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Renew Kyoto now, UN boss tells parties

By Suleiman Mustapha

United Nations Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon, has urged struggling climate change negotiators at the COP17 talks in Durban to press ahead for solutions because the future of the planet is at stake. He rejected any excuses that the global economic crisis was partially responsible for the delay in setting up an international fund to help countries combat the effects of climate change.



UN Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon, speaking at the COP17 climate change talks in Durban. Pic: Steven Lang

“It would be difficult to overstate the gravity of this moment,” Ban said at the opening of the High Level Forum of the 17th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Durban, South Africa. “Without exaggeration, we can say: the future of our planet is at stake – people’s lives, the health of the global economy, the very survival of some nations.”

The 12-day talks held in terms of the UNFCCC have been hamstrung by sharp divisions over the future of the Kyoto Protocol, the world’s only legally-binding treaty for curbing greenhouse gases blamed for climate change. “I urge you to carefully consider a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, Ban said in clear support of the position held by African and other developing countries. This statement reaffirming the need for a second commitment period drew a spontaneous applause from delegates at the plenary session

“On the now and the immediate, we need to agree on the adoption of a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, as well as the possibility of enhanced mechanisms and to decide on the eligibility for participation in these enhanced mechanisms,” he said.

The Secretary-General said, the link with the funding, technology transfer, mechanisms and networks as well as capacity building for real and tangible adaptation actions must be established. “This will give effect to the agreement that equal priority must be given to adaption and mitigation.”

According to Ban, all parties to the conference need to be assured that adequate and sustainable long term funding will be delivered, and that the implementation of all agreements will continue without any gaps between their implementation periods.

Pointing to economic problems and “abiding political differences” about how to tackle climate change, the UN boss said everyone had to be “realistic” about the chances of a breakthrough in Durban.

He said, “It may be true, as many say: the ultimate goal of a comprehensive and binding climate-change agreement may be beyond our reach, for now.” Yet he emphasised that none of these uncertainties should prevent negotiators from making real progress in Durban.

UPCOMING EVENTS

7 December 2011

11:30

Joint Declaration of Intent between Central African Countries and Donor Partner Countries to Advance REDD+ in the Congo Basin Meridian

13:15

United Nations hosts an open dialogue led by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. Parties to the Convention and UN leaders will have an open exchange on how the UN system is responding to climate change.

14:00

Planting a tree of hope: Soham Baba Mission will plant a Lavender tree as a symbol of a positive tomorrow.



Forest Day vs Fake Forest Day

By Sam Schramski

Images of lush, green trees, full of wildlife, have long been used by environmentalists to portray the plight of the world's forests. These days the periodic table of elements, especially carbon, might be just as emblematic.

Carbon was a central theme of the fifth Forest Day held on Sunday, a COP 17 side event sponsored by an assortment of government and NGO partners. The chemical element has been central in many of the negotiations at this year's COP. This is most evident in the context of "reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation plus" (REDD+), a proposed way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in some of the world's most important ecosystems. There are many REDD+ projects planned, including several in Africa.

REDD+ is controversial as it values the carbon stored in trees in what is known as an ecosystem service, potentially making the commodity accessible to global markets. It is also not fully understood how it would affect farmers and others who rely upon forests for their livelihoods, as World Bank sustainable development vice president, Rachel Kyte, notes in her address to Forest Day attendees.

"If we cannot stop hunger and increase energy, the best laid carbon plans will fail."

Forest Day has featured as a side event at every COP since 2007, when many of the ideas about how to value forests for their ability to combat climate change were first discussed widely. Since then, the event has become a feature of the annual climate change meetings, with a large number of hosting and co-sponsoring organisations. Prominent attendees this year included the high level ministers, governor, and heads of international governmental agencies like the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

This year a Rhodes University senior lecturer in the environmental science department, Dr. Sheona Shackleton, delivered an interactive

presentation on the links between vulnerability, natural resource use and HIV/Aids based on much of her work in the Eastern Cape.

"I'm trying to understand the linkages and feedbacks between ecosystem and human vulnerability, and how we go about preventing potentially reinforcing positive feedbacks from occurring," Shackleton says to an audience of researchers and professionals. "Is there a way to look at human vulnerability and how that might link back to the vulnerability of forests, or ecosystems? Are the stresses on humans also stresses on their environment?"

