

# THE ‘SIGNALING’ EFFECT OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT



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Multilateral agreements generally pertain to the actions of national governments. The Paris Agreement, for instance, sets collective goals and spells out the obligations of the national governments that join it – the most important being the development and implementation of their “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs). However, unlike most other multilateral agreements, the influence of the Paris Agreement extends well beyond the purview of national governments. Across societies, a wide range of other actors – state and local authorities, companies, workers, faith organizations, educational and cultural institutions, and others – are internalizing the goals of the Paris Agreement and orienting their actions accordingly. This proliferation of bottom-up, Paris-aligned action helps achieve, and strengthen, countries’ NDCs. In the United States, it has maintained momentum toward the Paris goals even as the Trump administration was withdrawing from the agreement. Over time, this indirect “signaling” effect of the Paris Agreement may be as decisive as its direct influence on national governments in catalyzing an ambitious global response. This brief highlights a broad range of climate actions across many spheres of society inspired by the Paris Agreement.

## INTRODUCTION

The Paris Agreement establishes a set of long-term climate mitigation goals: keeping average warming well below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to keep it to 1.5 degrees C; reaching peak global emissions as soon as possible; and achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in the second half of the century.

Toward those goals, the agreement commits participating governments to undertake NDCs. Parties

must periodically report on their emissions and on the implementation and achievement of their NDCs, and these reports are subject to international review. Countries also commit to update their NDCs every five years following a “global stocktake” of collective progress. The first round of NDC updates is now underway.

While focused principally, like all international agreements, on the actions of national governments, the Paris Agreement recognizes “the importance...of public



participation,” and “the importance of the engagements of all levels of government and various actors...in addressing climate change.”<sup>1</sup>

The agreement has, indeed, provided a strong signal to actors beyond national governments. Although they have no means of formally associating with the agreement, countless “nonstate actors” around the globe have taken it upon themselves to internalize its goals, and many are implementing specific plans and measures to align their actions with them. In this way, the agreement serves as both a driver and a benchmark for climate action across society.

This “signaling” effect cannot substitute for ambitious NDCs. The long-term structural transitions required to meet the Paris goals require strong efforts led by national governments. But the bottom-up actions inspired by the Paris Agreement help countries achieve their NDCs and – by demonstrating capacity and will across society – can embolden national governments toward higher ambition in their subsequent NDCs. These Paris-inspired actions can also help maintain momentum

toward the Paris goals even as national efforts are lagging. For instance, in response to President Trump’s announcement of his intention to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, thousands of entities coalesced by signing the We Are Still In (WASI) declaration to demonstrate broad-based support for the Paris goals. WASI now includes nearly 4,000 mayors, governors, companies, universities, faith-based organizations and others pledging to “support climate action to meet the Paris Agreement.”<sup>2</sup>

Climate action in all forms has continued to build since the Paris summit in 2015, in many cases aided by initiatives like the Race to Zero, a campaign recently launched by the U.K. government to spur action ahead of COP 26 in late 2021 in Glasgow. This brief focuses only on those actions by states, cities, companies, and other nonstate actors that expressly reference the Paris Agreement. Although the full emissions impact of these actions is not easily quantified, this summary provides strong evidence of the agreement’s powerful “signaling” effect.

## SUBNATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Many provinces, states, cities, and other subnational governments have embraced the aims of the Paris Agreement by setting ambitious climate targets, enacting and implementing policies, and collaborating across borders. In some instances, cities and states have estimated their share of emissions reduction under the Paris Agreement and have set targets accordingly. Others are aligning with the overall ambition to be carbon neutral by 2050.

Many have signaled their commitment to the Paris goals by joining with other subnational governments in international partnerships and pledges. Members of the Under2 Coalition, a global partnership of over 220 state, regional, and local governments, have committed to taking action commensurate with the Paris goal of keeping warming well under 2 degrees C.<sup>3</sup> Two dozen regions, states, and cities have joined the 2050 Pathways Platform launched at the 2016 Conference of the Parties, or COP 22, which supports governments seeking to develop long-term, net-zero greenhouse gas emission, climate-resilient pathways like those national

governments are encouraged to develop under the Paris Agreement.<sup>4</sup>

### STATES AND REGIONS

Major states and regions on every continent have set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reach carbon neutrality by 2050 or earlier. For example, ten international regions belong to the Under2 Coalition.

