

DURBAN CLIMATE TALKS: MIND THE GAP

In November 2011, almost 200 governments will meet in Durban, South Africa, to negotiate the next critical steps in tackling the effects of climate change. Christian Aid believes they must overcome the political obstacles that have hindered past climate negotiations, and cut a deal that prevents dangerous climate change, while supporting poorer countries to adapt and develop cleanly.

The 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be a defining opportunity for world leaders to put binding outcomes in place that deliver vital, ambitious and achievable action, which supports the world's poorest people.

The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires at the end of 2012.¹ That leaves just over a year in which to negotiate and ratify a second commitment period to deliver the level of emission reductions that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says are urgently needed.²

With inadequate pledges currently in place regarding carbon emissions cuts and climate finance – and certain countries calling for a voluntary 'pledge-and-review' system, instead of a more stringent deal – there is a risk that negotiations might not only fail to deliver, but also set the process even further back.

Meanwhile, the world's poorest people, who live on the frontline of climate change, need to adapt to its inevitable impacts and tackle energy poverty. They require financial and technological support and capacity-building to increase their resilience to the effects of climate change, while ensuring a sustainable low-carbon future.

Christian Aid is calling for leaders to agree a fair deal at Durban, to limit damage caused by climate change, while protecting poor countries from the effects of a problem that they have done little to create.

This would include putting adequate measures in place to:

- cut greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions, or carbon pollution, to a sufficient degree
- provide developing countries with the finance, technology and other resources they need to adapt to the inevitable impacts of climate change and make the transition to a low-carbon pathway.

Such an agreement must be based on multilateral action, and should also take into account countries' historical responsibility for climate change, as well as their ability to mitigate its affects.

A gap in progress

At the Durban talks, leaders will discuss establishing a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, under the 'Kyoto track' of the negotiations.

The Protocol, which was established in 1997, set legally binding targets for 37 industrialised countries and the European Community for reducing GHG emissions. Recognising that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, it places a heavier burden on them under the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. Under the protocol, signatory countries are obliged to negotiate its extension after the first commitment period ends in 2012.³

Under the 'Convention track' of the talks, meanwhile, leaders are negotiating to 'enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through

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long-term cooperative action', including determining what action the US and developing countries – which are not covered by the Kyoto Protocol – should take.⁴

The commitment to extend Kyoto was reaffirmed in the Bali Roadmap of 2007, covering all countries, in which it was decided that all Kyoto Parties (the nations that have signed up to Kyoto) would take on a second round of commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, starting in 2013.

In Bali, it was also confirmed that:

- the United States, which withdrew from Kyoto in 2001, will take on 'comparable' efforts under the UNFCCC (before the end of the first commitment period)
- all developing countries will take on nationally appropriate mitigation actions, or NAMAs, enabled by finance, technology and other support from developed countries (also before the end of the first commitment period).⁵

The first of these points is being negotiated under the Kyoto Protocol track, while the second two are being considered under the Convention track, which is also known as the Long-term Cooperative Action (LCA) track.

However, since Bali, some Kyoto signatory countries have been trying to replace the Kyoto Protocol with a weaker instrument, instead of establishing a second commitment period.

In addition, talks to progress the other elements of the Bali Roadmap – which were meant to conclude two years ago – have suffered a series of spectacular delays. Following the failure of the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009, they were first extended to the following year's meeting in Cancún, and then delayed to the Durban talks this year.

So Durban is the last chance to deliver adequate and legally binding emission-reduction commitments for developed countries under Kyoto, and ensure a new commitment period is in place before the current one ends.

Gigatonne gap

The 'gigatonne gap' is the difference between the emissions the world is on course to produce and those that could keep the rise in global temperature at a 'safe' level.

If countries keep to their existing pledges to cut emissions – which lie within a certain

range, varying from state to state – then the world can expect a temperature rise of 2.5°-5°C, which could lead to dangerous climate change. To keep warming to well below 2°C, which is called for under the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancún Agreements, the world must cut greenhouse emissions by about 12 gigatonnes by 2020.⁶

Christian Aid, however, supports the more than 100 countries calling for warming to be limited to well below 1.5°C – a target that would require far more stringent cuts.

