

The Great Climate Challenge

COP-29

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Historical Background:

The [UNFCCC](#) (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) is an international treaty that began in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The goal of the UNFCCC is to combat global warming and reduce greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

COP is the abbreviation for the Conference of the Parties, i.e., the conference of the parties that have signed the UNFCCC treaty. Since 1995, countries have met annually to work on climate policy. The Paris Agreement of 2015, which aimed to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius. Temperatures have already increased to 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1992. To limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030. The [Paris Agreement](#) is based on three pillars: **mitigation** (reducing emissions), **adaptation** (adjusting to climate change), and **financing** (support from wealthy countries for poorer nations).

The most recent Climate Change Conference of the Parties, COP 29, was held in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2024. The three outcomes of COP 29 were:

- Triple finance to developing countries, from the previous goal of USD 100 billion annually, to USD 300 billion annually by 2035.
- Secure efforts to increase finance to developing countries, from both public and private sources, to the amount of USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2035.
- Establish the biannual Climate Week Initiative to bring together representatives of Parties and non-Party stakeholders in a global space offering a unique opportunity to plan the agenda for the next COP. The Climate Weeks will be held twice a year in different regions, maintaining a global focus. **Panama** will host the first Climate Week from **May 19-23, 2025**. The second Climate Week is expected to be in Africa later this year.

The United States announced in January, 2025 that it was withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. The process to withdraw takes a year. Although it is unclear about the commitment of the United States as a government to the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992). The agreement made at COP 29 in Baku allows for private (non-party) stakeholders to participate. For example, New Jersey could be considered as a non-party stakeholder. [COP30](#) will be held in Belém, Brazil, November 10-21, 2025.

Lesson Activity:

The suggestion is for a high school class to research and debate the topics or issues below. Debate is encouraged because it supports inquiry and critical thinking in the development of the First Affirmative and cross-examination. The structure of the debate also supports a Plan with planks for budget, implementation, and enforcement.

However, the lesson activity is flexible and teachers may make changes to allow students to hold a Model UN or Model Congress, make a video or slide presentation, or write letters to elected officials or to the United Nations. Teachers may also modify the lesson to a discussion.

Debate Topics to Consider:

Resolved that the federal government reconsider its decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement in 2015 and support the COP-29 decisions.

Resolved that the federal government direct the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a partnership with three or more countries to eliminate fossil fuel emissions in the generation of electric power and transportation sector.

Resolved that the state government of New Jersey enthusiastically support the COP-29 decisions as a non-party stakeholder.

Resolved that the state government of New Jersey host a Climate Week in 2026.

Resolved that the United Nations mandate that all of the \$300 billion designated in COP-29 be allocated for life-saving needs and resources for the health of people in the top ten countries experiencing extreme affects from climate change.

Resolved that your public or private school or district provide a school in a developing country with sustainable energy.

Debate Structure:

There are different debate models for high school classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to use these resources as a guide for the model that best meets the needs of their students and classroom schedule.

[Structured Classroom Debate \(McGill University\)](#)

[Policy Debate \(National Speech and Debate Association\)](#)

Sample for a 40-50 minute class: 20 + 8 + 12 = 40 minutes

First Affirmative: (5 minutes)

(Identify needs/explain harms, identify the problem, explain why status quo cannot solve the needs/problem.)

Cross Examination by Second Negative: (2 minutes)

First Negative: (5 minutes)

(Attack the needs/harms presented in the First Affirmative by criticizing their sources, needs are exaggerated, or evidence is flawed. Explain how and why the status quo is effective, explain the harms that will occur as a result of change.

Cross Examination by the First Affirmative: (2 minutes)

Second Affirmative: (5 minutes)

Present your plan for action, propose the budget or amount of cost, have an implementation date, explain how your plan will be enforced. After presenting the plan, explain why the status quo cannot solve the problem and the advantages of your plan.

Cross Examination by the First Negative: (2 minutes)

Second Negative: (5 minutes)

Explain why the plan presented will not work, will not be implemented, cannot be enforced, and that the budget will take money away from other necessary programs. Identify disadvantages of the plan and explain why all the arguments of the First Negative are flawed, misleading, or inaccurate.

Cross Examination by the Second Affirmative: (2 minutes)

New arguments are NOT PERMITTED in Rebuttals. However, new evidence can be presented.

First Negative Rebuttal: (4 minutes)

Summarize with counter arguments every argument presented by the Affirmative team. Explain how the Status Quo is addressing this in a way that is better than the proposed change. (i.e. Status quo protects jobs, saves lives, prevents economic collapse, supports technologies that are effective, etc.) Explain there is no Affirmative evidence supporting their plan will work. (i.e. too much risk)

First Affirmative Rebuttal: (4 minutes)

This is a very important response to attack and criticize **all** of the arguments presented by the Negative team. Claim as winning arguments everything the Negative team failed to address or provide substantial evidence for. Explain that there is no evidence that the

Second Negative Rebuttal: (3 minutes)

Summarize the main arguments you won and point out errors in evidence. (bias, inappropriate source, outdated source, not a direct quote, no context for the evidence, etc.) Explain Affirmative failure to explain why the status quo cannot address the resolution.