- Victoria became the first Australian state to pass legislation to align with the Paris Agreement. The 2017 Climate Change Act sets a goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, makes climate change a mandatory component of government decision-making, and requires government departments and local governments to make emissions reduction pledges.<sup>5</sup> Every state and mainland territory government in Australia has made either aspirational or legislated commitments toward zero emissions.<sup>6</sup> The Australian Capital Territory, for instance, has legislated net-zero emissions by 2045.<sup>7</sup>



- Other world regions like Baden-Württemberg, Germany and Catalonia, Spain have targeted their greenhouse gas reduction laws to align with the Paris Agreement.<sup>8</sup>
- Greater Manchester, United Kingdom, is a member of both the Under2 Coalition and the 2050 Pathways Platform. The first principle of the Manchester Climate Change Framework is setting its objective and targets in line with the latest science and the Paris Agreement: it plans to reduce direct carbon dioxide emissions by at least 50 percent by 2025 and reach net zero by 2050.<sup>9</sup>
- Africa has seen an increase in subnational support for the aims of the Paris Agreement. In 2015, the Assemblée des Régions de Côte d'Ivoire (ARDCI) representing 31 regions and two autonomous districts joined the Under2 Coalition.<sup>10</sup> Twenty governments in 16 countries have joined the Declaration of Local and Subnational leaders of Africa, which cites the Paris Agreement and encourages African cities and regions to join the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the Under2Coalition, and other networks aimed at achieving its goals.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. Climate Alliance, formed in June 2017, now includes 25 states and territories committed to “implement[ing] policies that advance the goals of the Paris Agreement.”<sup>12</sup> The alliance members, which encompass 60 percent of U.S. GDP and 40 percent of U.S. emissions, have committed to meeting the 2025 emissions target pledged by the United States under the Paris Agreement and to report their progress to the international community.<sup>13</sup>

- In California, the executive order issued in 2018 by Gov. Jerry Brown setting a goal of economy-wide carbon neutrality by 2045 explicitly declares the state’s commitment to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and to go beyond them whenever possible.<sup>14</sup>
- Hawaii became the first state to pass legislation to align with the Paris Agreement.<sup>15</sup> Hawaii Senate Bill 559 requires that the state’s climate strategies “be closely aligned with the climate change principles and goals adopted in the Paris Agreement,” and commits the state to delivering its share of emissions reduction regardless of federal participation.<sup>16</sup>

## CITIES

Cities large and small are partnering in international alliances committed to achieving the Paris goals. C40, a network of large cities including Delhi, Washington, D.C., and Cape Town, helps its members align individual emissions trajectories with the most ambitious aims of the Paris Agreement.<sup>17</sup>

More than 10,000 local governments in 138 countries have joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, which helps cities and other local jurisdictions undertake ambitious, measurable climate and energy initiatives to reach a net-zero emission world by 2050.<sup>18</sup> At COP 25 in Madrid, the Climate Ambition Alliance announced that 398 cities were working towards achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050.<sup>19</sup> Since the announcement, more than 50 other cities have joined the alliance as part of the Race to Zero.

Some examples around the world:

