

Christiana Figueres

Karen Christiana Figueres Olsen (born 7 August 1956) is a Costa Rican diplomat with 35 years of experience in high level national and international policy and multilateral negotiations. She was appointed Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in July 2010,^[1] six months after the failed COP15 in Copenhagen.^[2] During the next six years she dedicated herself^[3] to rebuilding the global climate change negotiating process based on fairness, transparency and collaboration, leading to the 2015 Paris Agreement, widely recognized as a historical achievement.^[4] Over the years she has worked in the fields of climate change, sustainable development, energy, land use, technical and financial cooperation. She is a frequent public speaker^[5] and widely published author.^[6] She is the mother of two young women, and speaks Spanish, English, and German.

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Early life

Figueres was born in San José, Costa Rica. Her father, José Figueres Ferrer, was President of Costa Rica^[7] three times. Figueres' mother, Karen Olsen Beck, served as Costa Rican Ambassador to Israel in 1982 and was a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1990–1994. The couple had four children. Figueres' older brother José Figueres Olsen, was also President of Costa Rica (1994–1998).

Growing up in La Lucha, Figueres attended the local Cecilia Orlich grammar school. She moved to the German Humboldt Schule in the capital and later graduated from Lincoln High School. She travelled to England for a year of A

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Figueres in 2018

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

In office

1 July 2010 – 18 July 2016

Secretary-General

Ban Ki-moon

Preceded by

Yvo de Boer

Succeeded by

Patricia Espinosa

Personal details

Born

Karen Christiana Figueres Olsen

7 August 1956

San José, Costa Rica

Political party

National Liberation Party

Children

Naima

Yihana

Alma mater

Swarthmore

Level studies before entering Swarthmore College^[8] in Pennsylvania. As part of her studies in anthropology, she lived in Bribri, Talamanca, a remote indigenous village in the Southeastern plateau of Costa Rica for one year, designing a culturally-sensitive literacy program which was used by the Ministry of Education for several years.

	College
	London School of Economics
Website	Official website (http://christianafiguere.com)

Figueres joined botanist Dr. Russell Seibert to improve nutritional conditions in Western Samoa using highly nutritious plants.

She then went to the London School of Economics for a master's degree in social anthropology and graduated in 1981. She met there and later married German-born Konrad von Ritter (former head of the World Bank's sustainable development unit).^[9] Her husband Konrad von Ritter founded a small (up to 50 employers) company WEnergy Global Pte Ltd in Singapore^[10] which is also working in green energy and ecology sector.^[11] He wrote several papers about ecology problems for the World Bank during 2003-2004.^[12] He has been working as a Sector Manager of Environmentally & Socially Sustainable Development department in World Bank Institute^[13] in 2006. The couple have two daughters with Arabic names: Naima (March 1988) and Yihana (December 1989).^{[14][15]}

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Following the failed COP15 climate change conference in Copenhagen,^{[16][17]} the UN Secretary General appointed Christiana Figueres as new Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, starting her first term in July 2010.^[1]

During her tenure as Executive Secretary, she led the UN Climate Change Secretariat (<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>)'s successful delivery of six consecutive yearly global negotiation sessions, culminating in the historical Paris Agreement in December 2015.^{[18][19]} Her engagement and close collaboration with yearly rotating presidencies (Mexico,^[20] South Africa,^[21] Qatar,^[22] Poland,^[23] Peru^[24] and France)^[25] provided the necessary framework and continuity that allowed every annual negotiation to build incrementally solid ground of common purpose.

Under the presidency of Patricia Espinosa (Mexico) COP16/CMP6^[26] in 2010 marked a radical departure from the previous conference in Copenhagen delivering a comprehensive package infrastructure to assist developing nations including the Green Climate Fund, the UNFCCC Technology Mechanism,^[27] and the Cancun Adaptation Framework.^{[28][29]}

At COP17/CMP7 held in Durban in December 2011,^[30] governments committed for the first time to collectively developing a new universal climate change agreement by 2015 for the period beyond 2020.^[31] The work toward that global legal framework was initiated at COP18/CMP8 Doha in November 2012,^[32] at the same time as the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol was adopted under the Doha Amendment.^[33]

In COP19/CMP9 in Warsaw in 2013^[34] governments continued to work toward the global framework but also adopted a rulebook for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and a mechanism to address loss and damage caused by long-term climate change impacts. Gathering in Lima for COP20/CMP10 at the end of 2014,^[35] governments defined the core elements of the upcoming agreement, and agreed on the ground rules to submit national contributions in the run up to the 2015 negotiation.