Second Affirmative Rebuttal: (3 minutes)

Summarize the winning arguments. State the most important argument you made.

Here are countries and regions that are experiencing these severe impacts of the climate crisis.

South Sudan – Floods & Drought



Four years of consecutive flooding in South Sudan is causing a hunger crisis. Nyaruan and her one-year-old son Chuong, in their maize plantation destroyed by the floods. “Our farm was affected by the floods. We planted maize in June but in July everything was under the water. We lost all the crops.” Photo: WFP/Gabriela Vivacqua

As one of the most rapidly warming areas in the world, South Sudan is on the frontlines of the climate crisis. The country’s temperatures are increasing at two and half times the global average. This has resulted in extreme weather events including four consecutive years of flooding that have left half the country underwater.

South Sudan is simultaneously drowning and drying as the climate crisis tightens its grip: An unprecedented flooding crisis has swallowed large swathes of the country while other parts are grappling with devastating drought. For some, the floods have resulted in extreme food scarcity and forced some families to depend on wild foods like water lilies to cope. 64% of the country’s population (7.7 million people out of 12 million total) are experiencing severe hunger.

In January of 2023, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) assisted 1.1 million people including 800,000 people affected by the floods. In Unity State, we are working with communities to battle the invasive hyacinth weed – an invasive plant that blocks waterways and emits a large amount of methane when it decomposes. The women in Unity State turn the hyacinth weed into fuel for cooking fires. Not only is this fuel safe and sustainable, it saves women from having to travel long, dangerous distances to collect firewood. [Learn more about South Sudan >](#)

Madagascar – Cyclones, Droughts & Floods



Aerial views from a UNHAS flight show the extent of the devastation caused by Cyclone Batsirai in Madagascar. Photo: WFP/Nejmeddine Halfaoui/2022

In February of 2022, Madagascar was hit with four tropical cyclones: Emnati, Dumako, Batsirai and Ana. These storms destroyed infrastructure, decimated rice crops just weeks away from harvest and left over 270,000 people in urgent need of food assistance.

Madagascar is one of Africa's most disaster-prone and food-insecure countries. Nearly 2 million people in Madagascar are experiencing severe hunger and are in need of humanitarian assistance. In the south, the driest conditions in 40 years forced Madagascans to survive by eating locusts, raw red cactus fruits and wild leaves.

Madagascar boasts invaluable contributions to the world's biodiversity with species of plants and animals that can't be found anywhere else. This is why the U.N. World Food Programme works to preserve the environment and implement nature-based solutions including reforestation. In 2022, 155,000 people were enrolled in an asset creation program to build resilience against climate-related threats to their environment. [Learn more about Madagascar >](#)

Pakistan – Floods



Pakistan was hit with one of the worst monsoons in its history. Photo: Anadolu Agency via AFP/2022

From June to October of 2022, Pakistan was hit by what United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres described as [“monsoon\(s\) on steroids”](#). During this time period, heavy rainfall caused flooding and landslides at a rate nearly ten times the national 30-year average. The floods affected nearly 33 million people, damaged 4.4 million acres (about twice the area of Connecticut) of agricultural land and killed 800,000 livestock.

In the aftermath, rising food prices exacerbated already stressed levels of hunger and malnutrition in the country. The number of people experiencing severe hunger has more than doubled since the floods hit in June: Today, 14.6 million people are experiencing severe hunger in Pakistan.

Pakistan’s malnutrition rates are dire. More than half of children under 5 have a vitamin A deficiency, 40% have a zinc and Vitamin D deficiency and 62% are anemic. To address these micronutrient deficiencies, the U.N. World Food Programme provides children with specialized nutritious foods that are fortified with vitamins and minerals. To address recovery from the monsoons, the U.N. World Food Programme is restoring the country’s flood protection walls and ground water channels. These assets will be built back stronger to endure the summer monsoon rains and facilitate a continued flow of clean drinking water. [Learn more about Pakistan >](#)

Somalia – Drought



Somalia has experienced 5 failed rainy seasons, drying up crops and killing livestock. Photo: WFP/Geneva Costopulos

There is no end in sight to the drought in Somalia. For the past five rainy seasons, rainfall has been below adequate levels for harvesting and keeping livestock. This has resulted in almost total crop failure and a lack of rural employment opportunities.

Every failed rainy season makes recovery from the crisis even more challenging for families. 5 million people in Somalia are facing crisis levels of hunger, including 200,000 people experiencing the very worst form of hunger.