- The city of Paris has its own Climate Action Plan in line with the Paris Agreement.<sup>20</sup> It includes more than 500 policies to reduce the city’s carbon footprint by 80 percent below 2004 levels, and to involve local stakeholders in offsetting any residual emissions to reach net-zero carbon.
- London’s Environment Strategy was one of the first city plans published in compliance with the highest ambition of the Paris Agreement.<sup>21</sup> The city aims to work with other global leaders to help turn London into a zero-carbon city by 2050.
- The city of Melbourne, Australia analyzed four scenarios for its Climate Change Mitigation Strategy.<sup>22</sup> It plans to reduce emissions by 29 to 50 percent by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050 or sooner.
- The Argentinian Network of Municipalities Against Climate Change, representing more than 200 municipalities and over 660 million people in Argentina, is aiming for carbon neutrality for 2050.<sup>23</sup>
- In November 2020, 177 local Japanese governments announced their plans to achieve net-zero carbon emissions in alignment with the Paris Agreement, including Tokyo, Kanagawa, Osaka, Nagano, and Kyoto.<sup>24</sup> Yokohama’s City Action Plan for Global Warming Countermeasures sets a carbon neutrality by 2050 target.<sup>25</sup>



In the U.S., Climate Mayors was formed in 2014 to connect a bipartisan group of mayors to demonstrate leadership on climate change. The coalition encourages cities to adopt city council resolutions in support of the Paris Agreement.<sup>26</sup> After the U.S. started the process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, 468 Mayors responded with a statement that they will “adopt, honor, and uphold the commitments to the goals enshrined in the Paris Agreement.”<sup>27</sup>

The American Cities Climate Challenge (ACCC) was launched in 2018 to help cities establish high-impact policies to reduce emissions from electricity, buildings, and transportation. Twenty-five of the largest U.S. cities have been accepted into a two-year acceleration program that aims, in part, to “[m]ake the Paris Agreement goals real.”<sup>28</sup> Some examples:

- The first “key principle” of Los Angeles’ Green New Deal is a commitment to the Paris Agreement. The plan, adopted in April 2019, also includes emission reduction targets to align with this commitment.<sup>29</sup>
- New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio signed an executive order in June 2017 committing the city to the principles and goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>30</sup> The order was followed by a detailed action plan, *1.5°C: Aligning New York City With the Paris Climate Agreement*, described by the city as the first Paris Agreement-compliant plan for a city anywhere in the world.<sup>31</sup>
- In 2020, Houston released its Climate Action Plan which includes an aim to reach climate neutrality by 2050 to comply with the Paris Agreement.<sup>32</sup>

## COMPANIES

Companies across a range of sectors are using the Paris Agreement as a key benchmark for setting long- and mid-term climate goals, including a growing number of net-zero targets. In addition to setting their own targets, many companies are coming together to jointly align their actions with the Paris Agreement.

Over 320 companies have joined Business Ambition for 1.5°C which commits them to aligning their business with the most “ambitious aim of the Paris Agreement.”<sup>33</sup> This commitment includes setting shorter-term science-based emissions reduction targets, effectively internalizing the Paris goals over the coming decades. The Race to Zero campaign has recruited 1,100 businesses to join the Climate Ambition Alliance and commit to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. In the U.S., over 2,200 businesses and investors signed onto the We Are Still In (WASI) declaration signaling their continued adherence to the Paris Agreement.

Many large investors have been particularly active in attempting to align their investments with the Paris Agreement. Climate Action 100+ has enlisted more than 450 investors with over USD \$40 trillion in assets to encourage the world’s top-emitting companies to align with the agreement’s goals.<sup>34</sup> In August 2020, the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change launched the “Net Zero Investment Framework” to provide metrics and methodologies to help investors

align their investment portfolios with the Paris goals.

Among individual companies:

- In the oil and gas sector, Shell, BP, and Equinor committed in 2020 to net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. BP laid out 10 goals that “together set out a path that is consistent with the Paris goals.”<sup>35</sup> Shell, when explaining its “Net Carbon Footprint Ambition,” stated that it is aiming to align with the most ambitious aims of the Paris Agreement.<sup>36</sup> Equinor announced its ambition to reach net zero by 2050 as a demonstration of the company’s “continued commitment to long-term value creation in support of the Paris Agreement.”<sup>37</sup>
- In the transportation sector, Volkswagen committed to being carbon neutral by 2050 and announced a decarbonization program to fulfill its commitment to the Paris Agreement.<sup>38</sup> Maersk, the world’s largest container ship and supply vessel operator, set a net-zero carbon goal for its operations to “contribut[e] to reach[ing] the Paris Agreement’s goal of staying well below 2C temperature rise.”<sup>39</sup>
- In the building materials sector, LafargeHolcim, the world’s largest producer of cement, committed in September 2020 to become a net-zero company by 2050 and to join Business Ambition for 1.5°C.<sup>40</sup> In February 2020, CEMEX, a Mexican multinational company and one of the biggest building materials



companies worldwide, committed to net-zero emissions across its products and operations by 2050.<sup>41</sup>

