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21 December 2009

People will be discussing the Copenhagen climate conference for years to come. Opinions will be mixed as to whether it was a step forward or a failure. Only history will tell whether it was a turning point or a tipping point.

From a ringside view from one who was there, the feeling today is of anger and disappointment. The [Copenhagen Accord](#) may well prove to be the Munich Agreement of modern times. An appeasement to major emitting nations that condemned the world to runaway climate change and declared war on our children.

The Copenhagen Accord - the 3-page document to emerge from the UN Climate conference - has dubious legal status and was not adopted, simply 'noted', by the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on 19 December 2009. Its very existence, however, could now risk the architecture established by the UNFCCC to combat global climate change.

A Powerful Non-Agreement

There is much that is wrong with the agreement. It is not legally-binding, contains no mid-term or long-term targets for emissions reductions and critically does not refer to a 'peaking' year for global emissions in order to keep within the 'safe' limit of 2 degrees C of warming (since pre-industrial times).

Neither has it followed the guidance of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that indicates three benchmarks for avoiding dangerous climate change: (1) developed countries must reduce emissions by 25- 40 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels, (2) global emissions must peak and then begin to decline by 2020, and (3) global emissions must decline by 50% by 2050.

The Copenhagen Accord contains a reference to 2 degrees C but does not endorse it. Given that there are no targets, no peaking years, no trajectories for emissions reductions, only vague rhetoric, this is effectively an agreement for business-as-usual.

According to the Accord, countries that sign-on will not be required to adopt nationally-binding targets but invited to submit voluntary numbers. This will effectively convert what was hoped to be a high-ambition, globally-binding international regime into a more laissez-faire, self-determined 'Pledge and Review' system for each country with no international compliance mechanism.

Granted there are some 'wins' in the agreement, in four main areas: short and long-term finance; a review in 2015; transparency in monitoring, reporting and verifying (MRV) actions; and mechanisms on forests (REDD+) and technology. There is some cold comfort here. If the fast-track financing of \$10 billion per year till 2012, and longer term financing of \$100 billion per year by 2020, does materialize, it will come as much-needed adaptation assistance for the

poorest, most vulnerable countries.

But the price paid for the Copenhagen Accord is a heavy one. The lure was the prospect of securing an Energy bill in the US Senate and finally getting US engagement in an international regime. Countries with the most to lose such as small island states, and even the European Union - which now remains the only region locked into legally-binding emissions controls - have given their acquiescence grudgingly for a deal seen as the least worst option on the table.

As a result of the low-ambition nature of the Accord, however, the EU now says that it will not raise its emissions cuts - long held as a bargaining chip - from 20 percent to 30 percent by 2020. An almost immediate chilling effect of the Accord.

Far worse, however, is the fear that if implemented according to the business-as-usual emissions targets announced so far by countries, the Accord will actually set the world on course for a 3 to 4 degree C world.

As this is a global average, the actual temperature rise in many parts of the world will be much higher. As the Sudanese chair of G77/China put it, 2 degrees means 3.5 degrees for Africa and certain death. The small island states have known this for some time which is why they set their threshold for global temperature rise at 1.5 degrees C to ensure "island survival".

Not all of this has made an impression on the major players. The Indian environment minister, for example, was heard saying that their demand for 1.5 degrees to ensure survival would mean switching off all the lights and was "not possible".

An Accord Too Far...

The 'Copenhagen Accord' is a cruel blow, a setback for millions around the world who had put their hope in their leaders to deliver on climate protection. Never before had such a constellation of groups and institutions calling for urgent and decisive action on climate change been assembled - from civil society, faith groups, business, investors, scientists, engineers and professional organizations, to the UN itself which ran an unprecedented 'Seal the Deal' campaign.

Leaders responded to the call and came - but they did not deliver. This is a failure of historic proportions because an 'encore' will be very difficult.

Instead, we have the modern equivalent of the Munich Agreement. In 1938 European powers sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Hitler's aggression thinking this would appease his territorial hunger. The consequences of this gigantic miscalculation became evident with the unfolding horrors of World War II.

