Bolivia creates a new opportunity for climate talks that failed at Copenhagen

Bolivia will host an international meeting on climate change next month because it is not prepared to 'betray its people'

Pablo Solón Romero

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In the aftermath of the Copenhagen climate conference, those who defended the widely condemned outcome tended to talk about it as a "step in the right direction". This was always a tendentious argument, given that tackling climate change can not be addressed by half measures. We can't make compromises with nature.

Bolivia, however, believed that Copenhagen marked a backwards step, undoing the work built on since the climate talks in Kyoto. That is why, against strong pressure from industrialised countries, we and other developing nations refused to sign the Copenhagen accord and why we are hosting an international meeting on climate change next month. In the words of the Tuvalu negotiator, we were not prepared to "betray our people for 30 pieces of silver".

Our position was strongly criticised by several industrialised countries, who did their brazen best to blame the victims of climate change for their own unwillingness to act. However,

recent communications by the European Commission have confirmed why we were right to oppose the Copenhagen accord.

In a report called International climate policy post-Copenhagen (pdf), the commission confirmed that the pledges by developed countries are equal to between 13.2% and 17.8% in emissions reductions by 2020 - far below the required 40%-plus reductions needed to keep global temperature rise to less than 2C degrees.

The situation is even worse once you take into account what are called "banking of surplus emission budgets" and "accounting rules for land use, land use change and forestry". The Copenhagen accord would actually allow for an increase in developed country emissions of 2.6% above 1990 levels. This is hardly a forward step.

This is not just about gravely inadequate commitments, it is also about process. Whereas before, under the Kyoto protocol, developed countries were legally bound to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a certain percentage, now countries can submit whatever targets they want without a binding commitment.

This dangerous approach to climate negotiations is like building a dam where everyone contributes as many bricks as they want regardless of whether it stops the river.

The Copenhagen accord opens the dam and condemns millions. Various estimates suggest that the commitments made under the accord would lead to increases of between three to four degrees celsius - a level that many scientists consider disastrous for human life and our ecosystems.

For Bolivia, the disastrous outcome of Copenhagen was further proof that climate change is not the central issue in negotiations. For rich countries, the key issues in negotiations were finance, carbon markets, competitiveness of countries and corporations, business opportunities along with discussions about the political makeup of the US Senate. There was surprisingly little focus on effective solutions for reducing carbon emissions.

President Evo Morales of Bolivia observed that the best way to put climate change solutions at the heart of the talks was to involve the people. In contrast to much of the official talks, the hundreds of civil society organisations, communities, scientists and faith leaders present in Copenhagen clearly prioritised the search for effective, just solutions to climate change against narrow economic interests.

To advance an agenda based on effective just solutions, Bolivia is therefore hosting a Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth on 19-22 April, and inviting everyone to participate. Unlike Copenhagen, there will be no secret discussions behind closed doors. Moreover the debate and proposals will be led by communities on the frontlines of climate change and by organisations and individuals dedicated to tackling the climate crisis. All 192 governments in the UN have also been invited to attend and encouraged to listen to the voices of civil society and together develop common proposals.

We hope that this unique format will help shift power back to the people, which is where it needs to be on this critical issue for all humanity. We don't expect agreement on everything, but at least we can start to discuss openly and sincerely in a way that didn't happen in Copenhagen.

• Pablo Solón is Ambassador to the UN for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. He is a sociologist and economist, was active in Bolivia's social movements before entering government, and is an expert on issues of trade, integration, natural resources and water.

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