Shackleton reports that the audience was very receptive, and that the themes of her session fit in very well with much of the issues addressed at Forest Day, including issues of food security, so-called "climate smart" agriculture, and ecosystem service payment options like REDD+.

Forest Day was not the only series of speeches and discussions on Sunday centred around the theme of forests and climate change, however. The so-called "People's Space" at UKZN, where unofficial civil society events will occur until the end of COP, hosted a much smaller "Fake Forest Day" throughout the day as a direct response to the former's perceived emphasis on REDD+ and plantation trees as the solution combatting climate change.

"REDD is nothing more than a massive land grab," intones Wally Menne, a member of the Timberwatch Coalition, an environmental activist group focused on the adverse effects of plantation forests in southern Africa. Referring to REDD+'s proponents and their treatment of forests, he added, "They sell off all the ecosystem services: water, biodiversity, and others. Now that is colonialism!"

Negotiations on the final language for REDD+ will likely continue until December 9, but Forest Day and Fake Forest Day attendees alike have helped keep a complicated and world-changing way of addressing a critical component of the climate change puzzle.

IEA urges political heads to act

By Thobile Hans

International Energy Agency (IEA) executive director Maria van der Hoeven has called on participating states to step up efforts to avert climate change.

The IEA is an autonomous organisation that works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its 28 member countries, including the US and many other European countries, but none from Africa and South America.

Hoeven noted that to do so requires addressing their energy security concerns in a sustainable manner. She described the limited progress that is expected at UN climate talks in Durban as a cause for concern, urging countries not to wait for a comprehensive deal on climate change but rather to act now to meet growing demand for energy with secure, low carbon solution.

The IEA had earlier in November made a call to COP 17 participants to put in place bold policy actions within the next several years, if not, it will be increasingly difficult and costly to meet the goals set at Cancun climate change conference in 2010, including the requirement of limiting temperature increases to two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

"The door to achieving our objectives is rapidly closing, and while I strongly urge an agreement on emissions, I have a simple message for the participants in these talks. Do not wait for a global deal, act now."

"You can and should implement robust global policies that will give your citizens affordable, reliable access to energy in a sustainable way," she added.

Hoeven noted that the IEA has identified many policy tools that countries can use to both enhance their energy security and reduce carbon emissions. Such tools are:

- Standards on energy – using equipment such as cars or electrical appliances
- Cost effective measures to deploy renewables, with care given to their impact on security of supply
- A price of carbon, including through tradable CO2 emissions quotas, used in the EU, Australia, and actively being promoted in China and elsewhere.

Hoeven noted that while industrialised nations have already pledged USD 100 billion per year for low carbon investments in emerging economies, financing remains a key challenge. But the big emerging economies – the so called BRICs that include Brazil, Russia, India and China – can and should implement sound policies that tap domestic funding sources and direct them to low-carbon investments that promote energy security.

Hoeven concluded that the focus has been for years on how energy will affect climate, it is time to begin studying how challenges in climate will affect energy systems and, and by extension, energy security.

