Climate change conference: Here is China's stand

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THE UN CLIMATE CHANGE conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, on December 7-19. During the last two days, 119 heads of state or government attended.

Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council of China attended the conference on behalf of the Chinese Government.

The press has made all kinds of comments on the outcome of the conference. We believe it is fair to say that thanks to the efforts of all parties, the conference produced important outcomes.

Firstly, it firmly upheld the framework and the host of principles established by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, particularly the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities".

Secondly, it was because of this conference that both developed and developing countries set out some targets and took new actions to address climate change.

Developed countries set out mandatory emission reduction targets as required by the Kyoto Protocol. Developing countries put forward voluntary mitigation actions. These commitments are part of the Copenhagen Accord.

THIRDLY, THERE ARE MAJOR ISSUES in climate change negotiations, including global long-term targets, financing, technology transfer and transparency. It is fair to say that parties are deeply divided on these issues.

After negotiations before the conference and with leaders' meetings and good offices during the conference, an initial consensus was reached on these issues. This is a very important outcome.

Take global long-term targets, for example. It was agreed that global temperature should not rise by more than 2°C by 2050. In terms of financing, the Accord provides for the establishment of a mechanism in which developed countries should provide funding to developing countries.

Developed countries have already committed to a target, namely, providing $10 billion a year up to 2012, which will total $30 billion. They have also pledged to mobilise $100 billion a year by 2020.

Though the numbers are not significant, and in China's view are not enough, they do mark a step forward. It was also agreed that a mechanism should be set up for technology transfer.

As for transparency, the emission reduction targets set by developed countries are mandatory and should be "measurable, reportable and verifiable" (MRV). Financial and technological support should also be subject to "MRV".

For developing countries, their mitigation actions can be divided into two categories. International "MRV" is only required for actions launched with international financial and technical support, not for the voluntary actions taken by developing countries with their own resources.

However, to increase openness, the issue of greater transparency was also discussed, this time for the mitigation actions taken by developing countries without international support.

A fairly good proposal was put forward: Countries will report their respective actions and then there will be a process of international consultations and analysis.

The Copenhagen conference should be viewed as just one stop in the journey of the international community to tackle climate change. Though we have come this far and produced some outcomes, we should go still further. This is a new beginning. We will keep moving forward.

It is fair to say that China made important contribution to strengthening international co-operation on climate change at Copenhagen, and displayed the image of a responsible big country committed to development and co-operation.

Developing and developed countries differ greatly in historical emission responsibilities and current emission levels. They are also different in terms of national circumstances and stage of development. It is, therefore, only natural that they shoulder different obligations in the campaign against climate change.

In the past few years, there has occurred a tendency to play down differentiated responsibilities while highlighting common responsibilities, and to exert pressure on major emerging countries while trying to cajole poor nations and small island states.

In his address at the conference, Premier Wen highlighted the following principles that all should observe in addressing climate change: First, maintain the consistency of outcomes. The outcome of the conference must stick to the basic principles enshrined in the Protocol.

SECOND, UPHOLD THE FAIRNESS OF rules. The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” represents the bedrock of international co-operation on climate change, and it must never be compromised.

Developed countries must take the lead in making deep mission cuts and provide financial and technological support to developing countries.

Developing countries should, with the financial and technological support of developed countries, do what they can to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change in the light of their national conditions.

Third, pay attention to the practicality of the targets. In tackling climate change, we need to take a long-term perspective, but more importantly, we should focus on the present.

We should focus on achieving near-term and mid-term reduction targets, honouring the commitments already made, and taking real action.

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