

POST-COPENHAGEN: A PERSPECTIVE FROM AUSTRALIA AND ITS ASIAN-PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS

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The biggest climate change conference in history is over and one month on, opinions are still divided over its significance for the fight against climate change and the future of global climate change negotiations. The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference took place from 7-19 December 2009 and was by far the largest climate change conference ever held. It attracted enormous public attention, more than 100 heads of state attended the conference and 40,000 people had registered for participation. Copenhagen was the culmination of a process that began at the Bali Climate Summit in December 2007. Parties adopted the "Bali Roadmap", according to which two different bodies were to prepare a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which runs out in 2012. These two different bodies reflect the possible legal nature of a new climate change agreement: Essentially there are two options to move forward after 2012. One is to bring all countries together under a single new agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that would supersede the Kyoto Protocol, the other is to keep an amended Kyoto Protocol and have a separate new agreement under the Convention that would then also account for those countries without obligations under the Kyoto Protocol – namely the United States and developing countries. Over the course of two years these two groups prepared draft texts for the conference, but in the end neither of them was used as a basis for the final text of the conference - a political statement called the "Copenhagen Accord". The Copenhagen Accord is a six-page paper comprised of twelve points and two annexes, which are still to be filled. The Copenhagen Accord is not legally binding, which means countries do not have to fear any consequences if they do not comply with it. It is, however, politically binding for those parties who choose to sign up to it until 31 January 2010. This entails no real consequences except political or diplomatic responses, such as public shaming of countries that breach its conditions. Point No. 1 of the Copenhagen Accord establishes a below 2 degrees Celsius target for the rise in global temperature. An assessment of this target is envisaged for 2015 with a possible strengthening of the temperature target to below 1.5 degrees. More than a hundred countries would have liked to have seen this lower target in the agreement straight away. The Accord states that countries "should cooperate in achieving the peaking of global and national emissions as soon as possible", but does not identify a specific year. According to the IPCC this peak would have to be reached by 2017 at the latest, in order to limit a temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius. The major unresolved issue of the conference is that no reduction targets for countries have been set. Usually, a deal between the developed world, offering stringent reduction targets and financial aid, and the developing world, in turn committing

to some sort of "mitigation action", is struck. In Copenhagen this did not take place. Instead parties can register their support for the Copenhagen Accord and submit emissions reduction pledges until 31 January 2010. Those 2020 emissions targets for developed countries and mitigation actions for developing countries will form the appendix to the Accord. But what are countries going to submit? Will their submissions be similar to what they had announced in the run-up to the conference? The US, for example had announced a 17 percent reduction target on 2005 levels (equal to 4 percent on 1990 levels). Australia had given a whole target range of 5–25 percent on 2000 levels (roughly equal to 5–25 percent on 1990 levels), similarly to the EU with 20–30 percent on 1990 levels. But not only developed countries had made mitigation pledges: China wants to reduce its carbon intensity by 40–45 percent on 2005 levels by 2020, Indonesia has set a 26–41 percent and Brazil a 36–39 percent below Business-as-usual target by 2020. Only if we see more ambitious targets than those (preferably without any ranges) the Copenhagen Conference has really made a difference. However, countries may well not increase the stringency of their targets or again submit a range. In this case, an agreement on reduction targets would have essentially been postponed to the next climate change conference. After the announcement of Australia and the European Union to stick to their previously announced target ranges, this seems to be the likely case. This "bottom-up" approach of setting reduction targets has been widely criticised. According to Christoph Bals, Policy Director of Germanwatch, looking at the targets countries have announced so far "we are closer to a path to 3.5 degrees temperature increase than 2." Missing from the agreement are long-term emissions reduction targets. In fact, earlier versions still comprised an 80 percent reduction target for global emissions by 2050. This was dropped over the course of the last day. One of the most detailed points of the Accord is the one on financial support for developing countries: For the period 2010-2012 US\$ 30 billion and a further US\$ 100 billion per year by 2020 are to be provided. These numbers reflect pledges made by developed countries fairly early on in the conference.

Neither a deadline for the achievement of a legally-binding agreement is included, nor an indication of its structure, both of which featured in earlier versions. Those had set a deadline for the climate conference in Mexico City in December 2010 and alluded to a single legally binding agreement. Furthermore, as mentioned above, long-term reduction targets as well as the identification of a year for global emissions to peak did not make it into the report either and one still has to wait for the submission of further reduction targets and mitigation actions for 2020 in order to more accurately evaluate the Copenhagen Accord and the negotiating process.

Taking into account the position of many Asian-Pacific countries in climate negotiations and the change in their attitude towards climate change policy

from not participating in the international negotiating process or even disrupting it to playing an active role or even leading and representing a country block at the Copenhagen Conference, one would have thought that the high hopes many had for this conference were not without reason.

After the close of the conference everyone was quick to find someone else to blame for its outcome, perceived as too weak by many, and there was no shortage of scapegoats: The developed world and in particular the US with their lack of ambitious targets, the developing world and especially China who blocked negotiations on some issues they did not agree with, a handful of countries, amongst them Venezuela, Bolivia and Tuvalu who contested the "Copenhagen Accord" in the final plenary and prevented it from becoming a stronger political signal or the Danish way of conducting negotiations, which was criticised by many.

It might also be true that the climate negotiations have become too complex for a conference like the one in Copenhagen to succeed. One draft negotiation text, which had been developed during the two years prior to the conference, was nearly 200 pages long - virtually impossible to get through in only two weeks, if whole meetings discuss the wording of a mere footnote. Australia and Europe's announcement to stick to their rather unambitious reduction pledges can be viewed as a first indication that the process cannot continue in its current form. However, one will still have to wait for the remaining countries' pledges (especially whether or not China will submit their previously announced emissions intensity target). Thereafter the lead-up to and outcome of the next conference in Mexico City will be crucial for the survival of the UN process.

Regardless the reason for the shortcomings of the Copenhagen Accord, the world seems to have to wait at least another year. This is even more unfortunate, since it became clear in Copenhagen that the public, business and industry are ready for a strong agreement. There is still hope that by the next conference in Mexico City in December 2010, the political issues will have been resolved and delegates will "seal the deal" after all.

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