

## **Which Road Will Cancun Take?**

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An announcement on the eve of the UN Conference on Climate Change at Cancun that the government of Japan will not agree to second Kyoto Protocol but will opt instead for “single treaty” approach, took people here by surprise. The announcement seemed strange because the Kyoto Protocol was conceived and agreed on at the Kyoto Climate Change meeting in December 1997, after a lot of hard nose negotiations.

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, almost every country in the world recognised that burning fossil fuel was increasing the level of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere, which in turn was warming the planet. Even at that time, scientific bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and many National Academies of the Sciences were warning that global warming would lead to severe weather patterns, a rise in sea-levels endangering tens of millions of people living on coast plains, and cause the extinction of vast numbers of species. Despite this clear scientific advice, the Convention members could not agree on mandatory limits to carbon emissions. The reason was that the petrochemical, automobile, steel and utility companies in the U.S. had successfully lobbied the administration of President George Bush senior to block such action.

Everyone knows that, unless mandatory limits are set for using fossil fuel which is so central to modern affluence, no one will voluntarily take the pain that such cuts will involve. So, for the next five years nothing happened on the regulatory front. Finally, at the UN Climate Change Conference at Kyoto in 1997, countries, including the U.S., accepted legally binding commitments to lower their carbon emissions by 5.2% to 7% below their 1990 levels by 2012. It took a lot of work by environmental, development and citizens groups to achieve this first step. In fairness, the Japanese government played a pivotal role in getting the Kyoto Protocol (KP) up and running. Now, 13 years later it is signalling that it will not support any extension of the KP beyond 2010, even if it means isolating itself at the UN. This is amazing for the country that gave birth to KP. It is also a clear breach of the multilateral process pursued by the UN in the COP meetings. Japan made the announcement before the negotiations even

began. At the very least, this item should have been tabled for discussion at Cancun.

So, what is going on? Many times during the past 30 years when I wanted to understand a complex issue in the justice area, I turned to the writings of Martin Khor, currently the Director of the South based in Geneva. For many years he was the Director of the Third World Network based in Penang, Malaysia. Happily I saw on the daily schedule for November 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, that Martin was one of the speakers at an afternoon conference.

I was not disappointed. In 20 minutes Martin explained that Japan's decision to abandon the Kyoto Protocol is linked to the unwillingness of the U.S. to enter the KP binding commitments process. Furthermore, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are also reluctant to commit to a second period of the KP. Even the EU, which promoted KP for over a decade, is now lukewarm about its commitment. This means that Norway is the only rich country ready to stand firmly behind KP. Understandably, Southern countries are annoyed that rich countries, which have historically enjoyed a high standard of living because of their use of fossil fuel, are now trying to wriggle out of legally binding commitments.

In the Copenhagen the U.S. refused to enter KP process. It agreed instead to make a pledge to reduce GHG emission so that the average global temperature will not exceed 2 degrees Celsius. In a *Climate Policy Brief* which Martin Khor distributed he quotes "top scientists in a new UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which shows how disastrously off target a voluntary system will be. "Instead of cutting their emissions by at least 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020 as required (or below 40% as demanded by developing countries), rich countries will actually increase their emissions by 6% in a good scenario (based on upper end pledges and without the use of loopholes)."

According to the UNEP report, when the GHG emissions from developing countries are added to the figures from the above pledges, it will give rise to an average increase in global temperatures of between 2.5 to 5 degrees Celsius before 2,100. This is a recipe for catastrophe.

*Caritas Internationalis*, which represents 165 Catholic charities from around the world in a paper prepared for Cancun is challenging "all Parties to reaffirm their

commitment to achieving a fair, legally binding deal to build on the Kyoto Protocol.”

Global climate change negotiations have reached cross roads here at Cancun. Either the Parties continue down the KP road of seeking mandatory, legally binding GHG reductions to be completed in 2012 in Durban, South Africa or they opt for the soft option of mere pledges, which will lead to disaster.

South Centre website [www.twinside.org.sg](http://www.twinside.org.sg)

Charitas Internalis [www.caritas.org](http://www.caritas.org)