COP21/CMP11 held in Paris in December 2015 has been widely heralded as a historic achievement.^[36] With the leadership of the United Nations Secretary-General and President Hollande of France, and beating all previous records of Head of State gatherings on one day, 155 Heads of State came together under one roof to send a strong political signal of support for an ambitious and effective agreement.^[37] On the final day under the presidency of Laurent Fabius the 195 governments which are Parties to the Climate Change Convention unanimously adopted Paris Agreement, accelerating the intentional transformation of the global economy toward low carbon and high resilience.^[38]

As secretariat of the UNFCCC, Ms. Figueres' emphasized that governments, particularly in developing countries, cannot act on climate change exclusively out of global concern, and that climate change should be reframed to address the priorities and interests of each nation. She advocated that the pursuit of climate change should be addressed as a vehicle through which each country can pursue economic stability and growth, greater energy independence, better food and water security, and healthier citizens.

Similarly, Ms. Figueres spent much of her tenure actively approaching key stakeholders beyond governments by actively engaging corporations,^[39] insurance companies,^[40] the science community,^[41] faith groups,^[42] youth^[43] and women's groups,^[44] and other members of society,^[45] encouraging them to partake in the global efforts to address climate change. In 2013, she addressed the World Coal Association, acknowledging that the coal industry faces risks in adjusting to climate change, but inviting them to be a part of the global solution.^[46]

Christiana Figueres completed her second term as Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC on 6 July 2016.^[47] She has since worked as convenor of Mission 2020.^[48]

United Nations Secretary-General selection

On 7 July 2016, Christina Figueres became the official Costa Rican candidate for the United Nations Secretary General.

The UN's role in the Haiti cholera outbreak has been widely discussed and criticized. There is evidence that the UN was the proximate cause for bringing cholera to Haiti. Peacekeepers sent to Haiti from Nepal were carrying asymptomatic cholera and they did not treat their waste properly before dumping it into Haiti's water stream.^[49] During the UNSG debate held by Al Jazeera, Christina Figueres raised her hand when the candidates were all asked who thought victims of cholera deserved an apology.^[50]

37 human rights organizations recently signed onto a UN Secretary General accountability pledge. This pledge asks the candidates to take action on two human rights violations that have tarnished the United Nations' image: failing to provide remedies for victims of cholera in Haiti, and sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers.^[51] Despite her bold and positive stance at the UNSG debates, her office declined to support the pledge. Her office did say "while she cannot sign any pledge on any topic, you have heard where she stands. Furthermore, she realizes that she is positively influencing the SG race agenda and she looks forward to further engagement on UN accountability issues."^[52]

Prior professional experience

Figueres began her public service career as Minister Counselor at the Embassy of Costa Rica in Bonn, West Germany, from 1982 to 1985.^[53] She directed the work of all departments of the Embassy, and re-negotiated the terms of technical assistance, development finance and cooperation between both countries.^[54]

Returning to Costa Rica in 1987, Figueres was named Director of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Planning.^[55] There she designed and directed the negotiation of comprehensive financial and technical cooperation programs with eight European countries (total investment US \$90 million), and supervised the evaluation of all national technical and financial assistance requests. A year later she was made Chief of Staff to the Minister of Agriculture.^[56] She

supervised the execution of 22 national programs involving training, credit and marketing^[57] (credit portfolio US \$200 million). She reorganized the Minister's Bureau for greater teamwork and productivity, and designed coordination strategies among three major public institutions in the sector, eliminating duplications of services and contradictions in policy.

In 1989 Figueres moved with her husband to Washington DC, and for several years devoted herself to the upbringing of their two daughters, Naima born in March 1988 and Yihana born in December 1989. At the same time she pursued her interest in institutional re-structuring and effectiveness building by first attaining the Certification in Organization Development from Georgetown University in 1991, and then the Certificate in Organization and Systems Design from the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland in 1993.