In 2009, we are making a similar miscalculation by allowing the major emitters to knowingly sacrifice the poor and vulnerable parts of the world for their 'right to pollute'. The consequences of this act at a time when the implications of rising carbon emissions are well-known is unconscionable in the extreme.

The Copenhagen Accord is little more than 'greenwash' by a group of countries who have put the world on a highway to 4 degrees and 550ppm. The countries who have pushed this through will spin that this is but the first step, when they know full well they have no intention of submitting to legally-binding global reduction targets.

Those in the room of 26 nations that 'sealed the deal' on Friday 18 December say it was India who rejected language from an earlier draft of the Accord calling for a legally-binding

instrument. Germany's acceptance for India's demand to strike the reference to "legally-binding" from the draft signaled the death-knell for any such commitment from developed nations or emerging economies.

India's opposition to any legally-binding commitments coming out of the UNFCCC's two-track approach under the Bali Action Plan - now to be extended into 2010 - continued to be forcefully expressed during the final Plenary in Copenhagen and will influence the outcome of COP16 in Mexico in 2010.

An anemic 'Pledge and Review' system it will be then ...

A New World Order Emerges

What Copenhagen made blindingly clear is how the world has changed. We are in a new geo-political era. Gone are the days of lazy definitions of the world as 'developed' and 'developing'. Nations such as China and India showed that they are the new power players and will act as nakedly in their self-interest as western powers have.

It was their double-act with the US that gave us this agreement - backed up by a pliant if somewhat discomfited Brazil and South Africa - and then bounced on to the rest of the world. So much for the transparency and inclusiveness that these BASIC nations had loudly called for from the Plenary floor. Regrettably they were not the only dissemblers. One found many such instances of public posturing and contrary private action over the course of the two weeks in the Bella Centre.

UN Reform - Creative Action and New Groupings

A key lesson from Copenhagen is that this new world order simply does not map onto the archaic systems and processes of the United Nations. The issue is not the UN per se but its processes and the 'political capture' it suffers from. The UN's bloc politics are now at least a decade out of date and have not permitted the creative emergence of 'coalitions of the ambitious' from across the 'North' and 'South'.

Copenhagen made depressingly clear that - for now - 'political realism' has trumped 'climate realism' and the G2 are incapable of providing global leadership. We will have to look elsewhere for solutions that will help the world turn the corner. The US and China, aided by others, have acted in their short-term political interest thinking they will be able to 'manage' their way out of climate change.

But the climate system is oblivious to the vaunted ambitions of temporal nations and a good kicking is around the corner. The reality is that those who have acted in their 'national self-interest' will find that their actions do not serve their long term interests in a climate- and resource-constrained world. The collateral damage of their decisions, however, will be tragic for those less able to cope - both in their own countries and elsewhere.

The good news is that nothing is stopping the emergence of new players. All we need is leadership. Instead of groupings such as the G77/China which are now dysfunctional and anachronistic, we need new groupings by nations that recognize the perils of climate change and increasingly see their interests aligned around early and decisive collective action to combat it.

Many of these nations - such as Maldives, Bangladesh, Barbados, Costa Rica, Mexico, South Korea, Brazil, European Union and others - are putting their faith in strong de-carbonisation efforts and smart 'green growth' plans. They now need to come forward with their fellow-

travelers from 'North' and 'South' and devise a new politics fit to address the greatest challenge of our times.

In Europe seventy years ago, the key lesson of Munich was that appeasement is not an option. Today our hopes rest on multilateralism to prevent a cabal of nations assembled in elite fora such as the Major Economies Forum and the G20 making climate triage decisions over the rest of the world.

There is a very positive agenda ahead. The post-Copenhagen anger that many are feeling now can perhaps best be channeled into a determination to see a new, more responsible world order emerge. The last two weeks have been deeply disillusioning for many. But we have seen leaders emerge. We must now ensure that those who wish to lead on an equitable and effective climate agenda are not prevented from doing so.

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