

# DECODING UNFCCC LANGUAGE

14:00-15:00

CAMBRIDGE  
ZERO<sub>2</sub>

**CLIMATE  
WORDS<sup>SM</sup>**

**IPR**  
Institute for  
Policy Research



# PROGRAMME



## JUNE 16, MONDAY

📍 SANTIAGO, WCCB

14:00-15:00

DECODING UNFCCC LANGUAGE



## JUNE 17, TUESDAY

📍 FOR ACE HUB YOUTH EVENT DELEGATES ONLY

13:00 - 14:30

CULTURE AS A FRAMEWORK TO DRIVE ACTION FOR CLIMATE EMPOWERMENT (CLOSED SESSION)



## JUNE 18, WEDNESDAY

📍 CLIMATE TOWER MEETING ROOM, UN CAMPUS

14:00-16:00

EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR SYNERGISTIC RIO CONVENTIONS ACTION



## JUNE 21, SATURDAY

📍 CLIMATE TOWER MEETING ROOM, UN CAMPUS

15:30-17:00

TRANSPARENCY EMPOWERING YOUTH TO DRIVE CLIMATE ACTION

[#Together4Transparency](#)

## JUNE 23, MONDAY

📍 CLIMATE TOWER MEETING ROOM, UN CAMPUS

13:00-15:00

YOU(TH) AND NDCS



For more info -



# Decoding UNFCCC Language





# Ice Breaker - Slido

# UNFCCC Language: Terms used in negotiation





# Just Transition

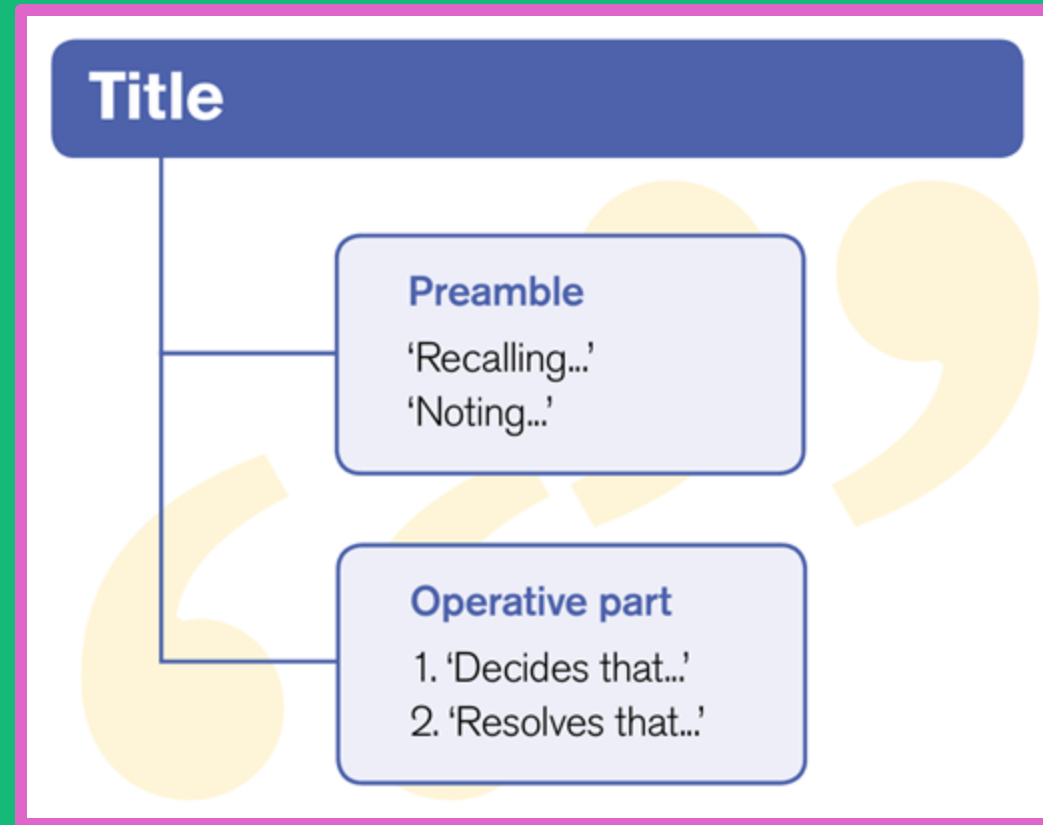


**A just transition seeks to ensure that the substantial benefits of a green economy transition are shared widely, while also supporting those who stand to lose economically.**

