

Cancun Climate Agreement and Bangladesh: A step forward

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In a change from Copenhagen's venomous atmosphere last year, on 11th December, more than 190 countries have struck an agreement at the latest round of UN climate talks in the beach resort of Cancun (Mexico) that puts efforts to secure a new international deal to tackle global warming back on track.

The talks ended with agreement after two sleepless nights with standing ovations for the chief negotiator and conference Chairperson, Mexican Foreign Minister Ms. Patricia Espinosa.

The deal, reached in Cancun after two weeks of UN talks, have the following main agreement:

- To pursue deep voluntary cuts to emissions by both developed and developing countries
- To establish a multi-billion dollar aid fund (Green Climate Fund) for poor countries adversely affected by greenhouse gas emissions.
- To allow the Kyoto Protocol for about 40 wealthy nations, including Australia, to co-exist with pledges made by low-income nations under last year's Copenhagen accord.
- To provide financial support to countries to combat deforestation
- To set up a committee for adaptation to combat the effects of climate change
- To start to verification of emission reductions made.
- To call for “urgent action” to cap temperature rises at no more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and asks for a study on strengthening the commitment to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Environment lobby groups hailed the result for its ability to bring developing countries into an emissions reduction framework for the first time, including reporting of emissions cuts.

Many delegates said the agreement represented a “well balanced outcome” that would provide building blocks for future negotiations next year in South Africa.

This is the first time that all major emitters have agreed to report to the world community their commitments and efforts to reduce carbon pollution in their own economies.

US President Barack Obama congratulated Mexican President Felipe Calderon in a phone call for “Mexico's excellent work chairing the Cancun conference to a successful conclusion that builds on the historic Copenhagen Accord and advances the effort to address the challenge of climate change,” the White House said.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who flew to Cancun to plead for progress, said the negotiations “have delivered important success for a world much in need of it.”

The “Green Climate Fund” is meant to provide assistance to poor nations, which many experts say are already suffering more floods and drought as temperatures steadily mount such as Bangladesh.

The fund will be steered by a board of 24 members chosen evenly from developed and developing nations. For the first three years, the new international organisation would be overseen by the World Bank - a controversial point for some who distrust the Washington-based lender.

The European Union, Japan and the United States since last year led pledges of \$30 billion in immediate assistance, to rise to \$100 billion a year to start by 2020.

A broader issue is just how wealthy nations would raise the money, with few governments enthusiastic to commit such large amounts in tough economic times. Some envoys advocated taxing airplane and shipping fuel.

Bangladesh & the Cancun Agreement:

Bangladesh is the top vulnerable country due to global climate change. A few facts distinguish Bangladesh from other countries: (a) its density of population per square mile, (b) loss of agricultural land per year due to growth of population and intrusion of saline water through coastal belt, (c) poverty. (d) sea rise may submerge coastal areas displacing millions of people, (e) loss of biodiversity through the disappearance of mangroves of the Sunderbans.

World Vision Chief Economist, Brett Parris reportedly said that “climate poverty” in Bangladesh is on the rise and stated: “We are seeing a convergence of climate change and poverty that is reducing the ability of poor communities to grow crops, access water and house and feed themselves.”

According to a recent report of Climate experts 17% of Bangladesh’s territory would likely to be submerged under water and about 30 million of people will be homeless and destitute by 2050, according to Equity and Justice Working Group, Bangladesh.

To combat the deleterious effects of climate change, adaptation is the only means since Bangladesh has been no polluter.

For Bangladesh, two important points are included in the deal—(a) Green Climate Fund and (b) An adaptation committee to combat effects of Climate Change.

Kyoto Protocol:

The talks were stuck for days over the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, the landmark treaty whose obligations on wealthy countries to cut emissions expires in late 2012.

The European Union led calls for a new round of commitments under Kyoto, a move that Japan surprisingly opposed, noting that the protocol covers only 30 per cent of global emissions because top polluters including China and the United States are not part of it.

In a compromise Japan accepted, the Cancun agreement called for work on a second period of the Kyoto Protocol "to ensure that there is no gap," but did not oblige countries to be part of the new round.

President Obama shifted gears on Kyoto Protocol when he took office, but his hopes for legislation to restrict carbon were dashed when the rival Republican Party won last month's election.

Response about the Cancun Deal:

Chief US negotiator Todd Stern said: "Obviously the package is not going to solve climate change by itself, but I think it is a big step forward."

Friends of the Earth's international climate campaigner Asad Rehman described the Cancun agreement as weak and ineffective - but said it gave the world a "small and fragile lifeline".

Keith Allott, head of climate change at WWF-UK, said: "After Copenhagen it was hoped that Cancun could establish a platform for progressing action on climate change. Despite some last minute hiccups, countries leave here with a renewed sense of goodwill and some sense of purpose."

Alex Farrow, Co-director of the UK Youth Climate Coalition, said: "Today's progress gives young people across the world hope. This is the beginning of a common climate path. These outcomes put us one step closer to the cleaner, fairer future that young people across the world dream of."

Greenpeace International Climate Policy Director Wendel Trio said: "Cancun may have saved the process but it did not yet save the climate. Some called the process dead but governments have shown that they can cooperate and can move forward to achieve a global deal."

Rebecca Chacko, who directs climate policy for the advocacy group Conservation International, said this "basic framework" is "going to inspire countries to really ramp up the financing immediately" for forest preservation, as well as open the door to more private funding.

Conclusion:

Cancun has delivered the momentum. A lot of work had to be done to make sure the agreements achieved in Cancun were built on next year.

The emissions- cuts on the table could still lead to a global temperature increase of up to five degrees which would be catastrophic for hundreds of millions of the world's poorest people. The Cancun meeting postponed much of the hardest work - including the determination of emission cuts for all nations - for 2011 talks in South Africa.

Finally, the agreement in Cancun did not give everybody everything they wanted but it is a step forward and restores trust in outcome of multilateral conferences.