



Delegates meet at the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

PREPARATION

Download the Treaties and International Agreements handout for use in your classroom. Familiarize yourself with the Treaty-making and Supremacy Clauses of the U.S. Constitution and the 1969 Vienna Convention of the Law of Treaties. Learn more about the following treaties online:

- Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- Montreal Protocol
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Kyoto Protocol
- Draft Copenhagen Accord



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Exploring International Environmental Agreements

OVERVIEW

Treaties and international agreements not only bring attention to global issues, but also commit nations to specific actions to address the issue. International treaty-making, addressed by the Treaty-making and Supremacy Clauses in the U.S. Constitution and the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, formally codifies the process by which two or more nation-states impose binding obligations on themselves. Students will be introduced to modern-day treaties through examination of the U.S. Constitution, U.N. Charter and various international environmental agreements.

PROCEDURE

1. Review and explain to students how treaties are established under international law and U.S. constitutional law. Students should consider the following questions during the discussion: a) What is the purpose of a treaty; b) How are treaties ratified?; and c) How are treaties enforced?. At the end of the discussion, students should understand that treaties: a) are entered into voluntarily; b) address specific issues; c) specify implementation details and enforcement mechanisms; and d) are entered into only after each independent nation complies with internal policies and procedures.

Treaty: an agreement or arrangement made by negotiation: as a) "private treaty" or b) a contract in writing between two or more political authorities (as states or sovereigns) formally signed by representatives duly authorized and usually ratified by the lawmaking authority of the state

May also be known as *agreement, protocol, convention, covenant, declaration, charter, pact, or understanding*

2. Divide the class into groups of four to five students. Assign each group one of the international environmental agreements (listed in preparation) to research. Each group should use the following questions to guide their research: a) What is the main purpose of the treaty? What are some of the action items; b) How many nations have ratified the treaty? Did the United States ratify the treaty? Why or why not?; c) How is the treaty being implemented and enforced?; and d) Does the treaty include next steps or does it indicate actions to be taken once the terms of the treaty end?
3. Each small group will appoint a spokesperson to report back to the whole class. Spokespersons should indicate sources of information as support for their group's research.
4. Debrief this activity by asking students to consider the role of treaties in a global world. How do treaties facilitate relationships among nations? Do international treaties and agreements effect change on a global scale? Why or why not? Are treaties and international agreements enforced? If yes, how so? If no, how can enforcement mechanisms be strengthened?