- In the mining sector, Vale, a Brazil multinational mining and logistics company and the world's largest producer of iron ore, pellets, and nickel, committed to carbon neutrality by 2050 to align with the Paris Agreement, a goal referenced throughout its 2019 sustainability report.<sup>42</sup> In 2019, BHP, one of the world's largest mining companies, committed to net-zero operational emissions by 2050, and in 2020, the company updated its climate goals and stated that its "portfolio is well positioned to support the transition to a lower carbon world aligned with the Paris Agreement."<sup>43</sup>

Some companies have set targets more ambitious than the Paris goals. Microsoft released commitments that go beyond current international goals by committing to

being carbon negative across all three emissions scopes by 2030 and to "remove from the environment all the carbon the company has emitted either directly or by electrical consumption since it was founded in 1975."<sup>44</sup>

Amazon, Mercedes-Benz, Siemens and other companies committed through The Climate Pledge<sup>45</sup> to be net zero by 2040, ten years ahead of the Paris deadline.

Climate action in the business sector is driven by a range of factors, including pressure from investors and shareholders and a growing recognition of the business risks and opportunities presented by climate change. The common framework and goals enshrined in the Paris Agreement are helping many companies align their long-term ambitions and short-term actions. Even in the absence of more ambitious climate policy, Paris is providing a clear signal to the business community that the future is net zero.

## CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

A wide range of cultural institutions – from arts and entertainment to sports, music, and fashion – have taken steps to internalize the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

### MUSEUMS

Museums, building on their experience in conservation, interpretation, and dissemination of cultural, scientific, and environmental knowledge, have committed themselves to further action in support of the Paris goals. Some examples:

- The International Council of Museums established a Working Group on Sustainability in 2018 to mainstream the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement across its activities and to support its member museums in doing so.<sup>46</sup>
- In 2017, the International Council on Museums and Sites (ICOMOS), which works to improve the conservation of cultural heritage sites, formed a Climate Change and Cultural Heritage Workgroup "in light of the implementation of the Paris Agreement."<sup>47</sup> A 2018 report highlighted ways in which cultural heritage considerations intersect with the Paris objectives and provided guidance to the heritage community on strengthening climate-related efforts.<sup>48</sup>

- Sustainable Museums, a global consultancy for museums, zoos, gardens, and historic sites addressing sustainability and climate, created the Twitter hashtag #MuseumsforParis to encourage education, research, and creativity to mobilize climate action and to share best practices among cultural institutions that support the Paris goals.<sup>49</sup>

### SPORTS

Sports organizations and their fans contribute to climate change through associated travel, energy use, construction, catering, and more. Teams and leagues around the world have partnered with the International Olympic Committee to create the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework.<sup>50</sup> The 165 signatories to date, including the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA), commit to a set of five principles, such as reducing their overall climate impact and promoting sustainable and responsible consumption, and work to incorporate them into their operations.<sup>51</sup>

### MUSIC

Musicians are using their art to raise awareness of the need for climate action and are taking steps to address the significant environmental impact of their tours and



performances. Some examples:

- Pathway to Paris was launched in 2014 to bring together musicians, activists, mayors, and innovators to raise climate consciousness and promote ways of “turning the Paris Agreement into action.”<sup>52</sup> It held concerts after the 2014 People’s Climate March in New York City, before COP 21, and before COP 23, and in 2017 launched the 1000 Cities Initiative for Carbon Freedom, encouraging all cities to transition to 100 percent renewable energy and zero carbon emissions by 2040.<sup>53</sup>
- A team of organizations produced the Green Touring Guide recommending ways that musical artists can better align the management of their tours with the Paris goals.<sup>54</sup> The British rock band Coldplay ceased touring in 2019 until it can ensure its tours are carbon neutral.<sup>55</sup>

