

THE COPENHAGEN CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT (I)

By Frederick Baffour Opoku

The impending United Nations Climate Change Summit, the 15th Conference of Parties (COP 15) to be hosted by Denmark in Copenhagen in December will be a significant move to fashion out a global response to the threat and challenges of climate change caused mostly by human actions.

Dubbed Copenhagen 2009, it is under auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The UNFCCC, the first international measure to address climate change, was adopted in May 1992 and came into force in March 1994. So far 189 governments - almost all governments in the world have ratified it. The convention's goals are to stabilize Green House Gas (GHG) emissions at a level that prevents dangerous human interference with climate system.

By differentiating between industrialized and developing countries, the UNFCCC recognizes that industrialized countries are responsible for most of the current build up of GHG in the atmosphere and should therefore lead in reducing emissions. The UNFCCC countries that constitute the Conference of Parties (COP) take the highest decision and meet every year to review progress and discuss further measures.

Climate negotiations in Copenhagen will centre round scientific input contained in the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program.

The panel brings together a group of experts working to understand climate change – its potential impacts and options to tackle it. The group produces up – to – date assessment reports on climate change. The fourth report was published in 2007, and has been a key factor for raising public and political awareness of societal risks which comes with unchecked emissions of Green House Gases (GHG)

The earth gets its heat straight from the sun but some of it gets reflected back into space. Fortunately certain gases in the atmosphere act as a greenhouse, keeping the heat in. The gases which cause this effect are known as GHG. The main GHG coming from human activities are carbon dioxide (CO₂), but others include methane, and nitrous oxide. As the atmospheric concentrations of these gases increase, more solar energy is trapped like a blanket, over the earth and as a result, temperatures on earth are rising.

The Kyoto Protocol:

When they adopted the UNFCCC, governments knew that the commitments would not be sufficient to seriously tackle climate change. In December 1997, they took a further step by adopting a protocol to the UNFCCC in the Japanese city of Kyoto: the Kyoto Protocol.

The protocol did not become international law until 2004. As of February 2007, 168 countries have rectified the treaty with the United States and Australia as notable exceptions. Under

Kyoto, industrialized nations agree to cut their CO₂ emissions by a certain percentage, but developing countries are excluded from binding targets for reducing emissions.

The Kyoto Protocol sets GHG reduction targets for industrialized nations and an international frame work for addressing global warming through international cooperation.

The protocol makes it clear that the industrialized countries, otherwise referred to as Annex 1 countries, are responsible for global warming and hence are also responsible for reducing GHG emissions while developing countries (non – Annex 1 or Annex 2 countries) are not responsible for global warming and therefore not responsible for reducing GHG.

Annex 1 target:

Binding target for the 37 industrialized countries and the European Community for reducing GHG emissions enjoin them to do an average of 5.2 percent below 30 percent 1990 levels and over the five year Kyoto period 2008 – 2012.

Annex 2 commitments:

But where as the industrialized countries are obliged to reducing GHG emissions at 1990 levels, the Kyoto Protocol states that the Annex 2 or developing countries, should be provided financial resources to assist such countries to implement projects designed to help them adapt to climate change.

Adaptation as a response to climate change involves changing our lifestyles and infrastructure to cope with the effects of climate change; For example, a coastal community might adapt by building up sea defences, whereas a farming community might need to adapt by growing different types of crops as seasons change.

However, there have been unilateral efforts by countries such as China, India, and Brail, to reduce emissions.

However, the industrialized countries have a common position that developing countries, especially the richest and large such as India, China, Singapore, South Korea and the OPEC countries are potential emitters of CO₂ and must be brought on board negotiations and have binding targets set for them in a new agreement.

Copenhagen agenda:

Any new agreement on emissions reduction at the Copenhagen summit will replace the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol which runs until 2012. The commitment period under such an agreement will run from 2010 – 2020.

Agreement:

Copenhagen 2009 is expected to produce a three phase agreement:

* Determine international targets on emissions reduction, establish developed countries caps, and set developing countries responsibilities.

* 2010 – 2020:

Build an effective and cooperative institution on carbon financing and technology as a basis for establishing developing countries caps. (Cap is how much pollution in total allowed (for a region). Those who exceed the cap are penalized for their excess pollution while still trying to bring pollution rates down).

* Post 2020:

That all countries form part of an international cap – and – trade system and adhere to technological agreements.

Four Key Issues:

Copenhagen 2009 will also focus on four main issues:

* Establish ambitious emissions reduction targets that industrialized countries will commit to

* Agree to clear national mitigation (activities which try to reduce the amount of GHG emitted into the atmosphere such as energy efficiency which reduces the amount of fossil fuels needing to be burnt and renewable energy which creates energy through methods which don't produce GHG), that developing countries could undertake

* Define stable and predictable financing to help the developing countries to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change

* Identify institutions that will allow technology and finance to be deployed in such a way that treat the developing countries as equal partners in the decision making process.

What will COP 15 look like?

The two principal negotiation tracts proposed at the Bali climate change summit which will be at work during the Copenhagen UN climate summit are the Ad hoc Working Group on commitments for Annex 1 parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG KP) and the Ad hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperation Action under the Convention (AWG LC)

There will be two negotiating texts with many issues amidst complicated wording, and one and a weeks of bureaucratic negotiations, issues falling off the table or being compromised, three to four days of a ministerial segment and perhaps with heads of states in attendance, there will be three to four days of adaptation financing issues to be taken out of text and given additional meanings and features, the summit will try to deal with a lot of unresolved issues.

The expected outcome may result in a ministerial statement, adopted negotiation texts and agreement, a lot of postponed issues, a lot of deleted issues or a complete collapse, as the skeptics' believe.

The Actors:

The developed countries (United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, Russia, etc and the European Union), **developing countries** (the richest developing countries, large developing countries, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and vulnerable countries (Least developing countries). The other actors are non – governmental organizations, business and indigenous people.