EDITORIAL

The Paris Agreement is considered to be a major step toward universal action mitigating climate change (see p.14). There are also critics asserting that it does do not go far enough. Yet, the outcome in Paris has brightened public confidence in the long-standing negotiations. It comes at a time when the World Meteorological Organization confirms that 2015 was the hottest year on record and the El Niño weather phenomenon is projected to threaten at least 60 million people in high-risk areas. Clearly, the Paris commitments must be signed, ratified and implemented. In general, they call on each State to move forward in three basic ways: to increase its energy efficiency, to rescind subsidies and tax incentives that promote the use of fossil fuels and GHG emitting processes, and to adopt policies that leave resources in the ground and vastly expand renewable energy production. At the same time, States will need to take due account of other sectors' contribution to climate change, make an effort to restore degraded ecosystems and otherwise mitigate climate impacts. All 196 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are expected to sign the Agreement, which opens for signature on 22 April. The outcome of CoP-21 will be judged when the words on paper result in efficient and effective implementation at national levels.

Given the urgency of the need for compliance and action in all States, it is troubling to hear rumours that opponents in the US, including all remaining Republican presidential candidates, are seeking ways to ensure that the US does not formally ratify the agreement reached in Paris. A document making the rounds among climate-action opponents in the US reportedly seeks to convince the Senate (which has the ultimate authority to ratify conventions on behalf of the country) to withdraw support, as it did in connection with President Clinton's signature of the Kyoto Protocol. If successful, these opponents could strangle the country's domestic efforts towards alleviation of climate change and send the wrong signals abroad, thereby weakening the resolve of other States. We trust that no matter which party wins the 2016 Presidential election and/or holds a majority in Congress, the people of the US will recognise the importance of international climate action.

The outcomes from Paris provide a rare opportunity to realise less carbon-intensive and more ecologically sustainable lifestyles. In the words of Janos Pasztor, UN Assistant Secretary-General and new Senior Adviser on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement can be seen as a decisive turning point that "sent a clear message to markets and investors that it's time to get serious about climate change". If these ambitions are realised, 2015 can be remembered for its historical importance, by virtue of the adoption of both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

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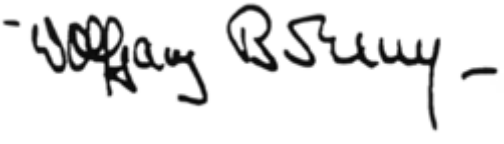
We thank Stephen McCaffrey for his contribution to this issue, discussing important aspects of the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Waterways (UN Watercourses Convention). Given the passage of time after acceptance by the General Assembly in 1997, it was eventually believed by many that the convention would never come into force. We recognise the significant contributions that Steve and his successor Robert Rosenstock, as well as their predecessors Richard Kearney, Stephen Schwebel and Jens Evensen, made within the UN's International Law Commission. We congratulate them and all those involved in crafting the convention, whose continued involvement helped to prove the nay-sayers wrong. We look forward to positive developments as the convention moves into its implementation phase.



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