

Too few Bhutan delegates in int'l climate change dialogues (edited)

Dipika Chhetri, Bhutan Today

Bhutan is actively participating in all international climate change negotiations, but the number of delegates who attend these meetings is very low, which may result in Bhutan not having enough say in many issues that concern us.

Only two delegates are currently participating in international negotiations because the government cannot fund sufficient number of delegates, according to National Environment Commission director Sonam Yangley.

Bhutan signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Rio Earth Summit in 1992, which the National Assembly ratified in 1995. Bhutan became a signatory of the Kyoto Protocol under the UNFCCC in 2002.

These documents recognise that climate change is a threat to human life, and that it is caused by human activity, which is resulting in increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other 'greenhouse gases' (GHGs), leading to global warming.

While the focus has been on controlling emissions of GHGs, the convention recognises the "principle of common but differentiated responsibilities," in which parties with historically high emissions are to pilot the reduction of emissions. These are industrialised countries known as Annex I Parties. Bhutan comes under the Non-Annex I Parties, being a developing country.

During negotiations, regional or economic status groupings are formed which enables countries with common issues to gain strength on common concerns. Bhutan associates itself in the Asian Region in regional grouping, the Group of 77 and China (G77 & China) in the economic grouping and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for specific interest issues.

LDCs are the most vulnerable to climate change problems, along with Small Island Nations. Bhutan does not contribute to the global emissions, as our per capita emission is, in fact, negative, due to the carbon absorbing capacity of our large forest cover.

But, as studies by NEC have pointed out, Bhutan is vulnerable to consequences of climate change, due to our fast melting glaciers, which pose an ever-present threat of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and water scarcity, which in turn affect our largest economic activity- hydropower, and our largest occupation- agriculture.

This is why, according to Sonam Yangley, Bhutan needs to play an active role in the ongoing multilateral negotiations under the UNFCCC. The aim is to ensure that forthcoming COP15 (the 15th Conference of

Parties) to be held in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, reaches an ambitious, but also an equitable agreement.

After the last COP meeting, which was held in Poznan, Poland, a series of technical level negotiations have been held to frame the negotiation text, and to negotiate issues to be agreed upon by all parties in Copenhagen in December.

Two Adhoc Working Groups (AWGs) have been working on Kyoto Protocol and long term action, and Bhutan has attended all the 14 meetings held after COP 13 in Bali, Indonesia, on UNFCCC funding. Two delegates are presently attending a meeting in Bonn, Germany. Two more meetings will take place in October and November this year before the COP 15, in Bangkok and Barcelona (Spain).

There are around 10 issues that are of particular interest to Bhutan, but due to the small size of the delegation, the delegates will have to prioritise issues of interest and narrow down the list to four issues: LDC matters, Clean Development Mechanisms, forestry issues including Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and adaptation to adverse impacts of climate change, according to the director.

NEC is presently coordinating with donor agencies like DANIDA and UNDP to support a minimum of four more delegates in informal, intersessional and AWG meetings before COP 15, in order to ensure that issues that are of interest to Bhutan are not left out of the negotiation text, Sonam Yangle said.