



COP 18: A Vital Meeting without Much Fanfare

"An effective global solution to the climate change crisis involves the negotiation of delicate balances and tradeoffs between a wide range of extremely complex, highly political and sometimes conflicting social, economic and environmental development issues."

Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa

1. Introduction

Many South Africans forgot all about the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Conference of Parties as soon as COP 17 in Durban came to an end in December 2011. However, as they have done for nearly 20 years, the proceedings continued and COP18 was held in Doha, Qatar from 26 November – 7 December 2012. This briefing paper seeks to clarify South Africa's position at the Conference, to discuss some of the global expectations from the Conference, and to communicate some of the decisions taken at COP18.

2. South Africa's Position

South Africa's engagement at COP18 was informed by the outcome of COP17, where the parties agreed to the following three-pronged approach:

- Acknowledging the need for urgent action such as the adoption of a second commitment stage under the Kyoto Protocol¹; a conclusion to the Bali negotiations; and full implementation of the agreed actions and institutional mechanisms under the UNFCCC;
- Under the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, the negotiation of an inclusive, fair, ambitious and binding future legal instrument applicable to all Parties was initiated. It is to come into force no later than 2020;

- The current assurances by countries to lessen their carbon emissions were seen as totally inadequate and do not nearly approach what is required by science. Therefore, South Africa has set up processes to increase levels of climate ambition, particularly for the interval between 2013 and 2020 whereafter the new treaty will take effect.²

Another institutional mechanism that the country believes should be set in full motion is the Green Climate Fund. Going into the 2012 Conference, South Africa was eager for the establishment of an ad-hoc working group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), which would address and increase the goals countries have set for reducing their respective emissions prior to 2020. The first phase of the ADP launch was successfully started during the Bonn mid-year session in June 2012, where the agenda and chairing arrangements were concluded. It was South Africa's view that Doha should have advanced this by agreeing to a plan of work for the ADP.

South Africa was therefore of the view that COP18 would serve as an implementation COP, with Doha trying to activate all the work mandated by the Durban Conference. It was hoped that the implementation of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol would see the finalisation of the legally binding contracts for developed countries willing to be part of the agreement. South Africa views the implementation of this second phase of the Protocol as the cornerstone of the Doha

agreement, it being an arrangement that is manifestly important to South Africa and all developing countries.³

3. Expectations

One of the first things expected from COP18 was the finalisation of how and when the Green Climate Fund, a product of the 2009 Copenhagen COP15 talks, would be financed. This fund is aimed at helping poor countries adapt to the impact of climate change. It was agreed that at least \$100 billion a year would be contributed towards the fund until 2020 and it is planned that less than half of this finance will be in the form of grants, with the remainder being in loans. This makes the Green Climate Fund a highly political matter. An amount of \$30-billion was supposed to be made available between 2010 and 2012 to launch the initiative, but to date all that has happened has been concurrence that it will be headquartered in South Korea. Doha was seen as a vehicle to straighten out the details pertaining to the implementation and operation of the Fund, but the meeting failed to achieve this.

Another central issue in Doha had to do with the individual pledges countries were supposed to make to reduce their emissions. Understanding the expenses and skills involved in leading nations towards sustainable development, it was also anticipated that a network of green centres of excellence would be formed to bring expertise to developing countries to help them progress in a climate friendly manner.

At COP17 in Durban, an agreement called the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action was thrashed out in the early hours of the morning after the conference had ended. The Platform aims to develop a protocol, another legal instrument, or an agreed outcome with legal force applicable to all parties. Through the Platform, the big decision has been made and COP18 was essentially where all the details of this and other things that were left unsettled in Durban would be resolved.⁴

4. Final Outcomes

4.1. Positive Outcomes

- An eight-year second obligation cycle of the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, albeit riddled

with loopholes that allow the use and trading of 'hot air'. Under the Kyoto Protocol, countries were assigned free carbon permits to allow industries to hypothetically trade pollution with less polluting countries. These 'hot air' permits are assigned financial values for trading, resulting in the unwillingness of some countries to reduce their carbon emissions. This carbon trade loophole, now carried into the new agreement, undermines the drive to cut emissions further.

