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Kyoto Protocol talks resume, after stalling

Barcelona, 4 November (Hira Jhamtani) -- Deep frustrations on the part of developing countries were heightened during the second day of the Barcelona climate change talks because developed countries are dragging their feet in concluding work on their emission reduction commitments beyond 2012. Developed countries are obligated by the Kyoto Protocol to agree on a second commitment period.

The frustrations were expressed when the African Group called for the suspension of all contact group meetings related to the Kyoto Protocol negotiations track, until the group discussing the emission reduction commitments of developed countries (called the “numbers group”) concluded its work on the aggregate and individual numbers. This request was made during the opening plenary of the Ad hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) on Monday, 2 November, and reiterated during one of the contact groups on the same day (*please see TWN Barcelona News Update #2*). The position of Africa was widely supported by developing countries and also from civil society groups who called for solidarity with the African Group.

Only the numbers contact group worked on Monday. The work of the AWG-KP was suspended on Tuesday even though the request of the Africa Group had been for the work on numbers to continue and be accelerated. The issue for the Africa Group was the sequencing of the work of the AWG-KP - for the work on numbers to be completed before time is spent on other issues. The AWG-KP Chair, John Ashe from Antigua and Barbuda, held consultations on the issue throughout Monday and Tuesday on this issue.

At a press conference held on Tuesday, the African Group clarified that they are not blocking the outcome of Copenhagen; rather they want to ensure that something tangible comes out of Copenhagen.

Grace Ukamu of Kenya said the Group was calling on developed countries to take the lead and put numbers on the table. If there is no number, negotiation becomes difficult. “When we ask why they are not willing to put numbers on the table, they said it is economically and politically difficult. But for us it is a question of life and death, due to the climate change impact brought about by the actions and the lifestyles in the North,” she said.

Osman Jarju from Gambia (coordinator for Africa in the AWG-KP), said the position is taken to ensure that the Annex I Parties come up with tangible numbers, particularly those that reflect their domestic efforts for the second and subsequent commitment period. “We are not ready to give them a blank check on mechanisms and other flexibilities until they put forward their individual and aggregate figures,” he stressed.

According to the AWG-KP work program, the aggregate number for emission reduction should have been agreed to at a session in March/April 2009 and the individual numbers in June. “It is now November and there are no figures. We are being taken for a ride. That is why we want to suspend meetings on all other issues until we see tangible numbers that reflect a bigger proportion of domestic efforts,” he explained.

Kamel Djemouai from Algeria (coordinator of the African Group), in response to a question during the press conference, said that developed countries are pledging some figures, but the African Group is asking them to come up with figures as demanded by the science. The emission reduction figures put forward by Annex I Parties are not ambitious enough, and they are estimated by the (UNFCCC) Secretariat to total between 16-23% of 1990 emission levels, by 2020. The lowest figure as contained in the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report is 25% below 1990 levels, by 2020. In addition, the African Group wants to know how much domestic effort is being made to achieve the emission reduction targets (as opposed to offsets from carbon credits generated by developing countries).

In a separate press conference held by the G77 and China, Ambassador Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan said that very little progress has been made in the negotiations (at the AWG-KP and the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperation under the UNFCCC).

“This is not the best preparatory process for a successful negotiation in Copenhagen. The life of the Kyoto Protocol is at risk. Many developed countries are intent on killing the Protocol. They want to walk away and discard the Protocol. They are walking away from their historical responsibility, from finance and technology obligations and from adaptation (support for developing countries),” he emphasised.

The Group also read a statement that it had issued at the last meeting in Bangkok. It said that the Kyoto Protocol is an international and binding treaty that provides figures on emission reduction commitments for Annex I (developed) Parties as a group and individually. It said that the Kyoto Protocol will not expire in 2012. Only the first commitment period is ending in 2012. There shall be subsequent commitment periods. It is a legal obligation of the Kyoto Protocol Parties to enter into a second commitment period. The Copenhagen meeting must come up with figures for the second commitment period. This would be the important outcome from Copenhagen. Failure to do so would signal a failure of commitment by Annex I Parties.

It said that the negotiations on this are very slow and there has been no progress. This is a clear signal that Annex I Parties do not want to negotiate on the second commitment period. Their statements indicate that they want to abandon the Kyoto Protocol altogether and to set up a new agreement.

Such a position has blocked the negotiations, created an atmosphere of distrust and frustration thus leading to the suspension of the contact groups, Ambassador Lumumba said.

