Climate talks failed, says SA minister

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PRETORIA, Tuesday

South African negotiators said today the outcome of the Copenhagen climate talks was disappointing and unacceptable, largely due to a flawed process that damaged trust among delegations.

Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, minister of environmental affairs, told reporters her government had considered walking out of the meeting but decided against it after consulting other African countries.

“We are not defending this, as I have indicated, for us it is not acceptable, it is definitely not acceptable,” she said after returning from Copenhagen.

“Our president consulted … and the feeling by Africa was it was not a good idea to walk out.”

Not legally binding

The United Nations summit ended with an underwhelming, and not legally binding, agreement on Saturday that set a target of limiting global warming to a maximum of 2 degrees celsius over pre-industrial times.

South Africa was one of the emerging powers that helped pen the accord.

The world's 12th biggest emitter, dependent on coal for 90 per cent of its electricity needs, South Africa had pledged before the meeting to slow the growth of its greenhouse gas emissions by 34 percent below projected levels by 2020, conditional on a broader international agreement.

Ms Sonjica said walking out of the meeting could have led to an even more disappointing outcome.

Direct involvement by South Africa's President Jacob Zuma and other world leaders had meant that political agreement on many issues had been reached, but not all.

"In Copenhagen, parties were still too far apart, and too involved with process rather than substance, to reach a formal negotiating process," Sonjica said, criticising "some ill-restrained interventions" and poor decisions by organisers.

South Africa's chief negotiator Alf Wills also said Danish conference hosts had "destroyed the trust" of delegates by introducing a draft text which he said was unacceptable.

South Africa said the level of ambition of developed countries' targets to cut emissions remained too low.

"Certainly, it was not the breakthrough that the world expected and the climate needed," Ms Sonjica said.

"But with some key issues resolved among world leaders represented (it) should help move forward." (Reuters)