

## **Crossroads and the climate change conference at the start of Cancun December 2010**

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The Copenhagen United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) drew to a close on December 18, 2009. This fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) was followed by three inter-session conferences in Bonn. The final and fourth UN FCCC intersession took place in Tianjin, China October 4-9, 2010. The Cancun UN FCCC COP 16 has started its November 29-December 10 negotiations. The journey of the human community in recognizing the realities of climate change and in seeking the requisite actions to avoid its most dangerous effects continues.

The 2009 Copenhagen UN FCCC began with an appeal for the most vulnerable. The opening ceremony focused on the vulnerable and the impact of global warming. Denmark's Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen stated that we are "to come to the aid of those who already suffer." UN FCCC Executive Director Yvo de Boer bracketed his opening remarks with the story of a child who lost her younger brother and parents to the waves and wind of a cyclone. The appeal was to encourage an effective conference outcome by focusing on the most vulnerable among us. However, the conference ended with the collective, eleventh-hour outcome of a non-binding Copenhagen Accord (CA). This accord does not have the status of a COP decision. The CA did state a "should be" intention to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius.<sup>i</sup> It also called for member states to submit projected emissions reduction targets. All analyses of these submitted targets state that they are unlikely to achieve a 2 degree Celsius ceiling and are more than likely to lead to an over 2 degree conclusion.<sup>ii</sup> Should humanity manage to stay below 2 degrees, there would still be significant impacts on the poorest regions of our world. Hence, there is a growing recognition that the effort to keep a global warming ceiling at or below 1.5 degrees is commensurate with actual concern for the most vulnerable.

### **Four crossroads to be traversed for a promising penultimate outcome in Cancun**

**1. The crossroad of a global warming limit.** The 43-nation Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have been consistent in stating the dire necessity of a 1.5 degree or less ceiling to global warming. The CA relegates this temperature target to a late-in-the-day "consideration."

"We call for an assessment of the implementation of this Accord to be completed by 2015, including in light of the Convention's ultimate objective. This would include consideration of strengthening the long-term goal referencing various matters presented by the science, including in relation to temperature rises of 1.5 degrees Celsius."<sup>iii</sup>

If we stabilized atmospheric carbon concentrations below 450 ppm, there may be likelihood that we can keep the temperature increase below 2 degrees C. This is far from a certainty.<sup>iv</sup> The later we stabilize emissions growth, the more uncertain this goal will be. The importance of keeping global warming below 2 degrees and no higher than 1.5 C is best assessed by impact summaries and projected "tipping points" in the earth systems. One recent study indicates that methane hydrates from the oceans release as you get close to 2 degrees. This would constitute

a new state of the system so that you will not be able to go down below 2 degrees for more than a century. There is growing evidence and consensus that a 1.5 degree C ceiling may well be required to avoid the most dangerous effects of climate change. In this, carbon concentrations in the atmosphere would need to be reduced ultimately to 350 ppm.

It must be noted that in a number of analyses the possibility of meeting a +2 degree C target for the global warming ceiling is perceived as a formidable and even as an insurmountable challenge. According to such projections, the prospect of adequate human response is unlikely.<sup>v</sup> Other analyses indicate that adequate human response is possible. Yet we are cautioned that: "If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO<sub>2</sub> will need to be reduced from its current 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm. The largest uncertainty in the target arises from possible changes of non-CO<sub>2</sub> forcings. An initial 350 ppm CO<sub>2</sub> target may be achievable by phasing out coal use except where CO<sub>2</sub> is captured and adopting agricultural and forestry practices that sequester carbon. If the present overshoot of this target CO<sub>2</sub> is not brief, there is a possibility of seeding irreversible catastrophic effects."<sup>vi</sup> The most recent scientific perspectives after Copenhagen states that even under a very stringent level of mitigation action, temperatures will probably exceed 1.5 degrees C for sometime. The subsequent goal would be to return to a 1.5 level thereafter.<sup>vii</sup>

At the second May 31-June 11 UN FCCC Bonn intersession, the Subsidiary Committee on Science and Technology Advice (SBSTA) proposal for a secretariat study on the feasibility of a 1.5 ceiling was opposed by the four Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman. This SBSTA closing plenary ended without reference to the proposed technical paper. However, AOSIS noted that "limited opposition" to the proposal "holds the promise of common consensus."<sup>viii</sup> This AOSIS proposal is now a Cancun focus.

