

# **South Views**

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## **Climate talks at new crossroads before COP 18**

**The latest round of UNFCCC climate negotiations in Bangkok in September has revealed a major problem. The Bali Road Map launched in December 2007 had 2 tracks. The Kyoto Protocol track seems to be ending in a very weakened outcome, while the Bali Action Plan track is in danger of being killed without a proper closure or a transfer of its unsettled issues.**

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**By Martin Khor**

The global climate change negotiations are at a new crossroads, as evident after the latest round of meetings that ended in Bangkok on 7 September.

“Crossroads” because the talks and the emerging climate change regime may go into one of various directions, or else become stuck in an impasse. “New” because the climate talks have been facing crossroads several times before in the past five years.

The Bangkok negotiations of the UN Climate Change Convention, held over ten days, revealed a major split between developed and developing countries on what to do over many issues that the developing countries want to continue to discuss, because they have not been resolved.

Most developed countries, led by the United States, believe there is no need for further discussion because they have been closed off by a decision taken at the last Conference of Parties in Durban last December.

The wrangling over a seemingly procedural issue of what remains on the agenda and what should be taken off is in fact a sign of a far larger question – what are the respective responsibilities of developed versus developing countries in the years ahead.

As evidence on the ground and in the science mounts over the devastating effects of climate change, it seems that the international community of nations has become less and less able to address the crisis.

At the heart of the problem is the continuing attempt of several developed nations' governments to run away from their earlier agreed dual obligations – to take the lead in sharp emissions reductions in their own countries, and to provide finance and technology to developing countries for them to take their own climate actions.

The column Global Trends in The Star, Malaysia broke the news during an earlier Bangkok session in 2009 that the rich nations were plotting to kill the Kyoto Protocol (KP).

Under the legally binding KP, all developed countries (except the United States, which is not a member) agreed to cut their emissions by specified rates; the overall average rate was 5% by 2012 compared to 1990.

Cuts for a second period starting 2013 have been negotiated in a KP working group since 2005. The new cuts are supposed to be at least 25-40 per cent for all developed countries; the developing countries have demanded 40% or more.

Another working group on long-term action (AWG-LCA) was created in 2007 in Bali that mandated those developed countries that are not in the KP (only the United States at that time) to undertake a mitigation commitment comparable to countries in the KP.

This LCA group also obliges developing countries to take enhanced mitigation actions, supported by finance and technology supplied by rich countries, and both the actions and the support would be subjected to measurement, reporting and verification (MRV). The actions would not be legally binding, and can take on various forms and rates.

Developed and developing countries are treated differently as the Convention recognises that the former are richer and also responsible for most of the carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere.

For the past three years there has been a see-saw battle to save the Kyoto Protocol as one country after another indicated it was jumping ship to join the US in the relatively safe haven of the AWG-LCA.

At the 2011 Durban conference, it was clear that Canada, Japan and Russia would not take part in a second KP period, while Australia and New Zealand took a wait-and-see attitude.

Thus only the European countries are left in the KP's active roll-call for post-2012 cuts. Up to now, well past the deadline, even they have not stated what cuts they are willing to commit to.

With the virtual abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol, the developed countries have plotted to now kill the AWG-LCA. The US dislikes the group and its Bali Action Plan for at least three reasons: it obliges all developed countries to make a comparable mitigation effort (the US is not willing to do as much as the European Union); it treats developing countries more leniently; and it links the developing countries' actions to the funds and technology transferred to them from the developed countries.

At Durban, a draft decision was put forward to end the life of the AWG-LCA by December 2012. This draft had not even been seen, let alone discussed, by developing countries, but was put on the floor in the last hours of the conference and adopted together with all other decisions on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

At Bangkok earlier this month, many developing countries put forward proposals on several issues not yet resolved in the AWG-LCA, including financing of developing countries' actions, technology transfer, adaptation, mitigation, trade and other measures against developing countries, capacity building.

The Chair of the AWG-LCA, Aysar Tayeb, prepared a compilation of issues drawn from countries' submissions, that have to be resolved or transferred to other bodies, so that the working group can successfully conclude its work and close by December.

However, the developed countries, led by the United States and the "Umbrella Group", vehemently opposed further discussion on most of these issues, and claimed the Chair's paper had no status and was wrongly raising expectations.

It is quite evident that the US and its allied countries want to kill the AWG-LCA and its associated Bali Action Plan and get rid of their three inconvenient elements – comparability of efforts, different treatment of developed and developing countries, and the link between developing countries' actions and finance and technology.

A new group on the Durban Platform was formed in Durban to negotiate a new agreement. The US is insisting that the Platform will not have the three disliked elements of the Bali Action Plan.

But to many developing countries, that is wishful thinking. For them, the principles of equity and common and differentiated responsibilities are key in the Convention and in the new Platform as well.

If the LCA group is to expire, all its issues and principles have to be transferred to other bodies in the Convention, including the Platform.

At stake is whether globally agreed actions to address the climate crisis are fair, or whether the powerful countries will continue to escape from their obligations and shift the burden to the developing world.

Meanwhile, Nature continues to ignore the slow progress or rather back-tracking of commitments going on in the sphere of human affairs. As emissions continue to increase and the average global temperature rises, a series of extreme weather events are wreaking havoc all over the world.

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