We all agree
global warming =

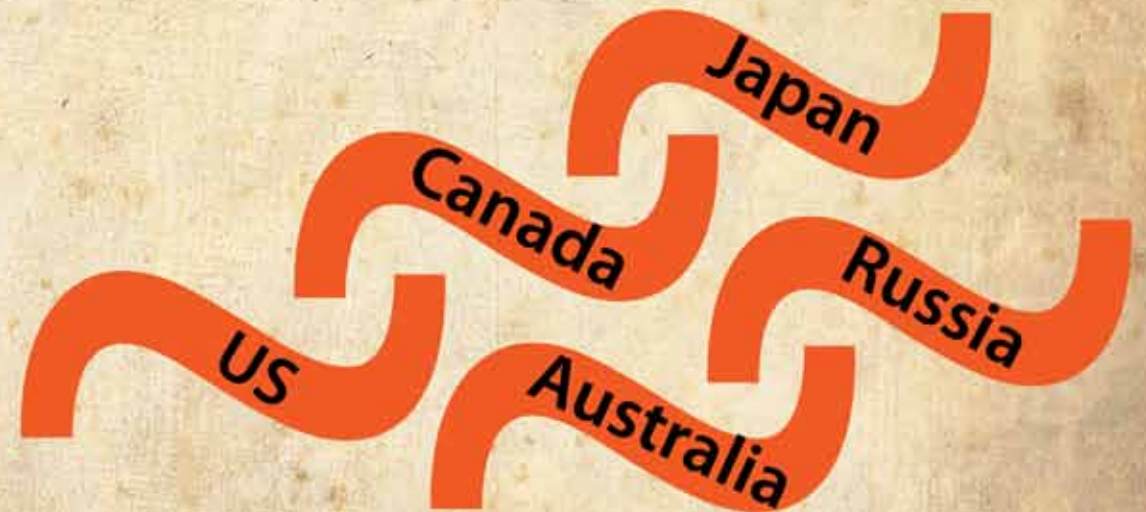
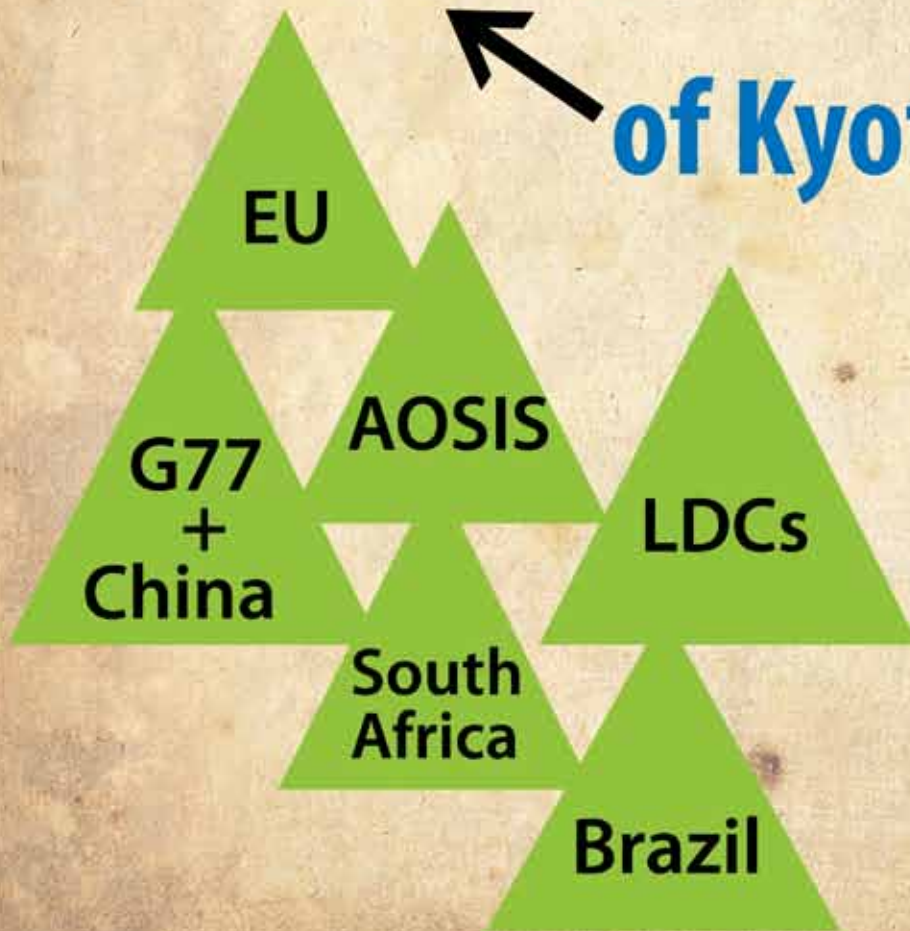


... SO

in favour

of Kyoto Protocol 2

not so sure



En Français

Le Japon se retire du Protocole de Kyoto

Par Mohammed Gueye

Les parlementaires japonais ont annoncé le lundi 5, la mort virtuelle du Protocole de Kyoto. Au cours d'une rencontre de l'Union interparlementaire (Uip), qui regroupe les députés du monde entier, les membres du Parlement du pays du Soleil Levant ont refusé de signer la résolution préparée par leurs collègues, et qui appelait à une prolongation du Protocole de Kyoto. Cette sortie des Japonais a créé un choc auprès de leurs collègues des pays d'Afrique. Pour ces derniers, cette décision des parlementaires japonais remettait en cause toutes les espérances que l'Afrique portait sur les négociations sur le changement climatique. Mais d'autres également ont compris que cette sortie des Nippons n'a pu se faire qu'en concertation avec le gouvernement de leur pays, et tient donc d'une stratégie préparée de longue date.

