

# Echoes from Cancún

United Nations Conference on Climate Change, 29 November-10 December 2010

Monday, 13 December 2010

## Copenhagen: 0, Cancun: 1, Durban: ?

### Down to the Wire!



Less than twenty-four hours before the end of the conference, optimists were few and far between. In an ambiance of tension and fatigue, the ghost of the failure in Copenhagen floated over the Moon Palace, the site of the negotiations. Yet, the texts on long-term cooperative action under the Convention on Climate Change, and on the Kyoto Protocol were the subject of a broad consensus. The Mexican method has proven itself, and the thunderous applause on the arrival of Mrs. Espinosa, the Conference President, during one of the last plenary sessions bears this out.

We are not home free yet. The results attained fall short of expectations. Everyone sacrificed a little national interest to reach a collective decision. And progress has been made on considering international solidarity issues. However, there is still a wide chasm between the level of ambition displayed in regard to lowering greenhouse gas emissions and what science dictates to avoid global warming of more than two degrees.

While the Cancun Conference cannot be described as a clear and massive success in the fight against climate change, it has laid the groundwork for an agreement that we hope will be binding, ambitious and fair by the end of 2011, at the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP17) in Durban.

### The Mexican Method

Fault-finders will certainly see reasons to up their pessimism about humanity's ability to rise to the challenge of climate change. Is Cancun therefore equal to Copenhagen in the nations' inability to face the climate challenge? Nothing is less certain. On closer look, it would seem that, on the contrary, actors' positions have shifted and even, in some ways, that the vision has taken on credible prospects. Good news for the living.

It is, in the words of Venezuela, repeated by the President of Mexico Felipe Calderon, an agreement with which all are equally dissatisfied by the abandoning of some of their desires. Legally weak when we were expecting a binding agreement, lacking a firm decision on a second Kyoto Protocol commitment period, no guaranteed amount for the Green Climate Fund created, etc. The compromise is in a multitude of ways far from the "balanced, binding package" that was the Conference's marching orders.

### Compromise: Weakness or Strength Recognizing and Showcasing Others' Positions?

Why oh why did the world's countries commit with palpable desire—a rarity, standing in plenary session—to officialize

this agreement despite the repeated attempts of Bolivia alone to block the adoption by consensus?

Beyond a text that agrees more on principles, modalities and methods than on decisions to commit to actions, it was a feeling of being in it together that ultimately generated a meeting of the minds allowing a conclusion to be reached. And not just any togetherness, but that of sharing dissatisfaction itself. In some ways, a community of countries that all gave something up. Food for thought for the future.

### **The Crack Opened in Copenhagen Let in the Light**



In the future, history could well speak of the “Mexican method” that brought greater serenity to the job and increased political trust between States too inclined to compete with each other rather than being favorably inclined to cooperate for the greater good. Perhaps even, beyond States, all the actors present in Cancun. On the last night, the long ovation given by all participants to Mrs. Patricia Espinosa, a calm and determined woman who inspires careful attention when she speaks, was the explicit acknowledgment by thousands of people of the work she did and supervised that made it possible, against all expectations, to adopt a text with an enthusiastic consensus. Provoking even a degree of compassion for Bolivia’s opposition in demanding “better” rather than “good.”

### **“No international conference can succeed if there is no trust among the actors and in the negotiation process.”**

From the start, the tone was set by Mrs. Espinosa: promise to listen to everyone’s point of view to the end, manage information and the negotiations in complete transparency, provide information on the progress in the work in real time. What is more, no pre-fabricated solution, vision or providential initiative was pushed forward with recommendations that all should rally behind it. The complaints of everyone, including the least powerful States, were patiently taken into consideration, amended, reasoned, included in longer texts presented during informal sessions acting as stepping stones. From the start of the second week, a more proactive attitude made it possible to conduct bilateral consultations and harvest emerging solutions to move toward new progress. On their arrival, the ministers were invited to work on the subjects under negotiation in pairs, one from a developing country and one from a developed country, with mediators’ mandates for results. In this way, everyone was given a share of responsibility for the potential success in Cancun. In a second theater of actors, the Mexican President Felipe Calderon was another untiring artist in this success. In meetings, debates and round tables over several days, he gave the heads of State and emblematic figures many opportunities to express themselves outside the limited framework of the negotiations. Voicing the suggestions that were made, highlighting the cost of non-action and the need for necessary changes now, in particular in regard to adaptation, before many full houses, he helped forge a spirit of togetherness in the face of a shared emergency.

