

Bangkok - 8 April 2011

BANGKOK: THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

A civil society analysis of the state of the climate negotiations

As the tumultuous Bangkok climate talks draw to a close it is essential to untangle what has happened, separate the substance from the spin, and secure agreement on an outcome that moves the process towards a successful conclusion at the December 2011 Durban Climate Conference.

Over the last week, the Bangkok climate talks have seen controversy during negotiations under the Convention (AWG-LCA) the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) as well as in pre-session workshops about the scale of emission reductions by developed countries.

Two views of the negotiations

The debate over the agenda of the AWG-LCA reflects two views on future of the climate talks – and the climate regime.

- Most countries take a broad view, based in previous discussions, that the purpose is an effective agreement based on the principles and provisions of the Convention.
- Some countries are taking a narrow view – that discussion should only focus on issues covered in Cancun. Among other things, they want to shut down negotiations to avoid discussing the adequacy and comparability of their efforts.

Cancun: floor or ceiling?

Developing countries see the Cancun AWG-LCA outcome as the "floor" or "foundation" on which to continue building efforts to implement the Convention and Bali Action Plan, including Annex I emission reductions and sources of finance.

Cancun addressed the "easier issues" in an attempt to rebuild momentum destroyed in Copenhagen. Efforts are now needed to address the "hard issues" that Cancun avoided, but are needed to fulfill the Bali mandate.

Consequently, developing countries are calling for a balanced agenda that addresses the issues decided in Cancun, as well as the further work required to implement the Bali Action Plan and Convention to solve the climate crisis.

Their position is based firmly on the outcome from Cancun including that:

- The Cancun decision explicitly acknowledges the

understanding that “not all aspects of the work ... are concluded.”

- It explicitly says the AWG-LCA will continue its work “drawing on the documents under its consideration” which includes the Bali Action Plan.
- It goes further and says that the AWG-LCA will continue discussing legal options with the aim to “complete an agreed outcome based on the Bali Action Plan”

The idea that focusing on the agenda is a minor procedural issue is incorrect. Debating the agenda is not discussing “the shape of the negotiating table” but rather what goes on it. It sets the basis for the talks going forward and thus, what will be included in any future outcome.

If we want a decision reducing emissions based on science and equity we need an agenda to get us there. The Chair’s proposed agenda could not result in a science-based outcome because it did not include a discussion of either the ambition of Annex I emission cuts or the sources/scale of finance required.

Delay and denial

Some developed countries are currently blocking the adoption of an all-inclusive agenda for the negotiations in Bangkok and beyond. At the same time, they seek to shift blame to others, while portraying the demands of developing countries as an arguments over technicalities. These developed countries are backtracking even from the Cancun outcome, which clearly called for an increase in the ambition of the Annex I countries.

The United States, in particular, seeks to establish the Cancun outcome as the "ceiling" on what we should achieve. The focus, they say, should be merely on “implementing” the Cancun outcome. They take this view because they want to take the scale of their emission reductions and comparability with other developed countries off the negotiating table. The reluctance of the United States to discuss their emission reductions further was made clear at the pre-session workshop.

Some developed countries are backtracking even from the Cancun outcome, which clearly called for increased ambition from the Annex I countries

The moment of truth has arrived. Developed countries must commit at the political level to a continuation of the Kyoto Protocol.

An unbiased umpire?

The US Chair, for reasons that remain unclear, proposed an agenda that followed neither the structure nor content of the Bali Action Plan or the Cancun outcomes.

Instead it hand-picked some issues and reordered them in a manner that suited the interests of some developed countries (e.g. by removing the ambition and comparability of Annex I efforts from the table). The original agenda is supported by those same parties.

The role of the Chair is to facilitate a party-driven process, not to drive its own process.

- Developing countries have highlighted for weeks that Cancun did not preclude a more ambitious, constructive and positive agenda being taken up here.
- The G77, Africa Group, BASIC countries and others have all confirmed that the Bali Action Plan remains the template for negotiations – yet the Chair's agenda appears largely to have ignored this.

It's important that Parties drive the process and the Chair serves as an unbiased umpire, as that it is the only way we can build an agreement with broad-based support. Developing countries should not have to negotiate with a US chair as well as the United States.

A failure of ambition

The source of the agenda debate is an unwillingness by some developed countries to increase the ambition of their emission reductions, discuss sources of finance or agree to a legally binding international climate regime.

So they are opposing an agenda covering these issues, despite that it is required by Cancun decision and Bali Action Plan. Instead they want to distract attention to technical issues – such as non-Annex I reporting.

The developing countries' agenda is required to ensure a level of ambition consistent with the scale of the challenge, which UNEP says requires closing an emission gap of at least 14Gt in 2020 simply to have a "likely" chance of remaining within 2 degrees C.

Developing countries mitigate more

Annex I countries are promising to contribute unconditional cuts of a mere 1.9Gt domestically in 2020 (and another 1.1 funded through "offsets" in developing countries). This is a profoundly and dangerously inadequate fraction of the effort needed.

In contrast developing countries have offered to contribute 3.6Gt at the lower end of their pledges – almost double what has been offered domestically by the developed countries.

To address the remaining emissions gap of more than 7Gt to achieve the inadequate and unsafe 2 degree goal - let alone a safe goal - Annex I countries must radically increase ambition by agreeing a science-based aggregate target, comparable individual efforts, and appropriate sources and scale of finance.

Failure to do so risks tipping the Earth's climate system further into dangerous and potentially run-away change which threatens the stability of the Earth's ecosystems and with it the future of human civilizations.

The moment of truth

During the Kyoto track of negotiations Annex I countries were asked to commit to the Kyoto Protocol or "leave the room". Negotiations on further commitments for Annex I Parties have continued since 2005 with still no clear commitment by Annex I countries that they will fulfill their legal obligations.

The time for ensuring there is no "gap" between the first and second periods has run out – the moment of truth has arrived. Developed countries must now commit at the political level to a continuation of the Protocol.

We call on Europe to stand up and be counted as a leader among developed countries, to join with developing countries in calling for an outcome that increases ambition, addresses the hard issues left off the table in Cancun, honors the promises made in Bali, and builds on – rather than dismantles – the climate system built since the Convention was agreed in 1992.

All developed countries must recommit to the Bali Roadmap which covers 100% of global emissions through three pillars: 1) binding cuts for Annex I countries under the Kyoto Protocol; 2) comparable efforts for the United States under the Convention; and 3) appropriate mitigation actions by developing countries, supported by finance, technology and capacity.

Bangkok as a turning point

Bangkok will be a turning point for the Climate negotiations. It is either the moment the climate negotiations begin drawing to a close, with agreement only to finish the "undertakings" of Cancun with the inadequate pledges remaining on the table – in which case we are, according to UNEP, on track for 2.5 to 5 degrees C of warming.

Or it is the moment at which leaders stand together to agree an agenda and program of negotiations that increases ambition of Annex I emission reductions and finance, fulfills the promises of the Convention, its Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Action Plan, builds the climate regime based on science, equity and the rule of law, and sets the world back on course towards stabilizing the Earth's climate system.