In 1994, Figueres re-entered professional life and became the Director of the Technical Secretariat of the Renewable Energy in the Americas (REIA) program, today housed at the Organization of the American States (OAS). She promoted hemispheric policies to advance the use of renewable energy technologies in Latin America, identifying barriers to investment and possible solutions. She developed coordination mechanisms among various US and Latin American agencies active in the field through close working relationships with the governments and private sectors of Chile, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, and Central America.^[58]

Center for Sustainable Development in the Americas (CSDA)

In 1995 Figueres founded and became the Executive Director^[59] of the Center for Sustainable Development in the Americas, a non profit organization dedicated to promoting the participation of Latin American countries^[60] in the Climate Change Convention. Figueres developed and led the four programs of the Center:^[61] capacity building, policy reform, project preparation and carbon finance. Some of her main accomplishments are:

- Conceived and established the first ever carbon finance program in the developing world: the Latin American Carbon Program (PLAC) within the Andean Development Corporation (CAF). 1999
- Successfully negotiated the first emission reduction purchase agreement between an industrialized country and a regional development bank. The agreement assigned the Andean Development Corporation (CAF) 45 million EUROS to purchase emission reductions in Latin America on behalf of the Government of the Netherlands. 2001^[62]
- Designed and performed capacity building activities on Climate Change, sustainable energy and conservation for over five hundred professionals from the public and private sectors, as well as from civil society throughout Latin America. 1995–2003^[63]
- Envisioned and helped establish national climate change programs in Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. 1998–2007^[64]
- Envisioned and supervised the creation of the first electronic climate change information system specializing on the Clean Development Mechanism.
- Supervised the preparation of six greenhouse gas reduction projects in the energy and industry sectors, all approved by US Initiative of Joint Implementation.^[65]
- Conceived and lead the preparation of FOCADES, an innovative fund for the promotion of biodiversity and clean energy projects in Central America, with a total capitalization of \$15 million. 1995

International negotiator

Representing the Government of Costa Rica,^{[66][67]} Christiana Figueres was a negotiator of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change 1995–2010.^{[68][69]} In 1997 she provided critical international strategy for achieving developing country support and approval of the Kyoto Protocol (http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). From 2007 to 2009 she was Vice President of the Bureau^[70] of the Climate Convention, in representation of Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the years she chaired numerous international negotiations.^[71]

Chair of the Contact Group on Guidance to the CDM Executive Board: Nairobi, December 2006;^[72] Poznan, December 2008;^[73] Copenhagen, December 2009.^[74]

Chair of the Contact Group on flexibility mechanisms for the post 2012 regime, Bonn in June 2008,^[75] Accra, Ghana^[76] in August 2008, and Poznan in December 2008.^[73]

Member of the Friends of the Chair Group that negotiated the Bali Action Plan for long term cooperative action of all nations, Bali, Indonesia, December 2007.^[77]

Programmatic CDM

Aware that developing countries would need additional support to undertake mitigation efforts that go beyond traditional single-site CDM projects into the promotion of climate friendly policies and measures, in 2002 Figueres proposed a "Sectoral CDM" under which developing countries would be encouraged to develop regional or sectoral projects that may be the result of specific sustainable development policies. In 2005 she published a groundbreaking study proposing "programmatic CDM" whereby emission reductions are achieved not by one single site, but rather by multiple actions executed over time as the result of a government measure or a voluntary program.^[78] She conceived Programmatic CDM as a way to mobilize mitigation activities that are highly dispersed and directly benefit the user, such as distributed renewable energy and end use energy efficiency, thereby bringing the benefit of the CDM to the household and small/medium enterprise level.^[79] Programmatic CDM not only expands the sustainable development impact of the CDM, it also allows the scaling up of emission reduction activities in all sectors while reducing transaction costs, and enables the transition to more ambitious developing country emission reduction programs.

In December 2005 Figueres took the idea to the COP/MOP 1 in Montreal,^[80] and achieved support for it on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She then took the lead of negotiating the concept with the various groups of industrialized countries, finally attaining a COP/MOP decision to allow "programs of activities"^[81] in the CDM (paragraph 20 of Decision CMP.1).^[82] Two years later, as member of the CDM Executive Board, she achieved consensus on the rules and procedures for the submission of "programs of activities" in the CDM.^{[83][84]} Programmatic CDM was recognized as one of the most innovative reforms of the CDM.

Private sector

Christiana Figueres has not only been active in the public arena and in the field of NGOs, in 2008 and 2009 she also collaborated actively with private sector companies that aligned themselves with climate friendly goals. Figueres served as Senior Adviser to C-Quest Capital, a carbon finance company focusing on programmatic CDM investments.^[85] She was the Principal Climate Change Advisor to ENDESA Latinoamérica, the largest private utility in Latin America with operations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru. She was also Vice Chair of the Rating Committee of the Carbon Rating Agency, the first entity to apply credit rating expertise to carbon assets.^{[86][87]}

- Devex Power with Purpose Award, 2016
- The Great Cross of the Order of Merit of Germany in 1985.

