

Way to Copenhagen

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The December 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, from December 7 to 18, will involve 192 countries, and more than 150,000 heads of state and government officials, advisers, diplomats, campaigners and journalists. The list of global dignitaries includes the American President Barak Obama and the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. It is interesting to note that on his way to the Conference, Harper is proposing a 20 percent reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from 2006 levels by 2020, and up to 80 per cent by 2050. He favours to having realistic targets which are feasible within the timeframe.

Obama will “put on the table” a U.S. commitment to cut emissions by 17 percent over the next decade, on the way to reducing heat-trapping pollution by 80 percent by mid-century, the White House said.

According to the newstimes.com, cutting U.S. carbon dioxide emissions by one-sixth in just a decade would increase the cost of energy as electric utilities pay for capturing carbon dioxide at coal-burning power plants or switch to more expensive alternatives. The price of gasoline probably would increase, and more fuel-efficient automobiles - or hybrids that run on gasoline and electricity - probably would be more expensive.

It was also reported that Obama’s promise of GHG emissions cuts will require Congress to pass complex climate legislation that the administration says will include an array of measures to ease the price impact. The bills before Congress, for example, would have the government provide polluters free emissions allowances in the early years of the transition from fossil fuels, as well as direct payments to many consumers facing high costs.

The Kyoto Protocol runs out in 2012. To keep the process moving forward there is an urgent need for a new climate protocol. The purpose of the upcoming conference in Copenhagen this week where the parties of the UNFCCC meet for the last time on government level before the finalization of climate agreement, is to renew the Kyoto Protocol for the next five years starting from 2013 to 2017. The topics on the conference agenda include: Preliminary negotiations at various global climate conferences; Geopolitical issues related to industrialized nations and emerging nations; and the Scientific and corporate issues that will impact the debate.

Just as a background, there were two international treaties designed to address climate change — the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol. These two treaties represent the international response to the compelling evidence, compiled and repeatedly confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that climate change is occurring, and that it is largely due to human activities. Here are some highlights:

- The UNFCCC adopted the Convention on 9 May 1992, and it entered into force on 21 March, 1994. The countries which adopted this Convention were aware of the fact that its provisions would not be sufficient enough to adequately address future climate change;
- At the first Conference of the Parties, held in Berlin, Germany in early 1995, a new round of talks was launched to discuss firmer, more detailed commitments;
- After two and a half years of intensive negotiations, a substantial extension to the Convention was adopted in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997. This Kyoto Protocol established legally binding emissions targets for industrialized countries, and created innovative mechanisms to assist these countries in meeting these targets;
- The Kyoto Protocol entered into force on 18 November 2004, after 55 Parties to the Convention had ratified it, including enough industrialized countries - who have specific targets - to encompass 55 per cent of that group’s carbon dioxide emissions in 1990; and
- The United Nations Climate Change Conference 2007 in Bali was held from Monday, 3 December to Friday, 14 December 2007. 187 countries in Bali agreed to launch negotiations towards a crucial and strengthened international climate change deal. The decision includes an agenda for the key issues

to be negotiated up to 2009. It was concluded that negotiations in 2009 will ensure that the new deal can enter into force by 2013.

[The Copenhagen Climate Treaty](#) is a proposal for a Copenhagen Agreement and was drafted by individuals from around the world reflecting on member's countries' national circumstances and debated with the knowledge that transformation is required. It is a work in progress; although the views on targets and the ambitious emission pathways will not change, the finer points are likely to evolve in step with the negotiations themselves. It is meant to encourage and provoke countries into thinking hard about the level of ambition, scope and detail that needs to be agreed in Copenhagen, the path to get us there and what comes afterwards.

It was clearly stated in the introduction of the proposal that the Treaty is based on the premise that all peoples, nations and cultures have the right to survive, to develop sustainably and to alleviate poverty.

The final agreement must balance the need for short-term action with medium and long-term certainty and vision on all aspects of the Bali Action Plan and the need for a legally binding form. It must be ambitious but must also safeguard the poorest people. There must be no trade off between ambition and equity.