# UNFCCC Language: Verbs used in agreements



# Structure of treaties and COP decisions



## Preamble language

### Paragraphs in the preamble of an agreement or decision:

- provide the background and the context of the agreement or decision that follows
- guide the interpretation of the agreement or decision
- have no binding legal value on its own
- may be used strategically to accommodate any particular language claimed by the parties, without creating binding obligations.

➔ When the language of the agreement or decision text appears to be ambiguous, preamble language is used to **interpret the intentions of the decision makers.**

## Operative language

### Paragraphs in the operative section of an agreement or decision:

- constitute the core of the agreement or decision
- represent what parties have actually agreed to
- focus on the actions to be adopted by parties
- may also call for the creation of new institutions or the undertaking of certain studies.

➔ Where there is a direct conflict between the preamble and the operational text, **the operative text prevails.**



Simon Evans

@drsimevans.carbonbrief.org

How does "urge" compare with "invite" or "request"?

Is "welcome" warmer than "note"? (Yes, obvs!)

Here's your complete guide to verbs in UNFCCC text:

verbs in its session documents. *It is not exhaustive.* Two or more uses of a verb may have been given to provide different examples.

**Note:** *Times in decisions [D] and draft conclusions [C]*

A mixture of tenses has been used in this section to reflect possible use:

- In the preamble to a decision, a present participle (e.g. "Recalling") or adjective (e.g. "Concerning") is used.
- In the operative part of a decision, the present tense is used (e.g. "Decides").
- In draft conclusions, the past tense is used ("agreed").

**To describe consideration of something**

**noted...**...the outcomes of the workshop [D]

**took note of...**...the views from Parties [C]

**having considered...**...the guidelines for the second review [D]

**considered...**...the possible need for a group of experts [C]

**having examined...**...the report of the Secretary-General [D]

(Note: "taking note of" is usually used to describe when a body considers a report submitted to it. "consider" is not limited to considering documents; a group can also "consider" a matter. One might "note" a document or "note" a fact.)

**deliberated on...**...the submissions from Parties [C]

**was informed of...**...the workshop on adaptation initiatives [C]

**To describe action**

**decided...**...to extend the code of practice [D]

**empowering...**...that certain development mechanisms activities should mean to... [D]

**drawing attention to...**...paragraph 1 (d) of decision 11/CP.2, in which... [D]

**highlighted...**...the need to ensure appropriate expert input [C]

**recognising...**...the continuing seriousness of the deficit made in ivory [D]

**recognising...**...the need to work further on this matter [D]

**recognised...**...that the implementation of TNAs remains a key objective [C]

(Note: here, "recognise" can mean "acknowledge the existence or validity of" or "officially regard as valid".)

**noting...**...the need to revise the reporting guidelines [D]

**acknowledging...**...the contribution of the emissions from deforestation [D]

**acknowledged that...**...there remains a need for continued support [C]

(Note: "acknowledge" may be less neutral than "note". Here, it can mean "accept the existence or truth of" or "recognise the importance of".)

**responding...**...to the findings of the Fourth Assessment Report [D]

**taking into account...**...the provisions of resolution X [D]

**took into consideration...**...the effects of aerosols [C]

**being aware...**...of the provisions of the Marrakesh Accords [D]

**emphasised...**...that decision X applies to Parties included in Annex I to the Convention [D]

**emphasised...**...of the need for close cooperation [D]

**keeping in mind...**...the note by the co-facilitators [D]

**expresses the hope that...**...progress on the framework will be made [D]

**miscellaneous verbs (various)**

*Listed in order of strength, from strongest to weakest \**

**instructs...**...the group to develop its work programme [D]

(Note: "instructs" is almost never used. It would be best restricted to requests of subsidiary or constituted bodies.)

