

SA signs Paris Agreement on Climate Change

PRETORIA: Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa has signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at the United Nations in New York.



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The Paris Agreement is universally regarded as a seminal point in the development of the international climate change regime under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Paris Agreement was adopted on 12 December 2015 at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC CoP21, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015.

The Agreement was adopted after four years of intense negotiations mandated by the 17th UNFCCC CoP held in Durban in 2011.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, acting in his capacity as depository of the Agreement convened a high-level ceremony for the opening for signature of the Agreement on Friday, 22 April. Parties to the Convention are able to sign the Agreement until 21 April 2017.

Minister Molewa signed the Agreement on behalf of the South African government.

The Agreement is a comprehensive framework which will guide international efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions and to meet all the associated challenges posed by climate change.

It signals the change in pace towards the low carbon development from 2020 onwards through commitments of countries in ambitious national plans called Nationally Determined Contributions.

This outcome recognises that climate change represents an urgent threat to human societies and the planet, requiring the widest possible cooperation by all countries and other stakeholders.

The main objective of the Agreement is to limit the global temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius, while pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.

The recognition of the 1.5 degree target is of central importance to South Africa as an African and developing country that is highly vulnerable to climate change.

The Paris Agreement is also an important tool in mobilising finance, technological support and capacity building for developing countries, and will also help to scale up global efforts to address and minimise loss and damage from climate change and increase climate resilience.

Signing the Agreement requires that countries will later need to adopt the agreement within their own legal systems, through ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

The agreement will enter into force when ratified by at least 55 countries, which together represent at least 55% of global emissions.

South Africa is already acting on climate change. The country has significant investment in renewable energy, public transport, energy efficiency, waste management and land restoration initiatives.

South Africa is also striving to enhance efforts to transition to a lower carbon economy and society, as well as to adapt in the short, medium and long term to the impacts of increasing temperatures, and reduced rainfall in many parts of the country.

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