L'un des parlementaires africains présent à cette session, que se tenait au stade Moses Mabhidia de Durban, le Sénégalais Abdou Sané a estimé que ce geste de ses collègues japonais, portait littéralement un coup de poignard dans le dos des Africains : Ces gens-là ont attendu de venir à Durban, dans un pays africain, pour signer la mort du Protocole de Kyoto. Cela, alors qu'ils savent très bien que ce sont les Africains qui nourrissent le plus d'espérance en ce Protocole. Très remonté, le Parlementaire, à l'instar de ses autres collègues africains, en est venu à se demander pourquoi les Japonais ont attendu de venir dans un pays africain pour prendre une telle décision. C'est comme s'ils avaient décidé d'humilier tout le Continent avec cette décision, a-t-il ajouté. Cela, tout en comprenant que les Japonais réagissent de cette manière tant que les Africains et d'autres pays en développement resteront silencieux sur les engagements en demi-teinte de la Chine, en ce qui concerne les réductions des émissions de gaz à effet de serre.

La société civile africaine pour le respect des engagements financiers

Par Issa Ousseini

La mobilisation de la société civile africaine à cette 17^e Conférence des Nations Unies sur le changement climatique vise comme principal objectif la sauvegarde de la planète dangereusement menacée par les émissions de gaz à effet de serre qui ont actuellement atteint des proportions inquiétantes, déclare l'activiste de la société nigérienne, responsable du Comité national de coordination des ONG et Associations de développement sur la désertification, Salifou Assane.

Depuis que nous sommes là, nous n'avons eu cesse de nous concerter entre acteurs venus de différentes horizons de l'Afrique autour de cette préoccupation, ajoute Assane, qui se dit toutefois sceptique quant à une quelconque évolution de la position des pays industrialisés, qui constituent les grands pollueurs. Si les positions sont restées figées à Copenhague, ce n'est pas parce qu'il y a eu un semblant d'avancées à Cancun, qu'il faut s'attendre à un miracle à Durban, estime-t-il.

Selon lui, le terrain sur lequel la société civile africaine concentre actuellement ses efforts, c'est celui de concrétisation des engagements financiers pris par les pays développés pour aider les pays pauvres à atténuer et à s'adapter aux effets du changement climatique. Nous luttons pour notamment la mise en place du Fonds vert climat et pour faire que tous les programmes environnementaux des pays industrialisés prennent en compte les aspirations et attentes des pays pauvres affectés par le changement climatique. Surtout que dans lesdits pays la jeunesse est

la couche qui paie un lourd tribut des perturbations liées à la dégradation de l'environnement, précise Assane.

Dans ce combat, qui doit normalement fédérer toutes les énergies à travers une vision unique, l'activiste de la société civile nigérienne déplore malheureusement des incohérences dans la démarche des Etats africains. Tout en prétendant défendre la position commune à l'Afrique, certains Etats qui ont atteint un niveau de développement appréciables adoptent à l'occasion de ces négociations des postures qui ne sont pas de nature à conforter la position officielle, constate-t-il, se référant aux pays africains dits émergents.

Dans cette course effrénée pour l'industrialisation, ce sont les pays pauvres qui paient la facture salée, car ce sont leurs population qui sont les plus exposées aux catastrophes naturelles liées au changement climatique comme les sécheresses et les inondations, explique-t-il, soulignant la nécessité de mobiliser et de mettre rapidement à la disposition des pays pauvres les financements annoncés dans le cadre des négociations climatiques.

Seuls ces financements peuvent leur permettre d'initier des actions pour atténuer les effets du changement climatique et mettre en œuvre des stratégies d'adaptation appropriées aux perturbations climatiques et promouvoir leur développement, indique Assane, qui promet une poursuite de la lutte des activistes africains en vue d'emmener les grands pollueurs à respecter leurs engagements.

Le Sénégal mécontent de la Chine

Le Sénégal n'est pas disposé à voir que la situation de la Chine puisse être un élément d'échec pour les négociations de Durban sur les changements climatiques.

