UN 'notes' divisive climate deal

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The UN climate talks in Copenhagen 'took note' of a new US-led accord on Saturday after almost 23 hours of heated debate in an extended plenary session. Maruf Mallick reports from the Danish capital

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Dhaka, Dec 19 (bdnews24.com)—The UN climate talks in Copenhagen 'took note' of a new US-led accord on Saturday after almost 23 hours of heated debate in a marathon plenary session.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the 'Copenhagen Accord in as an "essential beginning". But he said the accord must be made legally binding next year.

Bangladesh was among a core group of 25 countries that prepared a draft agreement in the frantic hours of Friday, the deadline for a Copenhagen deal. The controversial draft was pushed past its sticking points late at night by the United States, declaring the 'climate deal' done, after a closed door session with China, India, Brazil and South Africa.

The talks came to the brink of collapse again after Sudan, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia lined up to denounce the accord after Obama and over 100 world leaders left after the summit on Friday.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina said she was satisfied with the final accord.

Giving a lecture at Sweden's Lund University on Saturday, after her departure from Copenhagen, she said: "I am pleased to say that we have been successful in arriving at a reasonable conclusion."

"In COP 15 at Copenhagen, indeed, we came with our own expectations. So had 192 countries of the world with their own separate positions based on their individual, unique environmental problems, conditions, and even domestic political and economic compulsions."

"An agreement has been agreed upon taking in most of all our concerns. There are certain areas that would be finalised in the coming days."

The UN and key powers also viewed the final acknowledgment of the 'Copenhagen Accord' on Saturday as avoiding complete failure at the Dec 7-18 conference that was meant to seal a firm climate deal to combat global warming.

DISAPPOINTING

Many observers saw the accord as a "weak" and "watered down" compromise at best, and at worst a reflection of irresolvable disputes "dressed up as a deal".

The accord disappointed on several points, including putting off tough decisions until 2010 or even later.

It sets only a vague target of limiting global warming to a maximum 2 degree Celsius rise over pre-industrial times and holds out the prospect of $100 billion in annual aid from 2020 for developing nations.

The accord is not legally binding and does not specify greenhouse gas cuts needed to achieve the 2 Celsius goal that is seen as a threshold for dangerous changes such as more floods, droughts, mudslides, sandstorms and rising seas. Nor does it detail where the climate aid will come from.

"The conference of the parties takes note of the Copenhagen Accord," said the final decision at the 193-nation talks on Saturday.

But the conference stopped far from a full endorsement of the plan as UN talks are meant to operate by consensus and several countries had spoken against the plan.

The 'note' will list the countries that were in favour of the deal and those against.

The Bangladesh representative state minister for environment Dr Hasan Mahmud told a press conference: "Several countries including Bangladesh recommended its acceptance as a note."

UN CHIEF SEES 'DEAL SEALED'

Despite the conference merely taking note of the accord, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pronounced a deal "sealed".

"Finally we sealed a deal … The 'Copenhagen Accord' may not be everything everyone had hoped for, but this decision...is an important beginning."

'FURTHER TO GO'

Before leaving Copenhagen, Obama said the deal, which holds out the prospect of an annual $100 billion in aid for developing nations by 2020, was a starting point for world efforts to slow climate change.

"This progress did not come easily and we know this progress alone is not enough," he said after talks

with China's Premier Wen Jiabao and leaders of India, South Africa and Brazil.

"We've come a long way but we have much further to go," he said of the deal, meant to prevent more heatwaves, floods, wildfires, mudslides and rising ocean levels.

China, the world's largest emitter, expressed satisfaction with the deal. "The meeting has had a positive result, everyone should be happy," said Xie Zhenhua, head of China's climate delegation.

China had resisted international monitoring of its emissions curbs and the final wording took into account Chinese concerns, speaking of the need to "protect sovereignty".

Most delegates and observers saw the deadlock between the world's two top emitters China and US as the cause for the eventual weakness of the accord.

European nations were lukewarm about the pact. They wanted Obama to offer deeper US cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

'UNACCEPTABLE'

A number of developing nations, island states and emerging economies spoke out vehemently against the accord, saying it was undemocratically "imposed" and negates two years of work.

Lumumba Di-Aping, the Sudanese negotiator for the group of 132 developing countries known as G77, said the pact would lock developing countries and the poor of developing countries "into a cycle of poverty for ever".

He said the deal, with the lowest level of ambition in terms of temperature and emission reduction targets, would result in massive devastation in Africa and small island states.

He also called the outcome of the UN climate talks "a gross violation" of the tradition of the United Nations. "Because 28 countries decided on behalf of the rest."

"What has happened confirms what we have been suspicious of, that a deal would be superimposed by United States."

Other delegates said it could not become a UN blueprint for fighting global warming.

"I regret to inform you that Tuvalu cannot accept this document," said Ian Fry of the low-lying Pacific island state that fears rising sea levels.

At an extra night session in Copenhagen after most leaders left, he said that the goal for limiting global warming to a maximum rise of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times was too lax.

Delegates of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua also angrily denounced the accord, saying it would not help address global warming and was unfairly worked out behind closed doors.

Earlier, European Union nations reluctantly agreed to sign up for the accord meant as the first UN climate pact since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Even backers of the accord conceded it was imperfect and fell far short of UN ambitions for the Copenhagen talks, meant as a turning point to prevent irreversible climate change and push the world economy toward renewable energy and away from fossil fuels.

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