[The “expiry” or “end” of the Kyoto Protocol continues even at this stage to be touted. In an interview with Reuters on 2 November Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen was quoted to have said: "Our end goal is an internationally legally binding treaty for when the Kyoto treaty comes to an end in 2012." See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSTRE5A14LZ20091102>]

A plenary of the AWG-KP was convened at 6.30 pm on Tuesday to discuss the issue. The Chair of the AWG-KP, John Ashe said the he held consultations with Parties, in response to the request of the African Group. He said a solution has been arrived at i.e. to allocate 60% of the available slots to the numbers group. Parties agreed to this.

However, developing country Parties reiterated their fears and distrust, while the developed countries were conspicuously silent during this plenary.

Gambia, on behalf of the African Group said it wanted to reaffirm its position on an agreed legally binding outcome on the Kyoto Protocol process in Copenhagen. Its position is in no way intended to block the process, but to have ambitious numbers for emission reductions in accordance with science. It said that Africa considers the current level of ambition unacceptable, and is of the opinion that Annex I Parties (as a group) should reduce emissions by a minimum of 40%.

After consultations, it has agreed to the devotion of 60% of the available time to the contact group on numbers. In addition, all Annex I Parties that have made pledges must indicate what percentage is from domestic efforts, how much through offsets and how much from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF). It warned that failure to achieve results in the discussion tomorrow (i.e. 4 November) will give the Group no option but to request suspension of all other contact groups.

Sudan speaking on behalf of G77 and China said that the solution should not be understood as allocation of 60% time but to concentrate on real issues in order to go forward. The Group encouraged partners to look deeply into the issues. "The idea that we cannot arrive at numbers until Copenhagen is dodging the issue," it said.

China said it shared the legitimate concerns of the African Group. "We are in the final stages of negotiations under the Kyoto Protocol. So it is time to focus on the real core issues of the AWG-KP, i.e. to determine the emission reduction target for after 2012," it said.

It further said the AWG-KP has a very good solution to this issue but hoped that the focus is not only on nominal allocation of slots or timing but to have a substantive discussion and real negotiations and deliberations of quality. It appealed to the negotiating partners to come forward with specific, ambitious numbers, and an ambitious, meaningful and legally binding document from the (contact) group.

Saudi Arabia also expressed solidarity with the African Group position. It said that Africa announced a concern that is shared by developing countries. The 60% time allocation does not mean anything without real progress as far as the number issues are concerned. It hoped that the negotiating partners show their intent to move ahead. Given experience, Saudi Arabia said it is still worried. "Tomorrow (4 November) is the test. At the end of the day, the situation will be reevaluated accordingly," it added.

Bolivia expressed solidarity with the African Group and said the negotiating partners have heard in the past two days the frustration of developing countries that feel that developed countries do not take this issue seriously. There is the frustration about the business as usual situation that does not recognize the need for numbers, frustration on the clarity of numbers, and over the fact that everything will be offsetted and left to the markets. There is no recognition of the historical responsibilities of developed countries. "We need real numbers on the table as soon as possible so we can leave Barcelona with success. There is no excuse for delay, as the discussion on the second commitment period started even before the Bali Action Plan was conceived," it stressed.

Bolivia said it will be monitoring and looking closely at how serious the Annex I Parties are and to see if they bring in commitment on the numbers.

India expressed its solidarity with the Africa Group and said that unless there is a heightened level of ambition on the numbers, consistent with the science, it is afraid that "we have a very bleak future ahead in Copenhagen".

Brazil said that it shared the concerns of the Africa Group and said it will see the progress tomorrow (4 November). It said that it sees this issue as a benchmark for the negotiation as a whole.

Grenada speaking on behalf of AOSIS said it supported the call of G77 and China for a focused, urgent and meaningful response to the issues in the Kyoto Protocol agenda, particularly on the numbers issue.

Indonesia said that the number issues will be the determining success in Barcelona and Copenhagen, and the progress ahead.

In the corridors, developing country Parties continue to express frustrations. They said the African Group has shown a very great flexibility by agreeing to the 60% time slot for the contact group in numbers, as they had originally called for the suspension of all other contact groups until the numbers group completed

its work.

Another developing country delegate said there is distrust as Annex I Parties have not provided the necessary data to determine how much offsets and how much LULUCF will determine the figures for the second commitment period.

The remaining three days will see how the issue of numbers will unfold and affect the negotiations in Barcelona and Copenhagen.