- More than 40 U.S. music artists joined WASI and have promised to use their platform as performers and public figures to build awareness and engage their fans to take action.<sup>56</sup>

## FASHION

An item of clothing can have a significant carbon footprint, from the raw materials used to create it to the energy used in manufacturing, transporting, packaging, and selling it, and, finally, its disposal. The Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, launched in 2018, now has 113 signatories and 38 supporting organizations, including Esprit, Gap, H&M, Kmart and Target.<sup>57</sup> Members commit to 30 percent greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2030, and to set a decarbonization pathway for the fashion industry drawing on methodologies from the Science-Based Targets initiative.

## PROFESSIONS

As the impacts of climate change become more widespread, professions like medicine and law have increasingly made connections between their work and climate change. Leading professional organizations are calling on their members to change personal and professional practices in order to contribute to the principles and goals of the Paris Agreement.

### MEDICAL

A growing number of medical associations, medical journals, and healthcare systems have expressed their support for Paris Agreement, viewing climate change as a health stressor, and have taken steps to encourage physicians to implement sustainability measures in their own practices.

The American Medical Association (AMA) and 23 other medical associations strongly support the Paris Agreement.<sup>58</sup> New AMA policies encourage the adoption of sustainability practices in physicians’ operations and teaching about the health-related risks of climate change in medical education.<sup>59</sup> Local medical associations are also reaching out to their members. For instance, the Minnesota Medical Association recently published an article titled, “What physicians can do about climate change.”<sup>60</sup>

Other examples:

- The International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA), representing 1.3 million medical students in 123 countries, together with the World Medical Association (WMA) and the French Medical Council, has committed to training the health workforce on climate issues through the development of resources like the IFMSA Training Manual on Climate and Health.<sup>61</sup>
- The Lancet, an international medical journal, published an article in early 2020 emphasizing the importance of the Paris Agreement to a healthier future for all and calling on the health sector to ensure that health is integrated into climate-related policy making across sectors.<sup>62</sup>
- In conjunction with COP 21, several U.S. health care systems hosted a Healthcare Climate Leadership Roundtable to plan steps to address climate change.<sup>63</sup> Some announced commitments to the 2020 HealthCare Climate Challenge, and Dignity Health presented its plans at the COP.<sup>64</sup>
- In 2017, large U.S. health systems, including Catholic Health Initiatives, Dignity Health, Hackensack University Health System, Mercy Health, Trinity Health, and Providence St. Joseph



Health, announced their intent to honor the United States' commitment to greenhouse gas reduction targets as laid out in the Paris Agreement.<sup>65</sup>

## LEGAL

Many lawyers and legal organizations support the Paris Agreement as a matter of good governance, providing pro bono legal support to help cities and states reduce their climate impacts.

The 400,000-member American Bar Association (ABA) adopted a climate change resolution in 2019 calling for the United States to remain in the Paris Agreement, Congress to enact climate change legislation, and the private sector to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero or below as soon as possible.<sup>66</sup> The resolution also urged lawyers to engage in pro bono activities to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen climate adaptation, and to advise clients of climate-related risks and opportunities.

Over 22 law firms and nearly a dozen individual attorneys have responded to the ABA's call to engage in pro bono climate work by signing up to a project to draft model legislation implementing recommendations from a "legal playbook" for reducing U.S. greenhouse gas

emissions by at least 80 percent from 1990 levels by 2050 – the goal of the U.S. mid-century strategy developed by the Obama administration.<sup>67</sup>

Other examples:

- Established in 2016, Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG) engages more than 125,000 lawyers and citizens to defend democratic institutions and "good government" principles. In 2017, L4GG launched a nationwide climate change program deploying lawyers across the country to help U.S. cities convert to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030 to help the U.S. meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>68</sup> L4GG volunteers provide information to local decision-makers looking to switch to renewable energy.
- In 2018, at the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, California, five attorneys general declared their intent to maintain commitments to the Paris Agreement and launched the "Lawyers for a Sustainable Economy Initiative."<sup>69</sup> Founded by nine U.S. law firms and facilitated by Stanford Law School and its Precourt Institute for Energy, the program committed approximately \$15 million of pro bono legal support by 2020 for climate change and sustainability efforts.