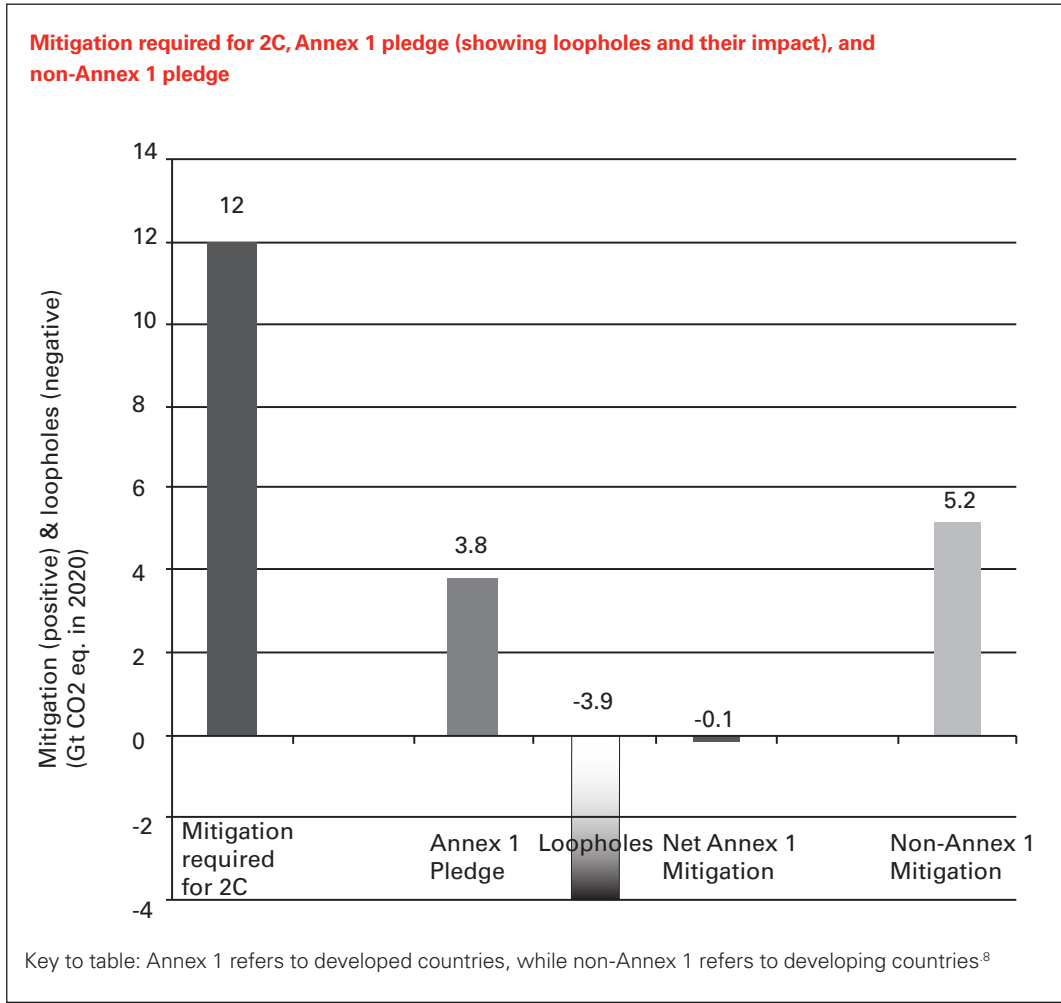
Unfortunately, with even the best of the current pledges and stricter accounting rules to compel countries to comply, there will be an emissions gap of about 5 GtCO₂eq (gigatonne of carbon dioxide equivalent) under the 2°C emissions pathway. The gap is even larger when considering the safer course of keeping warming well below 1.5°C. In other words, these pledges are not enough to prevent harmful climate change.

Moreover, developed countries' total pledges to cut their carbon emissions under the Cancún Agreements amount to less net mitigation than that of developing countries combined.⁷

Developed countries are also compromised by a series of accounting loopholes, under which they can avoid reducing their emissions. These include dubious rules on land use, carry-over of Clean Development Mechanism credits and so-called 'hot air' (or emissions reductions) from the first commitment period, and double-counting of 'flexible mechanisms' introduced to lower the overall costs of achieving emissions targets. Taken together, these loopholes negate the pledges by developed countries.

