

Leaders Summit on Climate: Countries to halve GHG emissions by 2030. Vietnam's net CO₂ emissions can stop increasing by then.

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Forty Heads of State, including President Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, met virtually on April 22-23, 2021, at the [Leaders Summit on Climate](#) to welcome back the US in the fight against climate change. To prepare for the COP26 conference in Glasgow this November, five years after the Paris Agreement, the Heads of State repeated their agreement on the urgency of the climate crisis. They recognized the need to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 to have a chance of keeping global warming under 1.5 degree Celsius.

President Nguyễn Xuân Phúc's presented Vietnam's climate policy at the Summit. He [acknowledged](#) the imperative of limiting global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius and the inevitability of the transition to a green, zero net emissions economy. He remarked that: The transition must be just and inclusive. He expects developed countries to continue taking the lead in emission reductions and supporting developing countries. The pursuit of climate goals should be compatible with each country's conditions. The President pledged Vietnam's commitments to fight climate change as :

- To reduce emissions in 2030 by 9 per cent unconditionally, with domestic resources. The reduction will reach 27 per cent conditional on bilateral and multilateral support.
- To reduce significantly coal-based power generation and increase the share of renewables in the total primary energy supply to 20 per cent by 2030 and 30 per cent by 2045.
- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions per GDP unit by nearly 15 per cent by 2030 and methane emissions from agricultural production by 10 per cent.
- To plant a billion trees by 2025, a project expected to absorb 2 to 3 per cent of Vietnam's total emissions by 2030.

According to my observations in the energy sector, bilateral and multilateral support for Vietnam to fight climate change has been significant for the last five years. The relevance of the 27 per cent reduction goal may persist in the future: President Biden, the summit host, announced increased climate finance plans to support developing countries. Even if these plans may not be enough for the US to catch up for four years of abandoned leadership, the

35 conference was a diplomatic success. Participants discussed the need for a minimum international carbon price, if not for a moratorium on coal. A critical mass of countries are converging on the goal to halve their greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 :

- The European Union is putting into law a target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and reach carbon neutrality by 2050.
- 40 • The US promised to halve its greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels within this decade.
- Japan promised to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 46 % below the 2013 level by 2030, almost doubling its current target. Canada also raised its ambitions to a 40-45 % reduction between 2005 and 2030.
- 45 • South Korea promised to terminate public overseas coal finance and strengthen its commitments later this year to be consistent with its 2050 net-zero goal.

Other countries' commitments involved preventing deforestation and cleaning up energy production. Poland, a heavy coal user, announced that they had just concluded negotiations with coal mine labour unions to ensure a just coal-fired power phasedown. India reiterated a target of 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030. China reaffirmed its plan to peak carbon emissions by 2030, attain net-zero by 2060, and further promised to phase down coal consumption from 2025 onwards.

As leading countries are halving their emissions by 2030, can Vietnam peak its net greenhouse gases emissions by that year? Vietnam's updated Nationally Determined Commitment communication ([NDC](#)) explains the greenhouse gas reduction goals in more details, see Table 1.

Table 1: Vietnam greenhouse gases emissions scenarios according to the updated NDC (2020)

	2014	2020	2030
Baseline	284.0	528.4	927.9
Unconditional policy scenario	284.0	528.4	844.0 (-9% below baseline)
Conditional policy scenario	284.0	528.4	677.1 (-27 % below baseline)

Unit : MtCO_{2eq}

60 Reduction is defined compared to the Baseline scenario, so actual emissions would still rise in the most ambitious scenario but slower. A Baseline scenario is not observable. It is a

counterfactual, hypothetical scenario. In the same vein, the ‘share of renewables in total primary energy supply’ commitment is fuzzy given the accounting ambiguities with traditional biomass and large hydro. Therefore, these numbers do not belong to the sphere of
65 quantified targets, monitored and verified. These numbers are political signals, which convey the meaning that Vietnam fully participates in the international climate protection process.

Vietnam did submit an initial and updated NDC, with an increasing level of ambitions since the 2020 commitment to 9 %-27 % reduction is greater than the initial 2016 commitment of 8 %-25 % reduction. Moreover, the conditional nature of Vietnam’s commitment is coherent
70 with the expectation of international support from developed countries. Under that condition, the emission growth over 2020-2030 will be ~150 Mt instead of ~400 Mt in the baseline. Over the next ten years, infrastructure and industrial capital invested in the 150 Mt emissions increase scenario will differ from those in the 400 Mt scenario. Emissions increased by ~244 Mt over the last six years. Reducing the growth to ~150 Mt over the next ten
75 years will be a severe inflexion of greenhouse gas emissions.

Vietnam’s pledges are ambitious. It is committed to decreases its emissions’ growth rate. But controlling the second derivative of the curve is not enough. The next step in the transition is to bring the emissions growth rate to zero.

The billion trees project, along with the massive adoption of renewable energy in Vietnam
80 over the last few years, gives reasons to hope. Vietnam’s economy and society are changing much faster than most other countries. The most likely trajectory is already below the baseline. The baseline was estimated pre-COVID, using the previous Power Development Plan. It did not consider the carbon savings due to the recent boom in solar and wind energy. Within five years, it is possible to kickstart a market for private energy service companies –
85 which will help organizations all over the country conserve energy and reduce emissions. Soon, EVN will start shutting down old, inefficient coal-fired power plants. The connection of a few offshore wind farms is feasible within this timescale. Improved weather forecasts will allow to use more solar and wind energy, more efficiently. The dynamics of floating PV, agrovoltatics, energy storage, biomass and waste heat, and electric vehicles sectors will
90 surprise many.

Making an international commitment to peak net greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 is not necessary nor sufficient to adopt it as a domestic policy goal. The ‘under-promise, over-deliver’ approach to greenhouse gas mitigation diplomacy is smart. Let’s work on the second part now. Vietnam’s net CO2 emissions can peak before 2030.

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