Par Mohamed Gueye

Le Premier ministre sénégalais Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye a réaffirmé avec force le mardi 6 déc. 11, à Durban, la volonté de son pays de voir se prolonger le Protocole de Kyoto, et surtout, sa transformation en un engagement ayant des contraintes légales, qui feront que les plus grands pays pollueurs seront obligés de se soumettre à des taux d'émission de gaz à effet de serre chaque fois plus réduits. Ce message, il l'avait délivré lors de la session plénière de la Conférence de Durban, organisée par les Nations Unies dans le cadre des négociations sur les changements climatiques, présidée par le président Sud africain Jacob Zuma, en présence du secrétaire général des Nations Unies Ban Ki Moon, ainsi que d'une dizaine de chefs d'Etats et de gouvernement des pays d'Afrique et du Pacifique, principalement.

Mais le même message, M. Ndiaye a tenu à le rappeler à la trentaine d'experts sénégalais qui ont fait le déplacement de Durban, pour défendre les multiples implications du dossier des changements climatiques pour le Sénégal. Il a rappelé que le Sénégal, qui connaît des très sérieux problèmes d'érosion le long de ses côtes, qui a vu certaines de ses îles, et certaines cités disparaître sous les coups de boutoirs de la mer, ne peut se permettre de rester insensible face aux menaces contre le Protocole de Kyoto.

Et il a demandé à ces experts que, dans le cadre de leurs travaux dans les commissions, ils tiennent le langage de la vérité à leurs homologues, pour faire avancer les choses. Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye dit comprendre que certains pays développés soit offusqués de voir que la Chine se retrouve toujours au sein du Groupe des 77, qui comprend les pays les plus pauvres de la terre, et qui ne sont pas soumis aux mêmes contraintes que les pays riches. Il a notamment déclaré : « Il y a des choses que nous les politiques ne pouvons dire, parce que nous sommes soumis à une réserve diplomatique. Mais vous les experts, dans les commissions, vous devez pousser vos collègues des autres pays à se rendre compte que certaines choses ne doivent pas continuer pour longtemps. Il n'est pas normal de mettre ensemble des pays comme le Sénégal, Kiribati, et le Mali. Nous n'avons pas les mêmes niveau de pollution, et ne pouvons avoir les mêmes responsabilités dans la dégradation de l'atmosphère ».

Le Premier ministre sénégalais a ainsi ajouté que cette question de la Chine ne devrait pas mener les négociations de Durban à un échec, parce que les pays d'Afrique ne sont pas disposés à accepter cela.

Waste pickers clean up

By Mike Loewe

Still thinking about wretched scavengers surviving on the tips? Can that thought.

They have a name: waste pickers, and they exist in their millions in the world.

They are organized into the Global Alliance for Waste Pickers which covers Africa, Asia and Latin America.

And they are at the UN's COP17 climate change conference arguing that their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially methane, should be recognized and supported.

The pickers say they collect, sort and process recyclables, including organic waste – which reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills. They are saving “valuable natural resources”.

At a press briefing at the ICC this week, waste picker leaders from India, Senegal and South Africa spoke out against attempts to privatize their sector.

Their experience with companies is that they retrench and bring in incinerators, both processes impacting badly on the effort to reduce global warming. They have formed a “Global Alliance for Incinerators”.

The global picker alliances are shying away from the UN's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) plan for “waste to energy”, which they fear will again marginalise the pickers and have negative environmental impacts.

One part of their struggle is to be paid for their work, mainly through becoming part of the waste management systems of local governments or municipalities.

And they seek funding directly from the proposed Green Climate Fund.

The pickers were prominent at Saturday's historic Global Action Day in Durban organized by social movements and trade unions. Their banner was large and they sang and danced.

Organisers say they have been active in Durban for a few weeks, and their raised voices and messages are “finally catching on”.



Global Waste Pickers alliance take their place in the Global Action Day march through Durban on Sunday. Pic: Mike Loewe

The alliance says waste pickers play “an indispensable role in the recycling of our waste and can no longer be ignored”.

They argue that the recycling work of the pickers, as opposed to bulldozers crudely closing up landfills, helps prevent methane gas from entering the atmosphere.

The World Meteorological Organisation's latest bulletin describes methane as an even more dangerous gas than CO₂, as it damages the ozone layer.