The shared vision maps out the international effort required to fundamentally tackle climate change while meeting sustainable development goals. It outlines the overall long-term global objectives for the four building blocks, mitigation, adaptation, technology, and finance, showing what it takes to transform the world to a zero-carbon economy over the coming decades, including global emissions cuts of at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. It will additionally enshrine equity and the right to survival for countries, communities, cultures, and ecosystems, as well as the right to develop sustainably in accordance with the UNFCCC principles. The agreement then operationalizes the shared vision for a 5-year commitment period for 2013 to 2017, to be followed by subsequent 5-year periods, for all four building blocks. Here are some highlights of the proposal:

1. **The Treaty's Legal Structure:**

- The Copenhagen Climate Treaty should consist of three pieces: an amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, a new Copenhagen Protocol and a set of decisions by the supreme body of the Convention and its Protocols;
- The Copenhagen Protocol and amended Kyoto Protocol should be viewed as a package encompassing the international community's response to avoiding dangerous climate change; and
- The Convention and Protocol decisions should lay the groundwork for the immediate and early action needed up to 2012 for mitigation and adaptation, including some of the decisions that will need to be adopted at COP16 by Parties to the Copenhagen Protocol.

2. **The Global Carbon Budget:**

- The overall ambition of the Copenhagen deal must be to keep the rise of the world's average annual temperature as far below 2°C warming as possible, compared to pre-industrial levels, to avoid catastrophic climate change;
- The world must stay within a maximum carbon budget that cannot be overspent nor borrowed against in the future. It reflects the total amount of greenhouse gases the planet can bear before it tips into instability;
- The planet's annual global carbon budget from all sources of greenhouse gases would in 2020 be no higher than 36.1 Gt CO₂e (giga tons of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions), roughly equal to 1990 levels and would need to be reduced to 7.2 Gt CO₂e in 2050, in other words by 80 % below 1990 levels. To put the world rapidly onto an emissions reduction pathway that can achieve that, global emissions need to come back to 1990 levels by 2020;
- For the annual reduction rates between 2010 and 2050 to be achievable, total global greenhouse gas emissions would need to peak in the 2013-2017 commitment period and decline thereafter. The physical emission paths would be:
 - Industrialised countries' fossil fuel and industrial greenhouse gas emissions would have to drop from present levels rapidly and almost be fully phased out by 2050;
 - Deforestation emissions would need to be reduced globally by at least 75% or more by 2020; and
 - Developing country fossil fuel and industrial greenhouse gas emissions would need to peak before 2020 and then decline, which emphasizes the need to provide high levels of binding

support by industrialized countries.

3. Historical Responsibility:

- All countries must contribute to preventing dangerous climate change. However, the largest share of responsibility for staying within the carbon budget rests with the industrialized countries, obligating them to reduce emissions at home whilst enabling and supporting developing countries to develop in a low-carbon manner;
- Given that the remaining atmospheric space has been constricted as a result of the excessive use of fossil fuels by industrialized countries to date, these countries need to provide significant financial, technological and capacity building support that can be monitored and measured to ensure that developing countries have the means to stay within such a carbon constrained budget and to begin to remedy the historical inequities;
- To achieve the necessary emission reductions, however, more advanced developing countries must also take up the call to action. Therefore the Treaty outlines their common but differentiated responsibilities and details the support to be provided; and
- Newly industrialized countries like Singapore, South Korea and Saudi Arabia should also take on binding targets in line with the Convention principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. The criteria for designating newly industrialized countries should be negotiated in Copenhagen.

What is critical to recognize is that the window of opportunity for limiting climate change is closing and therefore unprecedented international cooperation and commitment is critical to success of this initiative. It is feasible to “progress much faster, catalyzing the world onto a low-carbon development pathway that is ambitious, effective and fair and ensures that the right to survival for the most vulnerable is not sacrificed.”

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