The Cancun agreement could well have opened a new path in multilateral dialogue by seeking to build from the other’s perspective, particularly those others who struggle to be heard. In fact, that is what the United Nations are for, is it not?

## International Solidarity Is Gaining Ground

### Adaptation to Climate Change Is Making Headway

By creating an international adaptation framework, the decision on long-term cooperative action meets a strong demand from developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable countries. This framework identifies priorities for action: elaborating national adaptation programs of action for the Least Developed Countries, building institutional capacities, integrating climate change in natural disaster risk reduction strategies, etc. It will make it possible to catalyze, coordinate and harmonize actions in the field of adaptation. An adaptation committee has been created. It will provide technical support to developing countries, and will serve as an information clearinghouse between the various adaptation practitioners (NGOs, researchers, etc.). At the request of developing small island States, a process has been initiated to assess the mechanisms to offset the losses and damages associated with climate change impacts in developing countries (insurance fund for climate risks, risk sharing and transfer mechanisms such as micro-insurance, etc.). The groundwork has been laid but the lion's share of work remains to be done for this international framework to turn into visible, ambitious actions for those, in developing countries, most in need.

### REDD+: It's Official!

After five years of negotiations, first technical then political, the REDD+ mechanism has finally been established. Developing countries are encouraged to establish mitigation actions in the forestry sector: reducing emissions from deforestation, sustainable forest management, conserving and increasing forest carbon stocks, for example via protected areas and plantations. These actions should address, among other things, the factors behind deforestation and forest degradation (agricultural development, use of firewood, etc.), as well as land tenure

issues and forest governance. They should be implemented taking into account environmental and social safeguards such as respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, the full and effective participation of the concerned stakeholders, and the conservation of natural forests and biodiversity. Through these safeguards, the Parties acknowledge that forests are not only carbon stocks but living places and development factors for numerous populations.

### Financing: How to Pay the Bill?

A major breakthrough was made with the establishment of the Green Climate Fund, the "cornerstone of the negotiations" according to the South Korean representative. This Fund provides for balanced governance between developed and developing countries. A "transitional" committee has been set up to define the institutional and legal arrangements that will make this fund operational. It should give its recommendations at the COP17. The decision "recognizes" the promise of developed countries to mobilize 100 billion dollars per year by 2020 to meet the needs of developing countries. The bill is therefore on the table. But how will it be paid? The fund might well be an empty shell if countries do not reach an agreement as quickly as possible on sources of funding, and in particular on innovative financing mechanisms such as taxing emissions in the aviation and maritime sectors.

### Agriculture: Collateral Damage

Thirteen percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture. In Cancun, we had hoped that a work program would be able to be implemented to clarify the issues and study the technical and financial feasibility of including this sector in mitigation measures. We had also hoped that agriculture's key role in food security and adaptation to climate change would be recognized. Yet, agriculture was left by the wayside, a victim of the compromise. Uruguay, a large agricultural country, lamented that the agreement that the

countries had reached in Copenhagen was lost in Cancun.

## The Climate Still Needs Saving



The biggest loser in Cancun is undeniably mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, notably in developed countries. First, the COP “takes note” of the decidedly unambitious commitments made in Copenhagen, and does not make them binding. While the goal of limiting the temperature increase to 2°C by 2100 was reaffirmed, countries’ individual commitments are not enough to attain this goal. We know that the emissions reduction targets announced so far would lead to an increase in temperatures of around 3°C to 4°C, which would have devastating human and environmental consequences, particularly in the most vulnerable countries.<sup>1</sup> This gap between science<sup>2</sup> and developed countries’ commitments must imperatively be bridged. Second, Cancun pushes back the decision on entering a second Kyoto Protocol commitment period early enough to ensure that there is no gap between the first and second periods. Developed countries must commit to achieving more ambitious emissions reductions so as not to undermine once again the trust so difficultly rebuilt in Cancun by the Mexican presidency.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the UNEP report, November 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) 4<sup>th</sup> report.

## Geopolitics: the New Deal

Cancun distinguished itself from Copenhagen by the distribution of cards to play the climate negotiation game. China and the United States, the two largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world, stepped back, alongside the European Union, leaving space for other countries to take over the Moon Palace. For instance, in addition to the host country, Mexico, countries such as Japan, Russia, India, Bolivia and the Africa group stood apart from the rest in particular.

Japan and Russia, the two squeaky wheels, blocked any possible compromise to enact a second Kyoto Protocol commitment period in Cancun.