The pickers are calling for their “integration” into municipal waste systems as “the fairest and most economically and socially feasible way forward” for cities grappling with the task of “decreasing methane emissions and preserving natural resources”.

A documentary, “Delhi Waste Wars” has been shown to mobilise support and awareness at the People's Space, where social movements and labour have gathered on a hill at KwaZulu Natal University overlooking Durban and the UN COP17 conference.

Harouna Niass, from Dakar, Senegal, who heads up the 800-member Book Diomm Waste Pickers Association said members were threatened by CDM-backed landfill gas companies competing to extract methane, who tried to force waste pickers off the landfill.

“Waste pickers should be included and given more respect because we take care of our environment,” Niass said.

Simon Mbata, of the South African Waste Pickers' Association, called for public support in recognition of their positive role in society.

“We demand a Green Climate Fund that is directly accessible to waste pickers and an end of support for CDM projects which compete directly with us,” Mbata said.

See www.globalrec.org

Greenpeace plans to step up its stunts

By Mike Loewe

Greenpeace plans to step up its campaign against alleged corporate interference at COP17.

At a media briefing today, moments after seven activists were arrested for hanging a “Listen to people, not polluters” green banner on a beachfront hotel being used by the Council for Sustainable Business, Greenpeace International head Kumi Naidoo said they were thinking about their next move.

Greenpeace SA chair Ferrial Adams launched an attack on the South African state-owned electricity company, Eskom, adding the parastatal to Greenpeace's “Dirty Dozen in Durban” – a list of the world's 12 worst fossil-fuel polluters. She accused the company of selling energy to “dirty dozen” member BHPBilliton for 350% cheaper than South Africans were paying.

Secret subsidy deals were also in place with South African corporates; 36 SA corporates used 45% of Eskom's power output, while 20 percent of South Africans (12 million people) were “energy impoverished” and had no access to electricity.

Eskom is responsible for 45% of South Africa's greenhouse emissions, helping South Africa rank as the 11th highest emitter in the world.

Adams said Eskom was influential in the South African delegation to COP17, and had already heavily influenced the SA government's 20-year energy plan.

The plan envisioned a transition to renewable energy of a “very low 8%”, according to Greenpeace research.

“We need to have it at 50% by 2030,” she said.

Naidoo said South Africa suffered from a “disconnect” between its role as a champion of the Africa Group, which is calling for the Kyoto Protocol to be extended, and the reality of the country's heavy, and expanding reliance on coal.

South African intends building two more coal-fired power stations, which will be among the eight biggest ever built.

“And the argument about clean coal is not true. It does not exist,” said Adams.

The two leaders spoke of Saturday's diverse march of climate change activist groups and labour as a sign that global warming united all people, but criticized the actions of the “green bombers” – scores of COP17 “volunteers” who arrived in brand new bright green tracksuits and allegedly threw objects at the New Left Front group.

Police stepped in and kept the groups apart.

Adams claimed the volunteers were “paid to disrupt” the march and had links to the ANC Youth League.

The group's youth league affiliation was confirmed to this reporter by their leader during the march.

Greenpeace says the coal industry is spending millions on lobbying, with three “climate denial” lobbyists attached to every US congress member.

While 80% of business is estimated at being positioned in the middle ground, Greenpeace says they are only taking “baby steps” to reduce emissions.

“Science tells us emissions have to peak by 2015 and then must start declining to prevent the world from warming up more than the already frightening trajectory which is heading to two degrees.

“We are running out of time,” Naidoo said.

'We'll be tough with the big boys'

By Suleiman Mustapha

Ghana's Environment and Science Minister, Sherry Ayittey has warned that the 54 African countries at the UN climate change conference in Durban will not be bullied into making concessions to the developed countries at the expense of the African poor. "We have come to Durban with very clear and precise objectives; and that is to negotiate for a second commitment for the Kyoto protocol", she said. "It's a tough negotiation and we are going to be tough, we will not be pushovers" Ayittey stressed at a news conference in the South African port city of Durban.

African Ministers and other developing countries have been fighting for the survival of the Kyoto Protocol in the form of a second commitment period, as the first period ends next year. The minister who is leading the Ghanaian delegation to the Durban conference said developing countries are demanding an ambitious second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, the only legally binding instrument under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Kyoto Protocol signed by most developed nations, excluding the United States, had undertaken a legally binding regime to cut emissions, leaving all developing countries out of it. Delegates at the climate change conference in Durban are struggling to find common grounds to extend it.

