

WILL COPENHAGEN RESULT INTO ANY MEANINGFUL COMMITMENTS?

The world leaders have been meeting in Copenhagen since Monday, 07 December to discuss how best to tackle global climate change caused by human actions. The main negotiations on the “hows” and “whats” of the commitments are taking place simultaneously with countless other civil society and NGO meetings. There are mainly four aspects of negotiation taking place in the main arena, the Bella Centre, a central part of the Danish city Copenhagen.

Mitigation – how best to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Adaptation – how to continue developing and reducing poverty in the current situation without exacerbating the already high levels of carbon emissions, and how to help the least developed countries adapt to the current scenario of the global climate.

Financial commitments – what financial mechanisms should be put in place to assist those most hit and burdened by the effects of climate change? Emphasis is put here that these financial mechanisms should not be endlessly bureaucratic but rather be predictable and practicable.

Technology transfer – how best to share technology between and among nations while reducing the cost of that transfer.

G-77 and Copenhagen

The Group of 77 (G-77) was established in 1964 by seventy-seven developing countries. The purpose of the group is to provide the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system. The aim is to also promote South-South cooperation for development and it is currently the largest intergovernmental organisation of developing states in the United Nations. At the conference, there has been a growing concept of climate debt mainly among countries of the G-77, (mostly from Africa, Asia, and Latin America). In fact, the G-77 is the official channel that most countries in the South are using to communicate their positions in the climate change forum at Copenhagen.

Climate Debt

Climate Debt is the idea that those countries of the North (Europe and USA) responsible for excessive carbon emissions owe countries of the South and should pay reparations for the environmental damage. This is an additional claim to having the Kyoto Protocol Annex One countries (Developed and Emerging countries) cut down on carbon emissions by 40-45%, as recommended by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It is reported that countries from the G-77 are demanding that no form of climate change financing should be administered through any current existing mechanisms of the international financial institutions. Further, new financial commitments on climate change should not be aligned or confused with the already existing Official Development Assistance (ODA) since climate change effects pose an extra burden on the world's poor.

Surprisingly, and indeed shameful, it has been uncovered that, Denmark, among other countries of the North, is offering financial bait to countries of the South in an effort to divide the G-77 efforts to push for radical reductions in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by the Northern countries. This is contrary to the set negotiation norms of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

So far, the Kyoto Protocol is the only legally binding document guiding discussions and it appears the USA will not make any mitigation commitments until India and China do so. There is an overwhelming fear that the currently proposed commitments by USA, EU, and Japan fall far too short of expectations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommendations. Bolivia has made the most radical commitment of 49% reduction of GHG emissions as opposed to USA 4%. The IPCC recommends a reduction of carbon emissions of 40-45% by 2020. President Obama is expected to arrive and deliver his message on 18th December.

Future generations and climate change

The diversity of speakers at the many separate activities at the Kilaforum09 depict a deep understanding and concern, about the issues relating to climate change. Rather than just seek ways of cutting back on carbon emissions, civil society has given in-depth analyses on the causes of climate change. Some identified are the historical mass exploitation of the planet, over-production, over-consumption, uncontrolled use of fossil fuels, simply put, unsustainable development. The question to ask is, how can the mind that caused the problem objectively see its own faults and adequately address the problem? Is there not the need, then for a development paradigm change, where the planet and all it contains are seen not merely as inexhaustible capital but as ends in themselves that all generations need to benefit from and coexist with?

The Bolivian chief negotiator and ambassador, Angela Navarra addressed thousands of civil society people gathered in the main arena of the Klimaforum09. She expressed disappointment at the manner the Annex One countries of the Kyoto Protocol are conducting business at the Bella Centre. She condemned and termed it as 'shameful' how the Danish Government's secret mobilisations within the Bella Centre with the fellow Annex One countries and the efforts to divide the G77 countries' position. Ambassador Navarra pleaded for civil society support in Bolivia's earnest demand for at least 40 - 45% reduction in carbon emissions by the Annex One countries.

Last word

The 190 countries represented in the Bella Centre should not settle for a continued commodification and auctioning of the planet as though it were a finite pool of resources. They should rather see that humanity cannot continue on this unsustainable development course that is already affecting our generation, what more will be left for future generations if we continue?

Privilege Hang'andu

Debt Officer

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

December 13, 2009

In Copenhagen, Denmark attending the Climate Change Conference