**requests...**...the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to continue its work [D]

**requested...**...the secretariat to compile the submissions into a miscellaneous document [C]

**requested...**...its Chair to convene a meeting [C]

(Note: the COP or CMP can "request" bodies under their authority, such as the subsidiary bodies, the secretariat and the Global Environment Facility. Also note that the formulation "requests that..." should be avoided; prefer "requests [the body] to..." )

**strongly urges...**...Parties to make contributions [D]

**urged...**...other relevant organizations to undertake their own activities [C]

**urged...**...these non-Annex I Parties that have not yet submitted their reports to do so [C]

(Note: "urge" is used rarely, mostly with Parties.)

**invites...**...Parties to provide support for participants of the meeting [D]

**invited...**...the representative of the GEF to inform the meeting [C]

(Note: the COP or CMP can "invite" bodies that they not have direct authority over, such as Parties or organizations. To maintain scientific integrity, they also "invite", rather than "request", the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.)

**recommends that...**...the Conference of the Parties adopt the decision... (inoperative) [D]

**recommended...**...the dates of 17 to 22 May for the next period [C]

(Note: "recommend" is used by a body to make a request to a peer or a higher body, such as the Subsidiary Body for Implementation making a recommendation to the COP.)

**noted with appreciation...**...the progress made by Parties in implementing activities [C]

**noting with satisfaction...**...the information provided by the World Bank [D]

**were pleased to note...**...that collaboration has continued [C]

**noted...**...the close working relationship between UNEP and the GCOS secretariat [C]

**Part II. Verbs in other documents**

This section draws from dictionary definitions and common usage to provide guidance on using a variety of verbs in reports.

\* indicates that the verb may be sensitive, or that it may carry a specific meaning when used in decisions or draft conclusions; see Part I above.

**To describe an actual statement**

**"agreed..."**...with the representative from UNEP that there is a need for new guidelines announced... that he would consult interested Parties