Some developed countries including Canada, Russia, Japan and Australia are resisting African demands to move ahead with a second period of commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

China is currently the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, but as a developing country is not yet required to reduce its emissions. As China accounts for around one fifth of the world's population, increases in its emissions could dwarf any cuts made by the industrialised countries. The average Chinese person consumes only

10-15 per cent of the energy of an average US citizen, but with the economy developing at high speed many analysts expect China's per capita emissions to overtake America's by mid-century.

There are attempts by some developed countries to lobby the Africa group to soften their stance and back off the Kyoto Protocol, but Ayittey said there is no backing down on the Kyoto Protocol.

Securing the necessary climate finance forms a critical part of the official African position. "We've heard great things about the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Now some countries want to step back from it. It's unacceptable. They have to walk the talk - we need the finance to cope."

Referring to pledges by developed countries jointly mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020, Ayittey said, "You have to be responsible if you commit to a legally binding instrument. If your country doesn't keep its word, it shouldn't be trusted".

The marathon talks entered their second week on Monday, but there has been no clear indication as to what will happen to the Kyoto Protocol.

Countries have to sign up for another legally binding emissions reduction period if they want to keep the protocol going after 2012.

The African position is that, should a second commitment period be achieved, developed nations should reduce their carbon emissions by at least 40 percent in the period 2013 to 2017 and by at least 95 percent by 2050. She said, "Developed countries have shown us economic leadership, political leadership and sometimes military leadership - and now we want them to show us climate leadership."

Call for review of Clean Development Mechanism

On adaptation and finance, the Minister Africa wanted Durban to agree on a review of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM),



Ghana's Environment and Science Minister, Sherry Ayittey

which she said was currently not effective, with very few states benefiting from it.

The CDM allows a country with an emission-reduction or emission-limitation commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to implement an emission-reduction project in developing countries. Such projects can earn saleable certified emission reduction (CER) credits, each equivalent to one tonne of CO₂, which can be counted towards meeting Kyoto targets.



Todd Stern, head of the United States delegation to the Durban climate change talks. Pic: Steven Lang

US committed to success of COP17

By Rebecca Quaiocoe

The United States says it will cut its carbon emissions by 17 percent by 2020, but it will not sign up for a binding international agreement. It has identified three priority issues that need to be addressed at the COP17/CMP7 talks in Durban in order to get an outcome.

The first priority is to implement the agreements that were reached in Cancun; the second is to draft guidelines ensuring that a transparent system of accountability for the new Green Climate Fund and the third is concerns the Kyoto Protocol, and a potential second commitment period.

Todd Stern, Special Envoy for Climate Change for the US said it is critical that all major players have the same legal standing in order to have a legally binding agreement at COP17.

He said the focus of the Durban meeting is both on what happens to the Kyoto Protocol and on moving ahead with the key elements agreed to in Cancun last year.

"A new climate regime cannot be premised on a 1992

global economic state," Stern said, referring to the year in which the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was signed. The convention does not set mandatory targets, but divides the world into developed and industrialising nations.

He added that the United States supports the progress of the Green Climate Fund but is concerned about the role of the COP regarding the fund. He reminded the gathered media that there are still some underlying principals that need to be ironed out concerning the fund.

He said the US was not comfortable with how the yet-to-be-established Green Climate Fund has been left in the hands of COP rather than under the guidance of an authoritative body.

He said the US was keen on ensuring that the fund was handled successfully in a professional manner. "If we take these steps and start building the new institutions needed for a pragmatic international regime, COP 17 will be a solid success." Stern said.

UN climate talks in a spin, but . . .

By Wisdom Mdzungairi

UN climate talks became decidedly fractious on Tuesday as the rift between developing countries on one hand and the US and its allies on the other, widened amid calls to extend the Kyoto Protocol. Divisions were also distinctly evident over other issues such as the immediate formation of the Green Climate Fund, fast start finance and the drawing up of a Durban Accord.

In an exceptional show of unity, Brazil, South Africa, India and China – said a successful outcome in Durban depended on keeping Kyoto alive with a second round of commitments. Indian Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan supported the Chinese position saying: “The most important issue for us in Durban is that a clear and ratifiable decision on a KP (Kyoto Protocol) second commitment period takes place. This must happen if KP parties are really committed to addressing climate change.”