India, in contrast, was saluted by the Mexican presidency as an example of how to facilitate the negotiations within the working groups. On the continued negotiations in Durban and beyond, India said that it will live up to its responsibilities and will support vulnerable countries.

Bolivia has refused to support the Cancun text. Its reasons: the lack of commitment on a second Kyoto Protocol period and the weakness of current commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which would cause temperatures to rise by of 4°C, resulting in “genocide” and “ecocide.” Despite this opposition from Bolivia, the Parties adopted the two decisions. According to the President of the COP, the consensus rule is not the same as the right to veto; one Party cannot block the adoption of a text supported by 193 others. Bolivia announced shortly after the conference it was determined to bring an action before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against the climate agreement. We will certainly be hearing from Bolivia again.

Rendezvous in Durban in 2011 for the next COP. The Africa group spoke with one voice in Cancun and intends to do the same in South Africa. As Algeria said to the country Parties, “Africa is waiting for you.”

## The Off-Site Mobilized for Climate Justice

While many accredited NGOs tracked the slightest shifting of commas in the texts at the Moon Palace, other forms of off-site mobilization took place in Cancun outside the ultra-secure area.

### Three Arenas for Mobilization



The *Dialogo-Climatico Espacio Mexicano*, set up by Mexican organizations and unions, received hundreds of participants. For the Solon Foundation (Bolivia), the climate crisis is not an environmental crisis, but a civilization crisis, a system crisis. Environmental organizations, indigenous peoples, farmers, international movements for climate justice, etc., all were there to say no to the commoditization of nature.

The “Klimaforum10”, a self-run temporary village, aimed to promote concrete alternatives, from international solidarity to “permaculture.” Isolated and difficult to reach, this site did not receive the expected attendance. Was the government trying to prevent encounters between the negotiators and anti-globalization proponents?

The Via Campesina camp was set up on the arrival of caravans for climate justice,<sup>3</sup> coming from several cities in Mexico to give a face to the places and communities

strongly affected on the environmental level. Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, spoke before an enthusiastic crowd to defend the Kyoto Protocol and the need for binding commitments, while stressing the common but differentiated responsibility of countries in the face of climate change.

### We Need to Change the System, Not the Climate!

Despite this dispersion, which undoubtedly harmed the visibility of the mobilization, a common day of demonstrations was held on December 7.

The largest event in the streets of Cancun brought together 3,000 people (international movements, indigenous communities, electricians’ unions, farmers, etc.) around slogans such as, “REDD : falsa solucion !, El banco mundial fuera del clima!”, and “System change, not climate change.” Another demonstration by Via Campesina was blocked near the Moon Palace by an impressive police force. Simultaneously, thousands of demonstrators gradually approached the conference center to hold a peoples’ assembly. Despite the presence of heads of the delegations from Bolivia, Paraguay and Nicaragua, as well as of Via Campesina, the Indigenous Environmental Network, and Friends of the Earth, the accredited activists who had joined the demonstration saw their badges withdrawn and were expelled from the Moon Palace.

Other actions followed in the last days of the negotiations, in particular to denounce the role that the World Bank might play in managing the Green Climate Fund. On the last day, within the Moon Palace itself, several groups, notably the Climate Action Network, clearly expressed their demands. Finally, several members of the Climate Justice Now network blocked access to the negotiating rooms, wearing gags to protest the failure to take into account the voices of people from developing countries and the weakness of the agreement that was to come.

<sup>3</sup> Organized with the National Assembly of Environmentally Affected Groups (Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales—ANAA), the Mexican Union of Electricians, and the National Liberation Movement.



Pressure from NGOs and social movements helped to prevent the dissolution of the multilateral framework. Promoting the overlapping interest of the various social actors and increasing mobilization are the main challenges ahead to help (finally!) attain tangible progress during the upcoming meetings.<sup>4</sup>

---

**Authors:** Marie Bessières (Coordination SUD) Patrice Burger (CARI), Anne Chetaille (GRET), Célia Gautier (GRET), Jeanne Planche (CRID/Une seule planète)

**Acknowledgments** for their contributions to the *Echoes from Cancun*: Laurent Levard, Bénédicte Hermelin, Hélène Gay, Célia Gautier and Marie-Andrée Zozime (GRET), Marie Bessières and Aude Lefebvre (Coordination SUD) and Lara Andahazy-Colo (translation).

**Photo Credits:** Patrice Burger (CARI), <http://cc2010.mx>

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the mobilization, visit: [www.mediapart.fr/club/edition/allo-cancun-ici-la-planete](http://www.mediapart.fr/club/edition/allo-cancun-ici-la-planete)