As the largest humanitarian agency in Somalia, the U.N. World Food Programme has the reach and expertise to support communities impacted by the climate crisis. Through our anticipatory cash transfers and early warning systems, we equip people with the resources and knowledge to protect themselves against potential dry seasons. This program has already benefited [117,612 individuals across Hudur and Wajiid districts of Bakool](#). [Learn more about Somalia >](#)



[Related Article: Food Waste, Climate Change and Hunger: A Vicious Cycle We Have the Power to Break](#)

Sudan – Droughts & Floods



Unprecedented deadly rains and flooding in Sudan. Photo: WFP/Niema Abdelmageed

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, Sudan is one of [the world's most vulnerable countries to climate variability and climate change](#). The country has not had a moment of relief through decades of droughts, rainfall variability, depleting water sources and expansive desertification.

In Sudan, climate shocks and conflict are driving hunger: Last year, ongoing flooding disrupted the planting season while conflict prevented families from accessing farmland. An estimated [15 million people](#) (about twice the population of New Jersey) are severely hungry. Mothers and children have been hit hardest by the crisis. Over 4 million young children and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are acutely malnourished.

The U.N. World Food Programme has been present in Sudan since 1963. Since then, we have been consistent in our aim to reduce hunger and malnutrition as well as enhance communities' resilience to shocks across the country. In 2023, we plan to assist more than 7.6 million people. However, due to the country's security situation the U.N. World Food Programme has suspended their operations in Sudan.

[Learn more about Sudan >](#)

Chad – Droughts & Floods



A farmer in Chad, lost half of his maize harvest due to heavy rainfalls, which caused floods just a few weeks before the harvest. Photo: WFP/Evelyn Fey

In the fall of 2022, Chad experienced the worst flooding in 30 years. UNICEF reported that more than 1 million people were affected and 1,149,114 acres of farmland were devastated. In response, the U.N. World Food Programme stepped up its emergency operations and aimed to reach 300,000 flood-affected people.

The heavy rains and flooding came at a devastating time for Chad. Only a few months prior, the government had declared a national food and nutrition emergency. Many in the country are dependent on farming and livestock to sustain themselves. However, unpredictable rain patterns and frequent droughts make these livelihoods unreliable sources of food. 2.1 million people were left acutely hungry after the 2022 lean season – the dangerous period of time in between planting and harvest where economic opportunities are rare.

Chad, due to the decline in biodiversity of their drylands through desertification, has been slow to introduce clean cooking. People burn biomass materials such as wood, animal dung or crop waste in open fires and inefficient stoves. This process creates harmful household air pollution. In response, the U.N. World Food Programme supplied households, restaurants and street vendors in eastern Chad with [liquid petroleum gas](#). Since implementing liquid petroleum gas, households have seen improved indoor air quality and decreased air pollutants being released into the atmosphere – benefits that help the health of both people and their environment. [Learn more about Chad >](#)

The Sahel – Droughts, Wildfires & Floods



Niger is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the adverse effects of climate change. The country is affected by desertification, land degradation and extreme weather.

The climate crisis is having a significant impact on the Sahel – a region that spans across Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and includes Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. The region is experiencing increasing temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns that have resulted in more frequent and severe droughts. These shocks are exacerbating existing challenges including hunger and poverty. Today, nearly 13 million people in the region are experiencing severe hunger.

The U.N. World Food Programme takes a holistic approach to addressing the impacts of the climate crisis. Through our Greening the Sahel project, we work with local communities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to plant trees to combat desertification and restore degraded land.

The Dry Corridor – Droughts, Hurricanes & Floods



Cattle herd roams in the open field in Honduras that is complete dry due to the lack of rains.

The Dry Corridor of Central America is an area highly vulnerable to climate variability and erratic weather. In the south of Honduras, the people who live in the Dry Corridor are experiencing a severe drought, which is affecting their livelihoods.

The dry corridor, a region in Central America, is experiencing the devastating effects of the climate crisis. Droughts, heatwaves and unpredictable rainfall patterns have led to crop failures and forced migration. The situation is particularly dire for small-scale farmers and indigenous populations, as they are disproportionately affected by the impacts of the climate crisis.

Due to prolonged dry spells and excessive rains, farmers in countries such as El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are unable to grow enough food. Many families have had to resort to selling tools and animals to turn a profit, skipping meals and eating less nutritious food.

Farmers in El Salvador are leading the Dry Corridor into a more hopeful future. With support from the U.N. World Food Programme, three farmers have [converted a dry strip of land in Cacaopera into a lush haven](#) by using hydroponic technology. Now, they can grow fresh produce such as chilis and bell peppers despite the dry conditions. [Learn more about the Dry Corridor >](#)

Research Information:

[Cop 29 Conference in Baku](#)

[Paris Agreement \(2015\)](#)

[Sixth Climate Assessment Report \(Video, 5:50\)](#)

[Interactive Atlas \(2021-2040\) You can set your own variables](#)

[Climate Action Tracker for Countries](#)

[Regional Fact Sheet for North and Central America](#)

[Countries Experiencing the Most Harmful Effects from Climate Changes](#)

[UN: On the Frontline of the World's Climate Crisis](#)

[Clean Air Fund](#)

[Billion Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters](#)

[Climate Risk Index 2025](#)

[How Climate Affects extreme weather Around the World](#)