But, United States played down hopes for a deal with China that, by ensuring the survival of the threatened treaty, would lead to a breakthrough.

Green campaigners seized on this as a chance to remove one of the roadblocks to a deal that would save Kyoto, the only treaty that sets down legally-enforceable curbs on greenhouse gases.

But US chief delegate Todd Stern on Tuesday poured cold water on the Chinese position. “It’s not my impression that there has been any change at all in the Chinese position with respect to a legally-binding agreement,” Stern told a press conference.

He said key details had to be answered in such a pact. “It would have to cover all major parties in a full way, so that it binds with equal force for everybody, unconditionally, (with) no escape hatches in the text,” he said.

The 12-day climate talks are essentially a three-corner wrangle gathering the European Union along with China and the United States, which are the world’s No 1 and 2 emitters.

European Union Commissioner for Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard, fired a broadside in an apparent reference to the US saying: “In some corners, we have heard the argument that we do not need the decisions

on the future here in Durban. It is said that for the next years, we should implement and spend some years thinking.

“(But) Europe believes that the world has had a lot of time to think. What we need is not more thinking. What we need is more action. We would lament if this conference was remembered only for discussions and delay. Europe is ready to deliver. Our legislation is built on Kyoto Protocol. We have a 20% target by 2020. And we are ready to go to 30%, provided others are also ambitious. But Europe only accounts for 11% of the global emissions.”

Hedegaard added: “The Convention and the Kyoto Protocol continue to be the foundation of our regime. We understand others are ready and yet others are not. Even if others are not, we are ready to make a second commitment of the Kyoto Protocol. Now!”

Kyoto is an icon for green campaigners and developing countries, which seize on it as an effective means to tame global warming and show solidarity between rich and poor nations.

But the Protocol’s future is clouded.

The first round of emissions pledges under Kyoto expires next year.

These promises apply only to rich countries, not developing ones, nor do they concern the United States, which boycotted Kyoto in 2001.

As a result, rich Kyoto countries are refusing to sign on for a fresh round of commitments, saying this would be unfair if far bigger emitters get off the hook.

The EU has offered to sign up for a second round of commitments, but only if it secures approval for a “roadmap” leading to a new, legally-binding pact that would encompass the big carbon polluters.

Stern downplayed the significance of “legally binding,” saying it was not the “be all and end all” of solutions for climate change as its defenders suggested.

A study by German scientists released in Durban on Tuesday said these pledges would drive Earth’s average temperatures to increase by 3.5 degrees Celsius, significantly higher than the 2.0 C target set by the UN.



Doomsayers should be put to shame in Durban – Zenawi

By Rebecca Quaiocoe

Parties at the ongoing COP17 are being asked not to look back, but to keep moving forward for a more humanitarian deal despite the diverse views and opinions being expressed at the conference.

“Doomsayers are out in full to prematurely declare the conference dead, but we cannot let this happen”. This was the message from the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi when he spoke on behalf of the African Group at the opening ceremony of the High Level Segment of the climate talks in Durban.

The key objective is to move forward we cannot back track, Zenawi said adding that the Kyoto Protocol was the only deal that can save the world. He is opposed to attempts by some countries to backslide on the Protocol saying that “we cannot move backwards after every achievement”.

He therefore called on the European Union and Canada not to renege on the Protocol even though there might be no answer from Durban, but he urged them to rather help keep the Protocol alive.

Zenawi argued that Africa has constructive suggestions and expectations such as the implementation of the Cancun agreement for the end of the conference.

The Ethiopian leader expressed the continent’s disappointment at the inability of the industrialised nations to put into effect a fast track funding mechanism for developing countries to mitigate climate change as agreed on earlier. He said the Green Climate Fund should be the answer to helping the continent overcome the effects of climate change.

Zenawi said the funding of projects to cope with the consequences of climate change was vitally important to Africans as they were the most affected by its devastating effects.



Indian Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan and chief negotiator for the Chinese delegation, Xie Zhenhua, both support a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol.

Pic: Steven Lang

African sense of style



COP17 is described as the African COP – these pictures show how Africans can do it in style. Pics: Steven Lang



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