**confirmed...**...that the organization intends to lobby

**expressed the hope that...**...the SBSTA would make progress

**informed...**...delegates that the group could not reach a conclusion on this item

**invited...**...Ms. Lilian Perillo (Paraguay) to report on the activities of the group

**made a statement...**...on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)

**mentioned...**...the request from the Russian Federation

**observed that...**...markets in her country were less mature

**presented...**...the results of a recent survey

**revealed that...**...the foundation has invested USD 5 million

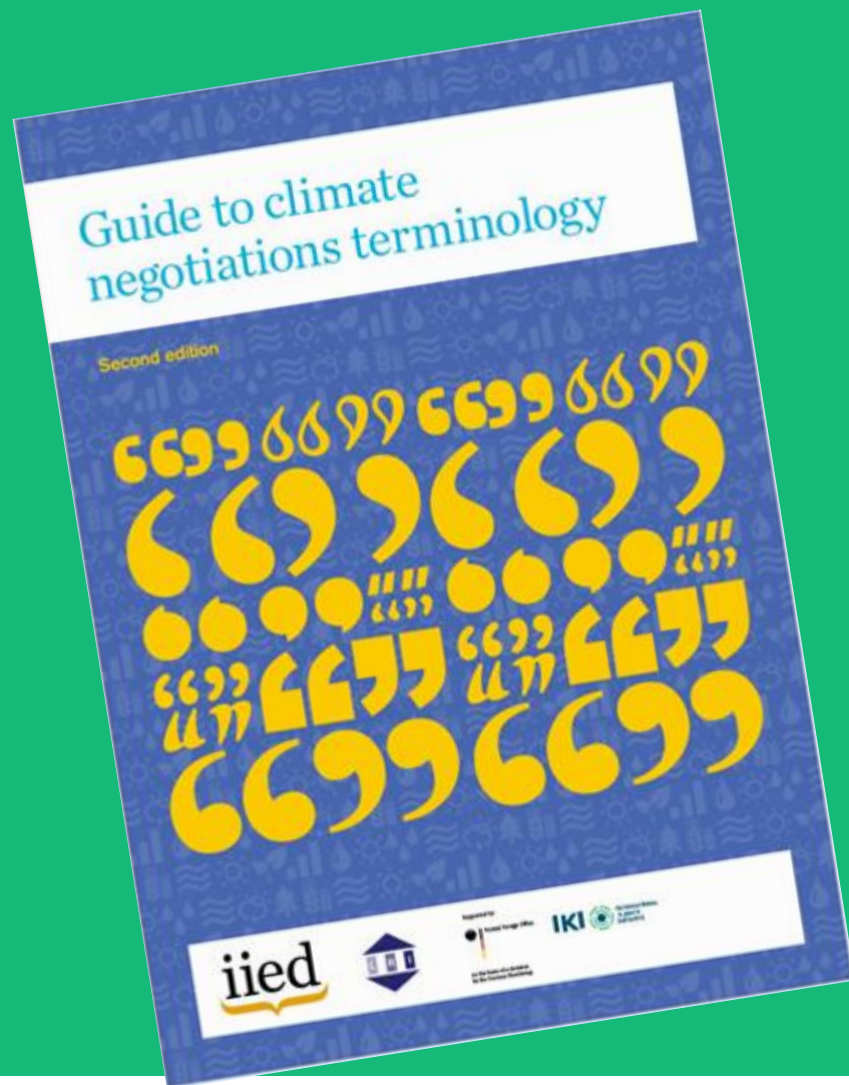
**shared with...**...delegates a preliminary evaluation

There exists a spectrum of verbs that all have slightly different meanings.

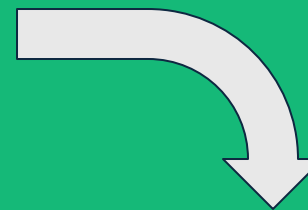
Learn more here:







Very helpful guide and  
resource to learn more!



Download here



# Case Study: Paris Agreement Article 4.4

# Article 4.4

4. Developed country Parties should continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets. Developing country Parties should continue enhancing their mitigation efforts, and are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances.

What do you think is the key word here?  
*Discuss*



# Should vs. Shall

## Should/ Ought to

Means **an action is not required**, but advised.  
Generally used in principles.

**Examples:** *'The Parties **should** protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities'*

– Climate Change Convention, Article 3.1

## Shall

Means that **an action is required**.

1. **'Shall'** is typically used in the context of agreements, to indicate that the following action is obligatory or binding.

**Example:** *'The Parties included in Annex I **shall**, individually or jointly, ensure that their aggregate anthropogenic carbon dioxide equivalent emissions of the greenhouse gases listed in Annex A do not exceed their assigned amounts'*

– Kyoto Protocol, Article 3.1

# How a 'typo' nearly derailed the Paris climate deal

A debate over the words 'should' or 'shall' in the final draft was passed off as an undetected error thanks to some timely French diplomacy

Todd Stern: It's a "very interesting mystery" why 'should' changed to 'shall'. "It doesn't happen on auto-correct"

— Edward King (@edking\_CH) [December 15, 2015](#)

Tosi Mpanu Mpanu, the DR of Congo's lead envoy, [told ClimateHome](#), a news site which closely follows the UN negotiation: "It's a typo we will refer to many times because frankly speaking, nobody's buying that."

# The last-minute crisis of the Paris Agreement

But when, at 1.30pm local time, the French presidency **presented its final “take it or leave it” Paris agreement text**, adoption of the text should have been a formality.

It soon became clear that something had gone very wrong in the text.

Rumours swirled, **and it was later confirmed by US secretary of state, John Kerry**, that the US had objected to Article 4.4 on page 21 of the 31-page final agreement. **US government lawyers had found, it was said to their horror, that they had unwittingly approved a vital word which could make the difference between rich countries being legally obliged to cut emissions rather than just having to try to: “shall” rather than “should”.**

**Professor Gurdial Singh Nijar**, the Malaysian spokesman for the Like Minded Developing Countries (Lmdc) group, which includes India, China and Indonesia, **told leading southern NGO Third World Network** that he was present throughout the crisis and saw what happened after the final text was shown to them by the French.