## FAITH COMMUNITIES

Faith-based groups have responded to the Paris Agreement's call to enhance climate ambition by issuing declarations and climate action plans of their own and encouraging their congregations to reduce their carbon footprint. In the U.S. alone, 944 faith groups have signed the We Are Still In declaration supporting the Paris Agreement. Other examples:

- In the lead up to the Paris summit, Islam, Hindu, and Buddhist communities signed declarations calling for world leaders to adopt the climate agreement, recognizing climate science, and emphasizing a personal responsibility to care for the environment and global ecosystem.<sup>70</sup>
- The Global Muslim Climate Network launched calls in 2016 for all Muslim nations to increase their renewable energy and for Muslim investors to employ environmental criteria in their investment portfolios.<sup>71</sup> It has also called on all mosques to reduce their energy consumption and switch to

solar energy as part of its Clean Energy Mosques campaign.<sup>72</sup>

- The Global Catholic Climate Movement collected nearly 1 million signatures and mobilized 40,000 people to march for an ambitious Paris Agreement, and produced a COP prayer guide highlighting local climate issues.<sup>73</sup> It has called for Catholic institutions to divest from fossil fuels and has encouraged Catholics to make personal choices to reduce their carbon footprint through Living the Change.<sup>74</sup> Pope Francis, who in 2015 issued the *Laudato si'* encyclical addressing climate change and other forms of environmental degradation, recently called on nations to abide by the Paris Agreement.<sup>75</sup>
- At its 2018 General Convention, the U.S. Episcopal Church passed several resolutions committing the denomination to the work of the Paris Agreement.<sup>76</sup> It has asked Episcopal institutions, congregations, and members to plant "Paris Groves" to sequester



carbon and to support the adoption of the Paris Agreement “at state, regional and local levels.”<sup>77</sup> Using the Diocese of California’s web-based carbon tracker, congregants are encouraged to make sustainable lifestyle choices.<sup>78</sup>

- In 2017, over 140 U.S. Jewish leaders signed a letter encouraging Jewish institutions to support the Paris goals by lowering carbon emissions by at least 26 percent over the following seven years.<sup>79</sup> Temples and organizations have responded with initiatives

like the Shalom Center’s Green Menorah Covenant and Temple Israel Boston’s Green Team.<sup>80</sup>

- The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility is a coalition of over 300 global institutional investors that leverage their equity ownership in large companies to encourage them to mitigate social and environmental risks in their operations, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions to align with the Paris Agreement’s 2 degrees C goal.<sup>81</sup>

## EDUCATION

Institutions of higher learning have played a critical role in uncovering climate risks and solutions, and many are now embracing the Paris goals by setting greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, implementing climate action plans, and working in their local communities to effect change. Under the Race to Zero campaign, 284 higher and further education institutions and 68 networks have signed the Global Climate Letter committing their institution to being net zero.<sup>82</sup>

In the United States, 22 major research universities have joined the University Climate Change Coalition (UC3), committing to achieve emission reductions consistent with the Paris goals. Schools like Boston University, University of California, and the University of Michigan have committed to carbon neutrality by 2050, some as early as 2025.<sup>83</sup> Second Nature, the organization that sponsors UC3, has also helped recruit more than 400 college and universities to WASI, in support of the Paris Agreement.<sup>84</sup>

The Global Alliance of Tertiary Education and Student Sustainability Networks was launched to make higher education institutions a major contributor to the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals by making the business management and curriculum of institutions sustainable across the UK, Ireland, and internationally. It currently has over 200 university, college, and learning and skills organization members.<sup>85</sup>

Some specific examples:

- In signing the WASI declaration, Columbia University noted its historical involvement in climate science, commitments to reduce its carbon footprint and divestment from thermal coal producers.

