

Billion-dollar boost for clean energy kicks off UN climate talks

Major governments join investors in a commitment to drive new energy technologies into the marketplace.

Jeff Tollefson

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PARIS



Jim Watson/Getty Images

US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping are two of the world leaders attending the climate talks in Paris.

Clean energy stole the spotlight as the [United Nations climate talks](#) began in Paris on 30 November. Twenty countries, including the United States and China, announced that they would double funding for energy research and development over the next five years, in partnership with a multi-billion-dollar effort by major investors.

The governments' "Mission Innovation" programme seeks to hasten research into a variety of clean-energy technologies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions — and thus [limit global warming](#) — over the coming century. A separate but related effort by 28 major investors and the University of California will spend US\$2 billion to drive clean-energy technologies out of the labs and into the global marketplace.

Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates, whose foundation is part of the effort, said that it will back any and all promising new technologies.

“We’re unbiased, but it has to be clean, and it has to have a chance at scaling up at a cost lower than today’s hydrocarbon-based energy sources,” he said. “That kind of innovation is what will allow the commitments that are made here to be strengthened in the years ahead to get us to our goal of not having more than 2 °C of warming.”



Long road ahead

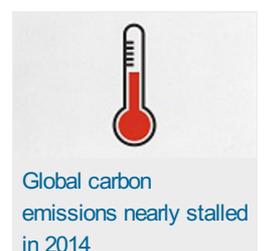
The announcement came as 147 world leaders embarked on a marathon of speeches calling for collective action to halt global warming. Noting that [global emissions stalled in 2014](#) even as the global economy grew, US President Barack Obama said that governments need no longer sacrifice the environment in the name of economic growth.

“One of the enemies that we’ll be fighting at this conference is cynicism, the notion we can’t do anything about climate change,” Obama said. “I’ve come here personally, as the leader of the world’s largest economy and the second-largest emitter, to say that the United States of America not only recognizes our role in creating this problem, we embrace our responsibility to do something about it.”

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President François Hollande announced a new alliance involving more than 100 countries, aimed at expanding solar energy around the globe. Modi said that governments and industry will collaborate on research and innovation to bring the cost of solar energy down and expand access to energy for the world’s poorest citizens.

“This day is the sunrise of new hope — not just for clean energy, but for villages and homes still in darkness,” he said.

World leaders will continue a series of high-level meetings on 1 December, but the hard work of transforming the 51-page draft climate agreement into a final deal is just beginning. Representatives from 195 countries will have to answer a host of questions about [who will pay](#) to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and how to ensure that countries honour their [current climate commitments](#) — and [go even further](#) to reduce emissions in the decades to come.



Doing so will require setting aside politics, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon told leaders as the Paris talks began. “The time for brinkmanship is over,” Ban said. “Let us build a durable climate regime with clear rules of the road that all countries can agree to follow.”

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