Expectations not met in Copenhagen

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by Egline Tauya – *SANF 09 No 03*

Expectations for southern Africa and the rest of the continent were not met at the recent United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference at Copenhagen.

The conference ended without a legally binding agreement but a political agreement termed the Copenhagen Accord.

Southern Africa expressed dissatisfaction with the contents of the Accord as expectations were not met especially regarding binding emission targets and binding financial contributions to tackle the impacts of climate change due to rise in global average temperatures.

While the Accord states that developed countries committed themselves to jointly mobilize US$100 billion a year by 2020 and an additional US$30 billion for the period 2010-12, for adaptation and mitigation in vulnerable countries, this fell far short of the Africa's expectations.

Africa favoured an approach in which developing countries will be beneficiaries of technology transfer, capacity building and funding to the tune of US$200 billion a year by 2020.

The Accord makes reference to 50 percent reduction of emissions by developed countries by 2050 compared to 1990 levels with no immediate 2020 commitments.

"It does not give legally binding commitments for industrialized countries and has no mid term targets," said the Zambian Environment Minister Cathrine Namugala

Africa and the rest of developing countries wanted the rich nations to cut emissions to at least 40 percent below the 1990 levels by 2020.

Africa also wanted deeper cuts by developed countries to reach at least 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

While the Accord recognizes the need to keep global temperature rises below 2 degrees, Africa say new climate studies show the dangers are even greater than thought just a few years ago.

Increased rate of melting glaciers including that are on Mount Kilimanjaro, faster than recorded by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), provides evidence to this effect. As such Africa argues global temperature rises should be kept below 1.5 degrees.

The recognition also falls short of providing a credible pathway for reaching the objective. Instead the Accord inserts domestic pledges on emissions to be submitted by end of January 2010.

In an attempt to appease the demands of the poorest nations and small island states, the Accord which will be reviewed in 2016 would include possible strengthening of the long-term goal to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees

The draft Accord also commits developing countries to emission reductions, but only in the context of future development. These countries would have to report on their emissions cuts every two years.

"The developed countries will give percentage of emission reduction while developing countries will give nationally appropriate mitigation action. By February we will have fair idea what countries are willing to commit," remarked IPCC chairman Rajendra Pachauri.

He also said action will be taken soon after to use these submissions as a basis for creating a legally binding agreement within a reasonable period of time.

While the Accord is voluntary there is an incentive that might encourage many developing nations to join as it promises funding to help poor nations deal with climate change.

Dr Batilda Burian from the United Republic of Tanzania said the conference reached promising stages and has laid a good foundation for the climate summit which will be held in Mexico in December 2010, although it failed to agree on most of the African recommendations.

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Burian said that, apart from the money, African countries requested that they should be empowered technologically so that they could effectively deal with the effects of climate change, but nothing was agreed upon.

While South Africa together with India, Brazil, China and USA contributed in drafting the Accord, Alf Wills, South Africa's negotiator said the resulting agreement was limited not only in terms of what it did to save the planet, but in the number of nations that accepted it, saying it did not extend beyond the 28 represented at the late-night negotiations.

He however said the Accord did have positive elements that can be built upon at the next round of talks.

Wills pointed to agreements on how the U.S. and other developed countries will record emission reduction targets, and on how emission reduction action by advanced developing countries like South Africa would be accounted for.

Meanwhile, South Africa is negotiating to reduce its emissions by 34-42 percent by 2020, depending on the amount of aid given.

The draft also recognized the need to provide funds to save forests as carbon sinks and to create market mechanisms – a reference to carbon trading systems – to promote emissions reductions.

This commitment was confirmed by the formation of Copenhagen Climate Change Fund which would sponsor environmental projects like those for reforestation.

The Accord states that only developing countries that accept financial support for their reduction projects have to accept international monitoring and verification of their reductions.

While the outcomes were not satisfactory, some delegates to the conference say outright failure to agree anything at all would have been very much worse.

The Parties agreed to "take note" of the Accord rather than formally adopt it and resolved to meet again in Bonn, Germany, around June for a preliminary meeting as a build up to COP 16 to be hosted by Mexico in December 2010.

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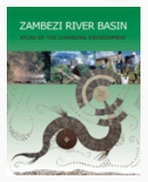

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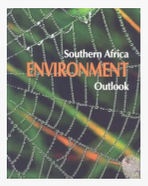

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