**2. The crossroad of emissions reduction from land use and forestry**<sup>ix</sup> Land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) governs the accounting by industrialized countries or Annex I Parties for emissions and sequestrations in land use and forestry. LULUCF rules, definitions and guidelines are currently being renegotiated for the second 2012-2016 commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol (KP). Various accounting schemes have been and are being proposed that literally would enable countries to arbitrarily choose rules which would allow huge carbon emissions from their logging and forest management sector without requisite accountability. This came to a sharp and clarifying contrast in the October 4-9 Tianjin negotiations. The Tuvalu ambassador proposed a "rolling baseline" for accounting. The first commitment period would be the reference against which emissions in the second commitment period would be measured. The basic reference for the third commitment period would be the second period. Hence, if a country's emissions were greater in the second commitment period compared to its first period, it would be held accountable for these carbon emission increases. In this proposal, all countries would have a historical reference to account for emissions from managed activities in land use and forestry. This proposal was brought to the floor and was vehemently opposed by the EU in Tianjin.

LULUCF negotiations continue in Cancun. Rules must be put in place in order that emissions from cutting forests and damaging wetlands are reduced and natural ecosystems are protected. It is that SIMPLE. Furthermore, as they presently stand, the KP LULUCF provisions do

not contain any obligation to respect indigenous rights. They do not contain any obligation to protect biodiversity. In lands where the only means of development seems to be the selling of forests to investors and logging firms, the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) provisions would best remunerate communities that protect their forests and preserve the sequestered carbon in their natural stands. However, none of this is presently secured in the current negotiations.

**3. The crossroad of sustainable development.** Development is an issue of great importance in the negotiations. There are a number of studies that have put forward pathways for the transition period to reach a new relationship with natural resources. The concept of a “just transition” has been evoked in this regard. However, the climate negotiations are stuck because the negotiators believe in securing as much atmospheric space as possible for their nation’s development. For the “developed” countries emissions reductions are seen as a sacrifice and off-setting credits are sought in lieu of cutting emissions at their source. According to the “developing” countries, the remaining carbon-free atmosphere should rightly be portioned for their developmental needs. None of these strategies attempt “to see emissions the way the atmosphere sees them” nor do they take cognizance of the dire global consequences of “business as usual” carbon intensive growth. The truth is that those countries whether developed or developing which reach the age of renewable energy first will be those who offer their people better lives. Their economies will be based on sources of energy that will renew rather than denigrate the common legacy of the earth’s atmosphere. They will be free from the cost of and dependence on imported fossil fuel. Poverty alleviation and development will be supported by a new paradigm of progress. There are no conflicts over sun, wave and wind energy resources. The Argentina Advanced Aug. 2010 Submission to the Ad hoc Working Group (AWG-KP) Item 3 of the provisional agenda for Tianjin stated it in this manner: “The challenge posed by climate change is at the same time an opportunity for the world as a whole to prepare and move towards a sustainable development path supported by environmentally sound technologies based on renewable resources.”<sup>x</sup>

**4. The crossroad of a viable multilateralism.** The parties at Cancun must strive for consensus over contention. The unsettling uncertainties on which the Copenhagen conference ended found their source in the very viability of the UN FCCC to achieve its mandated outcome. After COP 15, major entities and significant figures looked elsewhere for an effective resolution of the climate change crisis. Hence, the essential multilateral nature of the UNFCCC could be replaced by bilateral agreements and pluri-lateral negotiations. In a BBC March 2010 interview,<sup>xi</sup> Nicholas Stern, author of the 2006 *The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, addressed the disappointing outcome of Copenhagen. He pointed to the failure by developed countries to understand the concerns of the poorer nations. He commented on the process and outcomes of COP 15: “There was less arrogance than in previous years, we have moved beyond the G8 world to the G20 world where more countries are involved...but there was still arrogance and it could have been much better handled by the rich countries.” Stern sees a world in which the G20 holds economic hegemony as a world of wider collaborative and effective action. However, one should ponder that the G20 countries represent 90 percent of the world’s wealth, 80 percent of world trade, and two thirds of the world’s population. It can be argued cogently that it would tend to marginalize the concerns of the most vulnerable in a forum that excludes their presence. Cancun would best reinvest in the multilateral nature of its negotiations by achieving significant and conspicuous consensus.

## The needed “voice of conscience”

The closing remarks of Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN FCCC, at the Forest Day 3 in Copenhagen were most significant. They pointed to the need for a continued articulation and guidance of concerned parties on the issues of climate change in the near future.

His appeal was to those who must continue to be the “conscience” of this on-going process. He indicated that the framework conference attention had shifted away from the “broader issues,” i.e., sustainable development, biodiversity and food security while it concentrated on measurable agenda. He suggested that, while politicians will focus on emission reduction targets, finance, etc.; “other relevant constituencies” should ensure that attention **is not diverted** from issues concerning the “social and environmental integrity” in the architecture of the framework conference outcomes.