■ ■ We [the LMDC] found the text a little convoluted, but we felt we could consider it. We agreed with it and so did the Group of 77 and China. We felt there was balance and our red lines were somewhat preserved. Then when we went to the hall, we were shocked to find that the US was objecting to Article 4.4. They came up with this incredulous thing that it was a mistake.

**The EU approached us and said that there is a problem and asked us if we could change the ‘shall’ to ‘should’.** When we asked them why, they responded that the Americans had told them that if the word ‘shall’ was introduced, the Congress would not pass it. We said that we have done so many things to get the US on board and they were diluting everything. In this case they were diluting something which was our super-red line.

Just before 7.30pm, **the shall/should fiasco was passed off as undetected error in the text**, and the meeting moved to adopt the Paris agreement.



The G77 and other developing countries were then consulted about the dilemma, and told the presidency that this was a red line that they could not cross either because it diluted the whole UN climate convention. [In a nutshell, they said “shall should not become should. Should shall become should, all should think again”.]

At the very last minute, the French came up with a diplomatic solution. It was agreed that there had been a “typographical error” which was put down to an anonymous sleep-deprived negotiating team transferring lines from one draft text to another. The embarrassed French presidency, it seems, agreed that the amendment change of “shall” to “should” could be dealt with as a “technical error”.

# Case Study: Language on Fossil Fuels

# COP26: Glasgow Climate Pact – Para 36

36. *Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the **phasedown of unabated coal power** and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition;*





# COP28



# Global Stocktake Para 28 – Version of 5th December 2023

Global stocktake	2023/12/05, 04:25	24	0	96	"building blocks"; few bullets but 193 pars and many options inc on "carbon space", FF phaseout, 3x RE and 2X EE etc etc	Draft negotiating texts	<a href="#">PDF</a>
------------------	-------------------	----	---	----	--	-------------------------	---------------------

(c)

*Option 1:* An orderly and just phase out of fossil fuels;

*Option 2:* Accelerating efforts towards phasing out unabated fossil fuels and to rapidly reducing their use so as to achieve net-zero CO<sub>2</sub> in energy systems by or around mid-century;

*Option 3:* no text

(d)

*Option 1:* A rapid phase out of unabated coal power this decade and an immediate cessation of the permitting of new unabated coal power generation, recognizing that the IPCC suggests a pathway involving a reduction of unabated coal use by 75 per cent from 2019 levels by 2030;

*Option 2:* no text;

# Version of 8th December 2023

Global stocktake	2023/12/08, 16:56	27	0	159	"refined building blocks" but not "agreed text"; now 27pp and 206 pars; 5x options on fossil fuel phaseout (inc "no text")	Draft negotiating texts	<a href="#">PDF</a>
------------------	-------------------	----	---	-----	--	-------------------------	---------------------

(c)

*Option 1:* A phase out of fossil fuels in line with best available science;

*Option 2:* Phasing out of fossil fuels in line with best available science, the IPCC's 1.5 pathways and the principles and provisions of the Paris Agreement;

*Option 3:* A phase-out of unabated fossil fuels recognizing the need for a peak in their consumption in this decade and underlining the importance for the energy sector to be predominantly free of fossil fuels well ahead of 2050;

*Option 4:* Phasing out unabated fossil fuels and to rapidly reducing their use so as to achieve net-zero CO<sub>2</sub> in energy systems by or around mid-century;

*Option 4:* no text

(d)

*Option 1:* A rapid phase out of unabated coal power this decade and an immediate cessation of the permitting of new unabated coal power generation, recognizing that the IPCC suggests a pathway involving a reduction of unabated coal use by 75 per cent from 2019 levels by 2030;

