

THE RESULTS OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP-19) IN WARSAW

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Climate change is one of the most important problems for global community. The only legally-binding outcome to date – the Kyoto Protocol – did little to slow down greenhouse gas emissions over its first commitment period (2008–2012). The UN has exercised its convening power to leverage commitments from all major emitters, and it can do this again. High expectations in advance of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 led the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) to depart from tradition and announce significant 2020 targets. They were not obligated to do so by the Convention, which created a “firewall” between industrialized and developing countries, only the former having the requirement to mitigate. Despite the failure to achieve consensus at Copenhagen, these commitments stuck and were enshrined in the official outcome the following year. The US, not a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, joined in committing to reductions.

The 19th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-19) to the UNFCCC took place in Warsaw, Poland (11-22 November, 2013). 194 countries participated in this event. The aim of COP-19 was to prepare for the post-Kyoto commitment period and to discuss other important issues.

The UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw ended on 23 of November 2013. The Conference succeeded in keeping governments on track towards a universal climate agreement in 2015 and including significant new decisions that will cut emissions from deforestation and on loss and damage. Key decisions adopted at this conference include decisions on further advancing the Durban Platform, the Green Climate Fund and Long-Term Finance, the Warsaw Framework for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD) Plus, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage and other decisions.

The COP-19 talks concluded with delegates reaching a compromise on how to fight global warming. They approved a way out for a new global climate treaty to be signed in Paris in 2015. It will replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which set targets for developed countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. Negotiators agreed that all countries should work to curb emissions from burning coal, oil and gas as soon as possible, and ideally, this should be achieved by the first quarter of 2015.

In the context of 2015, countries decided to initiate or intensify domestic preparation for their intended national contributions towards that agreement, which will come into force from 2020. Parties ready to do this will submit clear and transparent plans well in advance of COP-21 in Paris by the first quarter of 2015.

The Conference also decided to establish an international mechanism to provide the most vulnerable populations with better protection against loss and damage caused by extreme weather events and slow onset events, such as rising sea levels.

In addition, governments provided more clarity on mobilizing finance to support developing country actions to curb emissions and adapt to climate change. This includes requesting developed countries to prepare biennial submissions on their updated strategies and approaches for scaling up finance between 2014 and 2020.

The Warsaw meeting also resulted in concrete announcements of forthcoming contributions of public climate finance to support developing nation action, including countries, such as Norway, the UK, the EU, the US, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Sweden, Germany and Finland.

The Green Climate Fund Board will start to commence its initial resource mobilization process as soon as possible, and developed countries were asked for ambitious, timely contributions by COP-20 in December 2015 to enable an effective operationalization of this fund.

The reached agreements included a significant set of decisions on ways to help developing countries reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and the degradation of forests, which account for around one fifth of all human-generated emissions. The Warsaw Framework for REDD Plus is backed by pledges of 280 million dollars financing from the US, Norway and the UK.

Regarding adaptation, a milestone was passed after 48 of the poorest countries of the world finalized a comprehensive set of plans to deal with the inevitable impacts of climate change. With these plans, the poorest countries can better assess the immediate impacts of climate change and what they need in the way of support to become more resilient. Developed countries, including Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, have also paid or pledged over 100 million dollars to add to the Adaptation Fund, which has now started to fund national projects.

The governments completed work on the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), so that it can immediately respond to requests from developing countries for advice and assistance on the transfer of technology. The CTCN is open for business and is encouraging developing countries to set up focal points to accelerate the transfer of technology.

The complexity of international treaties requires significant time and effort to hammer out the details, and so mitigation discussions may well yield significant results by 2015. The effectiveness of a 20-plus year process that functions (or not) depends on the consensus between 194 members, which range from climate problems to climate victims. At the same time, outside the UNFCCC process, there have been countless bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives, such as between the US and China and the G20, and a proliferation of platforms collecting commitments from states/provinces, cities and corporations.

At the center of the negotiations at COP-19, there has been a moral and legal debate surrounding equity: how to balance historical responsibility against current and future

emissions limits. Given limited resources, in order to achieve the goal of the Convention of preventing “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”, there will be inevitable trade-offs between efficiency and equity. The repercussions of this decision could easily become the basis for approaches to other multi-lateral issues and, more broadly, alter the structure of development assistance aid. It is necessary to convince developing countries that the evolving approaches within the UN (“offer-and-review”, voluntary commitments from subnational actors, and the gradual eroding of the 1992 “firewall” between developed and developing countries) are in their best interests.

Valentinas Mazuronis, who is Minister of Environment, also participated at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Warsaw. Minister Mazuronis presented the position of the Member States, represented them during meetings with Secretary-General of the UN, other Ministers and NGO representatives, informed the European Parliament’s delegation about the progress of negotiations and held the press conferences for journalists.

The EU was very active in discussions regarding climate change mitigation by 2020 and the preparation of a global agreement by 2015. The EU also urged countries to cooperate internationally to speed up the goals that are due by 2020, promote more effective energy consumption, develop renewable energy sources, decrease emissions of fluorine gasses, review fossil fuel grants and decrease emissions of greenhouse gasses in the maritime and aviation sectors. At the Conference, the EU delegation focused on the implementation and funding of instruments that were harmonized at previous climate change conferences.