This can be demonstrated in the figure on p3, which conveys the total global mitigation needed to ensure a rise of no more than 2°C (far-left column), developed countries' pledges (second left) and developing countries' pledges (far right). The middle column demonstrates how developed countries' pledges could be more than entirely negated by the range of accounting loopholes available.

Christian Aid calls on developed countries to commit themselves to making the most ambitious emissions reductions out of the range of possible cuts they have already outlined, as a first step in Durban. We believe these developed states should commit to sharing the global burden of emissions cuts in an equitable and principled way, and set out the process to move towards these targets within the next year.



Christian Aid calls on rich countries to commit to providing additional, scalable, predictable and adequate sources of long-term finance in Durban

Financing gap

The climate crisis that is unfolding across the world comes with a huge price tag, and the costs of mitigating emissions in developing countries is also considerable. While money has been pledged until 2012, and parties have agreed to mobilise further funds by 2020, sadly thus far there is almost no money pledged for 2013-2019, after the end of the initial finance pledged. So a shortage of financing necessary for combating climate change is extremely likely after next year.

Even the goal of mobilising 100 billion US dollars per year by 2020 – agreed in the Copenhagen Accord and at Cancún – is not linked to the actual needs of developing countries, but to the political and economic constraints of developed ones. Given the extent of poor nations’ adaptation and mitigation needs relative to the 2°C (let alone the 1.5°C) objective, there will certainly be a gap between human need and the resources available.

Christian Aid calls on rich countries to commit to providing additional, scalable, predictable and adequate sources of long-term finance in Durban.

Time to face the post-Copenhagen realities

We are facing an intractable and potentially catastrophic situation in the negotiations about the legal form of an outcome under the Convention track of the negotiations – which are being held to decide the long-term cooperative action of countries under the UNFCCC.

The mandate for these negotiations was to come up with an ‘agreed outcome and adopt a decision’ to ‘enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action, now, up to and beyond 2012’.⁹

Presumably, this should therefore involve attempts to secure a second commitment period for the Protocol, while also tackling the question of emissions cuts by the US and in developing countries.

But perhaps encouraged by the lack of progress made at Copenhagen and Cancún, some developed countries now want to move away from the Kyoto Protocol’s top-down, rules-based system towards a so-called ‘pledge and review’ scheme. This ‘bottom-up’ approach would allow

states to decide for themselves what, if any, emissions cuts they would make. They are also attempting to replace the Protocol with an agreement that binds all countries equally, with the exception of the least developed countries, in respect of their mitigation commitments to cut their emissions.

Such a permissive voluntary system would weaken future climate action by removing any obligation for states to act, and would also fail to take into account developed countries' historic responsibility for climate change. Moreover, if countries' pledges remain at their current level, or drop further, this would risk devastating impacts on climate.

Instead of this voluntary system, Christian Aid would like a legally binding international emissions-reduction agreement for developed countries, based on the latest science. Under this, countries would make collective cuts towards an aggregate target, and be held to account for failure to comply. The total emissions cuts required of each state would be determined on a fair basis – taking into account differing degrees of responsibility for causing climate change as well as varying capacities to deal with it.

This aggregate target would ensure a fair and science-based contribution by the rich countries towards the global goal for emissions reductions, which is necessary to keep the world safe.

Christian Aid's view is that Durban should strengthen the implementation of the UNFCCC with a set of COP decisions that address the needs highlighted in the Bali Action Plan, including provisions for adaptation, finance, technology transfer and capacity-building.

It should not open up a debate on the legal form of the outcome, which would at best further delay key decisions, or at worst result in a pledge-and-review voluntary system, ending in the deregulation of the existing climate regime.

Christian Aid also believes that if a mandate to negotiate a new legal instrument under the Convention track is pursued (and eventually agreed in Durban) that would be the death knell of the Kyoto Protocol. This would amount to an abandonment of the principles and provisions of climate equity and justice, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities to deal with climate change, as well as developing countries' right to sustainable economic growth and development.

Even if such abandonment were avoided, it would still take many years to negotiate a new climate treaty, meaning further

dangerous delays before countries actually do something about climate change.

Furthermore, judging by talks so far, it is highly unlikely that any new treaty that includes the US would be fair, ambitious or legally binding. Rather, such a treaty would likely lock-in countries' inadequate current pledges, and would not include anything like the robust reporting, monitoring, review and compliance mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol.