- An international pact was signed to invite gender equality in the negotiations. Although the text is vague, an invitation to include more women at the negotiating table will hopefully be reflected in a more balanced, fair, visionary, wise and understanding approach, with less bullying and indifference to suffering.
- The Kyoto conference aimed for a 5% carbon reduction, but we are now finding consensus at 18%. Even so, current pledges are not enough to guarantee that the temperature rise will stay below 2°C.
- An agreed work programme on loss and damage to help victims of climate change will start immediately, and a decision was reached to establish institutional arrangements at COP19.
- All countries are to begin an eight-year work programme, named the Doha Work Programme, focused on education, training and skills development on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The first review will be in 2016.
- Developed countries were encouraged to provide at least \$10 billion per year towards the Climate Fund between 2013 and 2015. Germany, UK, France, Denmark, Sweden, and the EU Commission pledged to provide \$6 billion annually until 2015. Work programmes on long-term finance were extended by one year, and will identify pathways to mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020. Developed countries are to submit plans at COP19 to raise \$100 billion per year by 2020, and a substantial share of public funds from developed countries is to go to adaptation activities.
- COP 18 saw the birth of the Youth Movement in the Arab region. This new group made a call to the leaders in the Middle Eastern nations to make use of the technology and know-how available to

reduce dangerous carbon pollution, protect vulnerable communities, and grow sustainable, resilient, economies.

4.2. Negative Outcomes

- There is still extraordinary disorder and ambiguity on matters pertaining to climate finance and strategies to ensure a pathway to the target of \$100 billion a year by 2020. The decision asks for submissions from governments on long term finance pathways, and calls for public funds for adaptation, but does not mention a figure, and encourages developed countries to maintain funding at existing levels dependent on their economies.
- Although not an official means to get countries to decrease their respective carbon releases, a call was made for Kyoto Protocol countries to review their emission-reduction targets in line with the 25-40% range by 2014 at the latest. While it could have been stronger, the decision reinforces a clear moral obligation for countries to increase their emission-reduction targets prior to 2020, and provides opportunities for them to do so

- Developed countries failed to agree on a proportionate way to account for their carbon production and release.⁵

5. Conclusion

The world is on an unsustainable path in terms of its global development policies. What we need are funds, targets and effective action. Technological advancements in various areas of our lives can attest that we possess the expertise to turn this state of affairs around and prevent even more environmental damage being done. Superpowers such as the United States of America and China need to come to the fore, taking responsibility for their pollution-based way of doing things. This lifestyle has resulted in the unjust consequence of poor countries having to repay, with interest, the costs of adapting to a problem that they have not caused. Let us hope that COP19, which will be held in November 2013 in Warsaw, Poland, yields better results than the last event.

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¹ An international agreement, linked to the UNFCCC, which sets binding targets for 37 industrialised countries and the European Union for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

² Minister Edna Molewa's National Statement made in the High Level Segment of the UNFCCC COP18 and KYOTO Protocol CMP 7 http://www.environment.gov.za/?q=content/ednamolewas_nationalstatementmade_highlevelsegment_unfcccop18

³ SA: Statement by the Department of Environmental Affairs, on South Africa at Climate Change talks to advance an effective global response to the challenge of climate change for sustainable development (03/12/2012) <http://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-statement-by-the-department-of-environmental-affairs-on-south-at-climate-change-talks-to-advance-effective-global-response-to-sustainable-development-03122012-2012-12-03>

⁴ Kings, S. 'COP18 - Critical but not spectacular', Mail and Guardian - 26 November 2012. <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-11-26-cop-18-critical-but-not-spectacular>

⁵ Germanos, A. 'Climate Fail: Cop18 Ends in 'Betrayal'', *Common Dreams* – 8 December 2012. <https://www.commondreams.org/headline/2012/12/08>

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