*Option 2:* no text

# Version of 11th December 2023

Global stocktake	2023/12/11, 17:10	21	1	0	fossil fuel phaseout is gone; entire par 39 on energy is framed by weak "actions that could include"; no specific methane target, specific renewable numbers or timeline for coal phase down; most verbs lack call to action ("notes", "recalls" etc); weak "encourages language on next NDCs; "invites...activities" by COP28/29/30 presidencies "with a view to enhancing action"	Draft negotiating texts	PDF
<p>39. Also recognizes the need for deep, rapid and sustained reductions in GHG emissions and calls upon Parties to take actions that could include, <i>inter alia</i>:</p> <p>(a) Tripling renewable energy capacity globally and doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030;</p> <p>(b) Rapidly phasing down unabated coal and limitations on permitting new and unabated coal power generation;</p> <p>(c) Accelerating efforts globally towards net zero emissions energy systems, utilizing zero and low carbon fuels well before or by around mid-century;</p> <p>(d) Accelerating zero and low emissions technologies, including, <i>inter alia</i>, renewables, nuclear, abatement and removal technologies, including such as carbon capture and utilization and storage, and low carbon hydrogen production, so as to enhance efforts towards substitution of unabated fossil fuels in energy systems.</p> <p>(e) Reducing both consumption and production of fossil fuels, in a just, orderly and equitable manner so as to achieve net zero by, before, or around 2050 in keeping with the science;</p> <p>(f) Accelerating and substantially reducing non-CO2 emissions, including, in particular, methane emissions globally by 2030;</p> <p>(g) Accelerating emissions reductions from road transport through a range of pathways, including development of infrastructure and rapid deployment of zero and low emission vehicles;</p> <p>(h) Phasing out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption and do not address energy poverty or just transitions, as soon as possible;</p>							

# Version of 13th December 2023 - final

28. **Further recognizes** the need for deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in line with 1.5 °C pathways and **calls on** Parties to contribute to the following global efforts, in a nationally determined manner, taking into account the Paris Agreement and their different national circumstances, pathways and approaches:

- (a) Tripling renewable energy capacity globally and doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030;
- (b) Accelerating efforts towards the **phase-down of unabated coal power**;
- (c) Accelerating efforts globally towards net zero emission energy systems, utilizing zero- and low-carbon fuels, well before or by around mid-century;
- (d) **Transitioning away from fossil fuels** in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science;
- (e) Accelerating zero- and low-emission technologies, including, inter alia, renewables, nuclear, abatement and removal technologies such as **carbon capture** and utilization and storage, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors, and low-carbon hydrogen production;
- (f) Accelerating the substantial reduction of non-carbon-dioxide emissions globally, in particular methane emissions by 2030;
- (g) Accelerating the reduction of emissions from road transport on a range of pathways, including through development of infrastructure and rapid deployment of zero- and low-emission vehicles;
- (h) Phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that do not address energy poverty or just transitions, as soon as possible;

 **Leo Hickman**  
@LeoHickman

"calls on..."

This is the crucial term here.

In UNFCCC legal jargon, this is known to mean an "invitation" or "request"

And, even more crucially, it is the \*weakest\* of all the various terms used for such exhortations



# Intergenerational Climate Justice



# Thank you



Filming opportunities with  
ActNowFilm at Bonn and  
beyond

# Follow us on social media!



@actnowfilm



@climatewords



@climataalk



/groups/12550724/



Filming opportunities  
with ActNowFilm at  
Bonn and beyond

# Climate Catalysts Mentorship Programme 2.0

*Build capacity and catalyse climate action!*

a collaborative effort between



&



powered by



MINISTERO DELL'AMBIENTE  
E DELLA SICUREZZA ENERGETICA



# 2025 BOOTCAMPS & P2P CHANNELS



MAY

*Entertainment And Culture-based  
Climate Solutions*

**ENTERTAINMENT +  
CULTURE PAVILION**



JULY

*Funding Climate Projects -  
From Vision To Action*



SEPTEMBER

*Green Skills for a Green Future*



*Virtual Climate Cafés after each bootcamp in English,  
Spanish & French*