“He suggested that, while politicians will focus on targets, finance and MRV; other relevant constituencies should ensure that attention is not diverted from the four building blocks (mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance), capacity building and REDD+, ‘even when the spotlight shifts elsewhere.’ He thus called on Forest Day 3 participants to contribute to ensuring the social and environmental integrity of the architecture of the Copenhagen outcome.”<sup>xii</sup>

Certainly the voice of the Church represents “relevant constituencies” affected by the realities of climate change. This is explicit in the opening paragraph of the October 2010 symposium document: “Climate Change: A Call to Justice”<sup>xiii</sup>

“Our dialogue experience impels us to make this call to justice in the light of the tragic reality of climate change. ...Climate change is a fact already affecting in diverse ways and extent all peoples of the earth, and especially the poor. The scientific community confirms the reality of global warming as seen in sea level rise, rainfall pattern changes, glacier melting in mountains, ice melting in the Arctic and Antarctica, as well as increasing mean temperatures and more occurrences of extreme weather events (storms, heat and cold waves, extended floods, severe droughts, etc.). Green House Gases, mainly carbon emissions from fossil energy (oil, gas, and coal), have warmed the globe by 0.75°C within the last century.”

The thought tradition of the Church holds that creation is revelatory. The symposium document concludes with a confirmation of this belief central to our faith.

“From the very beginning of time Creation has always been a most dramatic sign of transcendent power and providence – of God’s love and presence. We need to recognize the abundant yet finite resources of God’s gratuitous gift. This will help us to live a life of austerity and simplicity. Thus, future generations will receive from the present not a polluted and ruined earth but a habitable and welcoming earth. And they too would delight in contemplating God’s love and providence manifested in His creatures. With affection we invoke the continued protection and guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Spirit, we pray, will renew our mind and the face of the earth.”

The Church uniquely has the capacities to articulate the human tragedies of climate change and to convene ecumenical and inter-religious coherent collaboration in this matter. Hence, we might well consider the Rome: South-South Dialogue Declaration to be the first of many initiatives post Cancun and during the interim before the 2011 UN FCCC in South Africa.

Cancun would best be the penultimate conference to a Durban 2011 concluding conference for the implementation of binding measures that would bring to conclusion the objectives of the Convention and Kyoto Protocol. The voices of conscience need to be heard at the crossroads in this journey of humanity toward ecological resolution.

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<sup>i</sup> “We shall, recognizing the scientific view that the increase in global temperature should be below 2 degrees Celsius, on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development, enhance our long-term cooperative action to combat climate change.” Art. 1, p.5 FCCC/CP/2009/11/Add.1

<sup>ii</sup> Joeri Rogelj, Malte Meinshausen et alia, “Copenhagen Accord pledges are paltry,” *Nature* – Opinion Vol 464/22 April 2010

<sup>iii</sup> <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/11a01.pdf> Also see Art.12, p 7 FCCC/CP/2009/11/Add.1.

<sup>iv</sup> Leon Clarke et alia, “International climate policy architectures: Overview of the EMF 22 International Scenarios,” *Energy Economics* 31 (2009) S64-S81-on-line Oct. 24, 2009. The Stanford University Energy Modeling Forum 22nd Scenario summary on p. S80 states: “...only eight of 14 models were successful in producing scenarios that met the 450 ppmv CO<sub>2</sub>-e target by 2100 due to the large and rapid changes required in energy and related systems to meet this ambitious target. Only two models could produce this climate-action case assuming delayed participation. No model was able to meet the not-to-exceed 450 ppmv CO<sub>2</sub>-e assuming delayed participation.”

<sup>v</sup> “Meeting the 2 degree C Target; From climate objective to emission reduction measures” The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency ISBN 978-90-78645-28-3 This work significantly takes into account the difficulties inherent in carbon capture storage and bios mass in mitigation programs..

<sup>vi</sup> “*Target Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>: Where Should Humanity Aim?*” James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Pushker Kharecha, et alia.

<sup>vii</sup> “Scientific Perspectives after Copenhagen; Information Reference Document, October 2010” by Eric Fee, Daniel J.A. Johansson, Jason Lowe, Philippe Marbaix, Ben Matthews, Malte Meinshausen. This information Reference Document was commissioned by the EU’s Climate Change Science Experts on behalf of EU member states. It is an advisory document which has been written to inform climate change negotiators and policymakers of the most relevant up-to date scientific knowledge on climate change.

<sup>viii</sup> Vol. 12 No. 471 Earth Negotiation Bulletin Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Friday, 11 June 2010 concerning Bonn SUBSIA Report on 10 June 2010.

<sup>ix</sup> Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) accounting as referenced in Articles 3.3, 3.4 and 3.7 of the Kyoto Protocol.

<sup>x</sup> Argentina Advanced Aug. 2010 Submission to the AWG-KP Item 3 of the provisional agenda for Tianjin, 4-9 Oct. 2010, p.5.

<sup>xi</sup> “Copenhagen Climate Summit Undone by ‘Arrogance.’ ” by [Richard.Black](#)

<sup>xii</sup> IISD Forest Day Bulletin, Vol. 148, No.3, Tuesday 15 December 2009, p.8.

<sup>xiii</sup> The 1-2 October Rome: South-South Dialogue Declaration sponsored by Misereor and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.