The best way forward

The best outcome in Durban would include decisions:

- to adopt a second commitment period, binding rich countries to rule-based emissions cuts
- to cover the US for emission reductions at a level comparable to other developed countries, which are included in the Kyoto Protocol, under paragraph 1(b) (i) of the Bali Action Plan under the Convention
- for developing countries to undertake NAMAs under paragraph 1(b)(ii) of the Bali Action Plan under the Convention, enabled and supported by technology, finance and capacity-building
- on actions needed by developing countries, involving finance, adaptation, technology transfer and capacity-building, to enhance the UNFCCC.

Christian Aid would like parties to agree a provisional date for a second commitment period to enter into force. This would ensure that countries continue to be bound by the commitments they have made, and that there is no gap caused by waiting for the new agreement to be ratified and come into force.

Developing countries should oppose the creation of a single treaty under the Convention to replace the Kyoto Protocol until necessary safeguards guaranteeing adequacy, equity, historical responsibility, and a science- and rule-based system have been secured, and it becomes clear that all developed countries, including the US, will agree to be bound by terms that are fair. Such safeguards could be incorporated into any decision giving countries the necessary mandate to establish a new instrument.

The former should also adopt a 'wait and see' attitude towards any outcome that includes two legally binding treaties – that is, a new weaker pledge treaty sitting alongside the Kyoto Protocol – and oppose this if their demands for safeguards are not met. It is important to note that a weaker treaty would inevitably weaken the Protocol,

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by providing enticement and opportunity for some countries to jump ship to the new, more lax instrument.

If states want to expand coverage of the existing climate regime, to bring all countries under one comprehensive, legally binding treaty, they should first agree to an explicit and principled equitable effort-sharing process that is based on historical responsibility and existing capability, and respects poor countries' right to sustainable development.

To increase the possibility for an effective outcome, countries should follow a step-wise approach to mitigation, and then focus from 2013 on establishing a comprehensive agreement, to meet all the goals identified in the Bali Action Plan. Efforts would be required to ensure fair, balanced and adequate outcomes in relation to these, which include adaptation, finance, technology and capacity-building.

Leapfrog fund – a fair share of mitigation finance for sub-Saharan Africa

With more than 1.4 billion people in developing countries lacking access to electricity – and about 41 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa – it is imperative that Durban also establishes a special dedicated stream of funding under the Green Climate Fund agreed at Cancún.

This would allow developing countries to tackle energy poverty and move along a low-carbon, resilient development pathway – which is crucial to securing energy access for people living in poverty – while enhancing their wellbeing and resilience to climate shocks.

Leadership gap

Governments have made disappointingly little progress in the international climate negotiations over the last three years. Developed countries have failed to 'take the lead in combating climate changes and the adverse effects thereof'.¹⁰ Rather than fulfilling their commitments, they are undermining the basis for the UNFCCC.

We are now facing the catastrophic consequences of their failure – expressed both in countries' low ambition and in delays to climate negotiations and action. Christian Aid believes time is running out to prevent dangerous climate change.

We are calling on developed country parties to break the deadlock and honour their Kyoto Protocol commitments, as well their financing, technological transfer and capacity-building obligations under the UNFCCC.

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Endnotes

1 United Nations Framework on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol, http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

2 'Climate change: IPCC report highlights urgent need for negotiations on global emission cuts', <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1716&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

3 Countries decided in 2005 – see decision 1/CMP.1

Conference of the Parties, serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol on its first session, held at Montreal – that they would negotiate a second commitment period, as required by the Protocol's article 3, paragraph 9.

4 http://unfccc.int/essential_background/bali_road_map/items/6072.php

5 Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) on its 13th session, held in Bali.

6 *The Emissions Gap Report*, United Nations Environment Programme, unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgapreport/

7 Sivan Kartha, *Annex 1 Pledges, Accounting 'Loopholes' and Implications for the Global 2° C Pathway*, Stockholm Environment Institute, 16 June 2011.

8 *Ibid.*

9 UNFCCC, *Report of the Conference of the Parties on its thirteenth session, held in*

Bali from 3 to 15 December 2007, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/cop13/eng/06a01.pdf#page=3>

10 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, article 3, paragraph 1, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.html>

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

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