More recently she has been widely recognized for her six-year effort to construct the necessary collaborations to deliver a global legally binding agreement that had previously seemed impossible.

- Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau, of The Netherlands^[88]
- The Legion of Honor of France^[89]
- The Grand Medal of the City of Paris^[90]
- The National Guayacan Medal from Costa Rica^[91]

- The Ewald von Kleist Award from the Munich Security Conference^[92]
- The 2015 Medal of Honour from The Guardian^[93]
- The 2015 Hero of El Pais newspaper of Spain^[94]
- The 2016 Solar Champion Award from California's Vote Solar^[95]
- The Power with Purpose 2016 Award from Devex and McKinnsey^[96]
- The 2016 Joan Bavaria Award from CERES^[97]
- The Nature Journal of Science listed her first on the list of 2015 Top 10^[98]
- Foreign Policy Magazine recognized her as the 2015 Global Thinker^[99]
- Fortune magazine listed her number seven of the World's 2016 50 Greatest Leaders, the only female Latin American to be listed^[100]
- Time magazine included in the top 100 influential leaders of the world^[101]
- Honorary doctorate of law degree by University of Massachusetts Boston^[102]
- Honorary doctorate by Concordia University^[103]
- Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by Georgetown University^[104]

Early leadership

- Vice President of the Bureau of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2008–09.^[71]
- Member of the Scientific Advisory Panel of the UNEP Risoe Centre, Denmark.
- Member of the Carbon Finance Working Group of Project Catalyst, initiated by Climateworks, a new foundation endowed by the Packard, Hewlett and McKnight Foundations, and supported by McKinsey & Co. 2008
- Board of Directors of the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS), 2008.^{[105][106]}
- Energy Program Advisory Committee of Green Cross International, founded by Pres. Gorbachev, 2008^{[107][108]}
- Representative of Latin America and the Caribbean to the Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanism, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2007.^[83]
- International Member of the Academy of Sciences, Dominican Republic. 2007.^[109]
- Board of Directors and Trustee, Winrock International, a mission-driven international NGO with a budget of \$50 million and an endowment of \$60 million. 2005–present. Chair of the Governance Committee and Member of the Executive Committee, 2007–present.^[110]
- Advisory Senate of the ICE Organization Limited, first credit card to neutralize carbon emissions of user's purchases. 2007–present
- Board of Trustees of the Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Cordillera Volcánica Central (FUNDECOR), Costa Rican organization with an endowment of \$15 million and which received the 2001 King Baudwin Award. 1999–present^[111]
- Board of Directors,^[112] International Institute for Energy Conservation], 2006–2008^[113]
- Member of the Development Dividend Task Force, International Institute of Sustainable Development, Canada. 2005–2008^[114]
- Invited member of the Clinton Global Initiative, 2005–2006^[115]
- Member of the Global Roundtable on Climate Change, led by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs at Columbia University. 2005–07
- Selection panel for the Yale World Fellows Program, 2003 – 2006.
- Hero for the Planet Award by the National Geographic Magazine and the Ford Motor Company, March 2001, in recognition of international leadership in sustainable energy.
- Technical Advisory Board of the Prototype Carbon Fund of the World Bank, 1999–2001^[116]
- Board of Directors of the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC), 1999–2003^[117]
- Advisory Board of the Organization of Tropical Studies (OTS), Duke University 1998–2000
- Vice President, Foundation for Central American Management Education (INCAE), in association with Harvard University. 1998–2001
- Member, Inter-American Dialogue^[118]

See also

- An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power

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External links

- [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](http://unfccc.int/2860.php) (<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>)
- [Programmatic CDM](http://figueresonline.com/programmaticcdm.htm) (<http://figueresonline.com/programmaticcdm.htm>)

External video

 Former UN Climate Chief says Australia needs to ditch coal (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7hjhruliL0&t=193s>), Matter Of Fact With Stan Grant, ABC News

Diplomatic posts		
Preceded by <u>Yvo de Boer</u>	<u>Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</u> 2010–2016	Succeeded by <u>Patricia Espinosa</u>

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