

POST CANCUN 2010 – the heat is still on

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One of the most controversial topics, which is of great political importance for both the International and European strategy, is that of Climate Change. Climate Change is perhaps the greatest challenge for our planet. Humankind's efforts for the 21st century focus on limiting the increase in average global temperature to 2°C.

On March 21, 1994, many countries joined an international treaty known as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The scope was to consider what actions should be taken to reduce global warming and to cope with the inevitable temperature increases.

On December 11, 1997, a number of nations approved an addition to the treaty, the Kyoto Protocol. The Protocol is an international agreement that sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries, including 25 countries of the European Community, for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions: during the five-year period of 2008-2012 the countries should reduce their GHG emissions to an average of 5% compared to the 1990 levels. The major distinction between the Protocol and the Convention is that while the Convention encouraged industrialized countries to stabilize GHG emissions, the Protocol commits them to do so.

The United States, a country historically responsible for emitting high levels of greenhouse gases, is not responding to this international challenge. The reason given by the United States for their lack of response is the lack of commitment of developing countries to reduce GHG emissions according to the Kyoto Protocol. Some of these countries are operating with very high levels of emissions. Using the guise of a possible economic advantage by the developing countries, the United States still refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on the grounds that it may damage their economy.

After the 2009 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) Summit Meeting on Climate Change in Copenhagen did not accomplish what many had expected (mostly due to the economic and geostrategic interests of the big established and new emerging economies), the world turned its interest and hope to the 16th COP Summit Meeting on Climate Change. Among other things, the 16th COP Meeting set as principal aims to meet the needs of adaptation to climate change, the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, the development and dissemination of the necessary technology and the financing of related projects and programs.

This 16th United Nations Climate Change Conference took place in Cancun, Mexico, from November 29 to December 10, 2010. The main discussion focused on the negotiating process and aimed to enhance long-term cooperation under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Since the last meeting in Copenhagen in 2009, the UN based negotiation process was questioned by many as to whether it was capable to deliver an international climate change policy regime. This led to overall low expectations for any progress for the 16th COP conference.

Despite the progress made at Cancun, the outcome was an agreement and not a binding treaty. The outcome covered the areas of adaptation, mitigation, finance and technology. An agreement was reached by around 190+ countries to bring under the UNFCCC the emission reduction targets and nationally appropriate mitigating actions that were developed in 2010 as a result of the Copenhagen Accord. The main elements of the Cancun Agreements are summarized as follows:

- Recognition that deep cuts in global GHG emissions are required, with a view to reduce GHG emissions so as to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2°C. This is the first time this matter is acknowledged in a UN document.
- Industrialized and developing country pledges are officially recognized under the multilateral process.
- 'Green Climate Fund': funding from industrialized countries to support climate adaptation in the developing world (approximately USD 30 billion for the period 2010-2012 and USD 100 billion per year by 2020).
- Establishment of a Technology Mechanism which will consist of a Technology Executive Committee and a Climate Technology Centre and Network.
- Establishment of a Cancun Adaptation Framework and Adaptation Committee to allow better planning and implementation of adaptation projects.
- Future consideration of new carbon market mechanisms going beyond a project-based approach.

The Cancun Agreements are considered the best feasible results of COP 16. Arguably, the most encouraging aspect of the Summit Meeting at Cancun was the willingness by China and India, the two largest emitting developing countries, to legally commit to cut their emissions intensity. China and India committed to reduce their emissions by 40-45% and 20-25% respectively by 2020 compared to 2005, provided that an acceptable overall package (including financing) is agreed on.

Nevertheless important topics, such as the decision on the legal format for international climate change policy action, remain to be addressed. The Kyoto Protocol first commitment period comes to an end in 2012. Achieving a seamless transition from the first Kyoto Protocol commitment period to a new deal for 2013 and beyond will not be easy. This becomes more complex with the refusal of Japan, Canada and Russia to participate in the second commitment period of the Protocol. Furthermore, there is still the issue

between the United States and China, between actions in developed countries with commitments and emerging economies without commitments.

Two months have already passed since the Cancun meeting and it is well perceived that addressing the global climate change requires a lot more than international talks. Establishing a maximum level of emission cuts of greenhouse gases in industrial and rapidly emerging industrializing countries may not be enough. We need to aim higher. We need to aim to zero emissions. It remains to be seen in Durban how things will progress. COP 17th is not that far after all.