Columbia’s sustainability plan notes its support for the Paris Agreement and includes a target to reduce emissions by 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2050.<sup>86</sup>

- The College of New Jersey, another WASI signatory, is working towards climate neutrality by developing a rideshare phone app, installing electric car charging stations, providing bicycle facilities, implementing distance learning options, and converting all parking garages to LED technology.<sup>87</sup>
- Oxford Climate Society at Oxford University in England has set out an Oxford Climate Action Plan.<sup>88</sup> The plan of action is in line with the Oxford Martin Principles for Climate-Conscious Investment, which provide a framework for assessing compatibility with the Paris Agreement.<sup>89</sup> Oxford will aim for net-zero carbon dioxide emissions in its operations by 2030 and absolute net zero by 2050. It will require carbon intensive and fossil fuel companies to demonstrate a plan for net-zero operations with near term targets aligned with the Paris Agreement and begin to divest from those companies that do not.
- The University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, recently announced that it would divest from fossil fuel assets in its investment portfolio because it supports its net-zero emissions goal, in line with the Paris Agreement commitment to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C.<sup>90</sup>

The Paris Agreement also encourages parties to promote the integration of education in their climate change activities. To support this aim, the UN Climate Change Learning Partnership (UNITAR; UN CC:Learn),



a partnership of more than 30 multilateral organizations, supports countries in designing and implementing systematic, recurrent, and results-oriented climate

change learning. The Partnership has been supporting projects in Kenya, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Zimbabwe in its third phase.<sup>91</sup>

## INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with, the environment and its resources. A number of indigenous communities have committed to addressing climate change and have taken action to support the Paris Agreement.

In 2017, several Native Alaskan tribes responded to the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement by committing to aggressively address climate change in their respective homelands.<sup>92</sup> A resolution adopted by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian tribal governments, calls on all Tribal nations to work to uphold the Paris Agreement by supporting and advocating for greenhouse gas reductions, promoting climate resiliency, and educating the public on the climate impacts to Indian Country.<sup>93</sup> In 2018, NCAI established a Climate Action Task Force to identify and advocate for the policies and funding necessary to help tribal nations engage in effective, sustainable climate action, nationally and at international fora like the UNFCCC.<sup>94</sup>

Other examples:

- The Quinault Indian Nation in the state

of Washington strongly supported a state ballot initiative to tax carbon emissions.<sup>95</sup> When it failed to pass, Fawn Sharp, the tribal president and president of the NCAI, announced that the nation will establish its own carbon fee on businesses operating on Quinault land and use the proceeds in part to help relocate members living in areas most vulnerable to flooding and to support those who have lost their jobs due to the disappearance of salmon.<sup>96</sup>

- In 2019, reacting to the engagement of indigenous communities in the Paris Agreement, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation in the northern Yukon in Canada became the first indigenous tribe to declare an official climate emergency. The announcement is a call to action for indigenous groups to create an Indigenous Climate Accord.<sup>97</sup>
- In 2019, Peru announced that it will launch the world's first indigenous climate platform, which will allow indigenous peoples to share knowledge and practices to address climate change. The consultation process was conducted under the country's climate change law, which provides for the implementation and monitoring of Peru's commitments under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the commitments it establishes among national governments, the Paris Agreement has inspired countless commitments and actions by a wide range of actors across society. The long-term goals that countries built into the agreement to guide national efforts have served at the same time as a driver and benchmark for a growing abundance of bottom-up efforts. Through this “signaling” effect, the Paris goals have been integrated into state and local laws, corporate strategies, and the missions of cultural, faith and educational institutions,

and many others. While not a substitute for strong national commitments and action, this continued groundswell of nonstate alignment and action will inform and help to strengthen countries' future NDCs, and in so doing, will be critical in ensuring the success of the Paris Agreement.



## ENDNOTES

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## Other C2ES Resources:

*Paris Climate Agreement Q&A*

<https://www.c2es.org/content/paris-climate-agreement-qa/>



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