

A review of what has been achieved, and what needs to happen at Cancun.

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On Saturday November 27, 2010, when I came to the Conference Centre the journey took about 15 minutes. On Monday morning (November 29th) it took almost two hours. Many of the participants were stranded on buses, literally inching their way towards the Conference Centre (Moonlight Terrace) when President Filipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa, the President of Mexico, opened the proceedings for the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UN Convention on Climate Change.

Many of the delegates were annoyed at the fact that police and army were not more efficient in handling the traffic. The heavy police and military presence was there to protect the President from the narco-terrorist gangs which are so powerful here in Mexico. Drug traffickers have stepped up attacks against security forces and government officials since President Felipe Calderon deployed thousands of troops and federal police to crush the cartels in their strongholds.

There were no glitches this morning (Tuesday November 30th 2010). The bus time was back to 15 minutes. I still think that the communication facilities at Cancun are not as good as in previous COPs from Nairobi in 2006 to Copenhagen in 2009. For example, the bank of computers is much smaller than at previous COPs.

On the plus side, many of the members of the Group of 77 (mainly countries from the South) and Arab countries praised Mexico for the hard work it has invested in healing a lot of the distrust which characterized the final few days of the Copenhagen. This is a major achievement as there was every possibility after Copenhagen that the UN Convention on Climate Change would just fade away.

No one expects that the Cancun meeting will redeem the failures at Copenhagen in 2009. The people I have spoken to, mainly from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), hope that Cancun will put in place significant stepping stones towards achieving a full, fair, ambitious and binding treaty at COP 17 in South Africa in 2012.

The Executive Secretary, Christina Figueres, in her opening statement at COP 16 called for decisive action at Cancun for three reasons:

- The World Meteorological Organisation has said that the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is at their highest level since pre-industrial times.
- The poorest and most vulnerable need predictability and sufficient assistance to face the serious problems that they did not cause.
- The multilateral climate change process enshrined in the COP must remain the trusted channel for addressing the climate change crisis.

She reviewed, from a fairly optimistic perspective, what has been achieved at the various meetings since Copenhagen.

- A commitment to live up to the finance pledges made in Copenhagen. Developed countries have announced pledges totaling US\$ 28 billion dollars and many of them are now making information available on the disbursement of these funds. She expressed satisfaction with this development, but she went on to encourage developed countries to complete the work on their pledges in a transparent and timely manner;
 - A growing convergence that a balanced set of decisions under both the COP and the CMP (the Conference of the members of the Kyoto Protocol) could be an achievable outcome here in Cancun.
 - A willingness to stick with the text under the aegis of the Kyoto Protocol. At Copenhagen developing countries were annoyed when, towards the end of the first week, Denmark introduced a paper which seemed to bypass the multilateral negotiation process.
- A willingness to begin to put the Bali Action Plan into practice. The Bali Road Map was hammered out at the COP 13 in 2007 at Bali in Indonesia. It gave a mandate to take action simultaneously on a number of fronts to stabilize the global climate. These included mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology transfer.

Secretary, Christiana Figueres said that she is under no illusion about the magnitude of the tasks to be accomplished at Cancun. Outstanding issues include:

- The formalisation of mitigation proposals put forward by Parties in 2010 and the accompanying accountability processes for their implementation.
- The mobilization of long-term finance, the creation of a new fund and the accompanying accountability for its delivery;

- And the understanding of fairness that will guide long-term mitigation efforts.
- And how to send a signal from Cancun that governments wish to continue engaging the private sector through the Kyoto Protocol market mechanisms beyond 2012.

COP16 here in Cancun promises to be an exciting, but also exhausting 12 days. The stakes could hardly be higher. They involve the well-being of the planet, of those of us who are alive today and all future generations.