

The World Has Taken a Step toward 100% Renewables Global Climate Change Agreement Reached at the Paris UN Conference

12 December 2015, Paris COP21

The 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris COP21) ended on December 12, 2015. For the first time in history, all nations, whether advanced industrial or developing, joined together and agreed to make efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Renewable energy had the strongest presence at the Paris COP21 venues. Many diverse groups embraced “100% renewables” and called for a shift away from fossil fuels toward a new economy. These groups were not just renewable energy organizations and NGOs, but also included climate NGOs, religious groups, the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), youth, local governments, and investors.

23 years have passed since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, when the Framework Convention on Climate Change was opened for signature, and 21 years have passed since COP1. The threat of climate change has accelerated causing serious damage across broader areas while countries just idly stood by.

Meanwhile, renewable energy has grown considerably not just in the developed nations of the West, but also in Asia, Central and South America, Africa, emerging nations, and developing countries. Renewables now provide stable, affordable, and safe energy to people all over the world.

This is not by technologies in future nor through policies or investment that are not available. The technologies that we already have in our hands – solar, wind, bioenergy, geothermal, and hydropower – are generating 20% of the world’s energy, and providing 23% of the supply in the electricity sector. The cost of renewables have fallen significantly, and both installed capacity and supply are growing rapidly.

The “Paris Agreement” reached today has set a specific goal of holding the increase in the average temperature to below 2°C, which is considered to be the threshold to avoid dangerous climate change. The Agreement also talks about the efforts to be pursued to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

However, the “below 2°C” goal will not be achieved even if all the intended nationally determined contributions submitted to date are combined. The Agreement stipulates that the Parties must communicate and review their national emissions reduction and actions every five years, and pursue domestic measures with the aim of achieving the objectives. Further, the Agreement states that the successive objectives determined at the time of the five-yearly review will represent a progression beyond the previous objective.

Furthermore, a new group was formed called the High Ambition Coalition led by the Republic of the Marshall Islands and others. The formation of this Coalition, made up of over 100 countries including African nations, the United States, EU countries, Canada, Brazil, the Philippines, and Australia, was also an event that deserves special mention in the negotiation process to date. This group was a major driving force in pushing the negotiation forward.

Japan, meanwhile, joined the Coalition just today, after the direction of the negotiations was set. The Government is yet to put together its plan on domestic measures and its reduction measures remain passive, largely lagging behind the climate change measures of other countries in which renewables take a major role.

For Japan to ensure a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, it has to first of all strengthen the policies that promote improvement of energy efficiency in the industrial sector, which has not seen much progress for more than 20 years. It is important to also make efforts in the commercial and residential sectors, for example by making energy savings and efficiency standards for buildings mandatory.

And in the energy sector, Japan should cancel all new constructions and extensions of coal-fired power

plants, and change its course to an energy policy that leads to increasing renewables. In addition, the nation should take swift action to bring carbon pricing into practice, by tightening the carbon tax and introducing a cap and trade, an emission trading scheme, to move on with fundamental decarbonization.

The world has taken a solid step forward to the future, toward 100% renewables.

Renewable energy in Japan has been expanding significantly since the introduction of the Feed-in Tariff system. The tide should not be held back. That is the very place where the future of Japan lies.