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Bali Conference on Climate Change Ends with Road Map

By Rafaela Bielecki-Weyenberg in Frankfurt for CAAGLOP
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Until early Saturday morning it didn't look as if during the UN Conference on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia, considerable progress would be achieved. The EU wanted an agreement which would require developed countries to cut their emissions by 25 to 40 percent of 1990 levels by 2020, but delegations from the US, Canada and Japan at first rejected the text of the proposal, refusing to accept specific targets for the reduction of emissions, and disagreeing to funding plans.

After the Under-secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs and leader of the US delegation Paula Dobriansky had at first stated that she would not accept the proposal and expected more commitment from the developing countries, matters took a sharp turn. Her statement met with boos, and sharp criticism by the delegate from Papua New Guinea, Kevin Conrad, who asked the US to either "lead or get out of the way." Obviously moved by this comment, Ms. Dobriansky made a U-turn and announced shortly afterwards that the US would join the consensus. (CNN)

Later on in the debate a compromise was negotiated: The text does not mention specific emission targets but states that "deep cuts in global emissions will be required to achieve the ultimate objective" of avoiding dangerous climate change. In turn, the US and China agreed to being more moderate in their demands on the commitment of developing countries. Furthermore, delegates agreed on a 2-year road map, which is expected to lead to a global agreement on emissions at the Copenhagen summit in 2009. (BBC).

While the UN Executive Secretary IVO de Boer and UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the conference, regarding it as a very important first step in the right direction, some environmental groups did not at all share their opinion, and criticised the draft as being weak or - like Friends of the Earth "...failing to give a clear destination," or even claimed that the whole thing was not about saving the planet but that these conferences were "climate change profiteering conferences", serving predominantly the interests of governments or industries to make a profit, while the road towards extinction continued (Climate Change Action).

But in spite of all criticism one has to take into account, that the road map contains texts on emission cuts, the transfer of clean technology to developing countries, halting deforestation, and assisting poorer nations in protecting their countries against the impacts of climate changes. Though defining specific emission levels at this point in time was rejected, a "reward" system was agreed upon, which would allow more developed countries to earn "carbon credits" for supporting environmental protection efforts of poorer nations (e.g. prevention of deforestation), an approach which will benefit industrialised and developing nations alike. In this context it should also be taken into consideration that this is not only an issue of technology transfer, but also of recognizing the agricultural techniques and knowledge of indigenous people in the Southern hemisphere who usually work their lands without producing high carbon emissions, and also in other fields of work put the little they have to maximum use, and achieve sometimes surprisingly good results with it. Furthermore, we should be aware of the fact that it is not the developing nations who produce most of the emissions, but the industrialised nations with their enormous production and consumption of industrial goods.

Last not least one should not forget that finally the deadlock has been broken, and thus the Bali conference has paved the way for fruitful, effective agreements on curbing emissions and global warming in 2009. As climate change and its consequences are becoming quite visible already, in spite of voices that are trying to play it down, one can only hope that now, as everybody is on board, visible results and progress will be achieved.

Sources:

BBC, Climate Change Action, Friends of the Earth.