, negotiators tried to advance the text which they intend to finalize and adopt in mid-December in an additional, last-minute meeting in Bangkok. Results show that there are still too many doubts on the 307-pages long text. Chief negotiators noted with concern that progress remained "uneven" and was "insufficient on certain issues".

Very important, but highly contested are for example the reporting requirements for future NDCs and to what extent they can differ between developed and developing countries, and how often countries will have to hand in their new plans. The question is also contested among developing countries which from 2020 onwards will present emission reduction

targets - subject to international assessment - for the first time. As well, doubts have been raised on the kind of information countries can use to assess their progress towards the Paris goals, as they agreed to conduct a global stocktake every five years from 2023 onwards in order to raise the ambitions of their future national climate plans.

Ambitious climate politics are however already needed in the next months and years. Delegations in Katowice will therefore for the first time discuss progress on their climate targets under the format of the Talanoa Dialogue. The dialogue was designed in a new way as a one-year participatory process which was also open for inputs from non-state actors. The inclusion of non-state actors in the process reflects the growing importance of non-state climate initiatives currently complementing government efforts worldwide. Overall, more than 90 events worldwide, such as the Global Climate Action Summit in California, associated themselves with the Talanoa dialogue with the goal to provide ideas and opinions on three questions: "Where are we now?", "Where do we want to go?", and "How do we get there?" The Fijian and Polish chief negotiators expressed the expectation that this new dialogue format can "generate greater momentum and enhance ambition" as well as "enthusiasm and the energy" for the upcoming national contributions that need to be handed in until 2020.

The encouraging words are facing hard climate realities. The previous implementation record of global climate politics is weak – global emissions as well as impacts of climate change and related loss and damage are increasing – and the political conflicts on the rulebook still need to be solved. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we can only reach the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement if global emissions start to decline well before 2030. Current commitments by countries are rather likely to lead us to a 3-degree-world. The next months are therefore crucial to deliver on what has been pledged back in 2015.

If UN climate policy still wants to influence climate reality in a positive way, it needs to increase speed. Robust global rules for the implementation of the Paris Agreement are a key prerequisite to accelerate this process. Countries themselves urgently have to deliver on more ambitious national climate policies. After all, also the UN is just the sum of its parts.