GRET

Echoes from Poznan

United Nations Conference on Climate Change, 1-12 December 2008

Wednesday, 3 December 2008

The Dance Has Begun!

Setting the Scene

Between Political Determination and Pragmatism

More than 190 countries and 8,000 participants are meeting in Poznan, the cradle of Poland, for the fourteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP 14) and the fourth Meeting of the Parties (MOP 4). At the opening of the Conference, the Prime Ministers of Poland and Denmark, the countries hosting COP 15 / MOP 5 at the end of 2009, set the tone. Faced with the climate emergency, international solidarity is necessary. A shared vision aiming to facilitate the transition to a low-carbon society that is resilient in the face of the impacts of climate change must emerge from the Poznan negotiations. It must be given concrete form in the new climate agreement beyond 2012, that must be signed in Copenhagen.

To these political declarations, Dr Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Yvo de Boer, Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), added a dose of pragmatism: the decisions made in Poznan and especially in Copenhagen will need to take into account the alarm sounded by the IPCC.

The Poznan agenda is full. The various Parties expect concrete results on improvements to the mechanisms in the Convention and Protocol: improving the geographical coverage of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), increasing financing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change, making the adaptation fund operational, etc. All eyes are, of course, also focused on the working groups on long-term cooperative action under the Convention and on the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-LCA and AWG-KP), bodies in charge of determining the future of the multilateral climate regime beyond 2012.

Regional Groups Reaffirm their Expectations

The major regional groups—the G77/China, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Umbrella Group[1], the European Union (EU), and the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)[2]—have taken advantage of the official opening of the conference to clearly state their expectations.

The G77/China countries, including AOSIS and LDCs, have called for industrial countries to provide proof of their leadership in reducing their emissions and support the fight against climate change more fully through financing and technologies.

Aware of the need to be exemplary, developed countries—and in particular the EU and the EIG—have insisted on the need to shift from "discussion" mode to "negotiation" mode. Finally, beyond the discussions on the post-2012 period,

[1] Including: Australia, Canada, the United States, Norway, New Zealand, Russia.

[2] Including: South Korea, Kazakhstan, Lichtenstein, Mexico, Switzerland.

the Umbrella Group defends the need to improve implementation of the Convention and the Protocol by then.

First Divergences from a "Shared Vision"

The "shared vision" is one of the five pillars of the Bali Action Plan on long-term cooperative action. It refers to all of the objectives and principles that will guide cooperation in the framework of the new climate agreement. For now, it is time to exchange points of view but already divergences are emerging between developed and developing countries and within these categories of countries. These divergences notably have to do with the reference to quantified reduction targets and the content to ascribe to the principle of shared and differentiated responsibilities at the centre of the Convention.

Developing Countries

The most detailed and ambitious proposals come from AOSIS and the LDCs, groups that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. According to them, the shared vision must acknowledge the need to keep global warming under 1.5ºC—maybe 2ºC—by 2100, which implies drastic emissions reductions in the medium and long term in developed countries (40% less by 2020, and 95% less by 2050 compared to 1990 levels). For their part, developing country emissions must also deviate substantially from their current paths.

Although they belong to the G77 as do the LDCs and AOSIS, India and China are almost totally silent on these long-term reduction targets and on any possible commitment for them to adopt lower-carbon development. For them, developed countries must make most of the efforts in the name of historic responsibilities and the right to development.

Developed Countries

The European Union's proposal is similar to that of AOSIS and the LDCs. It includes the reference to the 2ºC threshold, with reduction levels of approximately 30% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 for developed countries. For the EU, developing countries must participate in order to cut global emissions in half by 2020. According to the latest scientific studies[3], this would imply a 15% to 30% reduction in emissions in these countries compared to current trends. But there is still a hitch: the lack of reference to quantified targets on the financial support for developing countries. For its part, Japan is vaguer on the medium-term reduction target so as to avoid any commitment that could rapidly become restrictive.

The GEF Under Siege Again?

Another pillar of the Bali Action Plan, financing is also an important and tricky question in the discussions on the financial mechanism in the Convention, the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

As they do every year, the Parties are examining the GEF's contribution to implementation of the Convention. Developing countries have many criticisms: the complexity of the procedures to access resources, the small amounts compared to needs, in particular for adaptation, the lack of fund predictability, etc. Although they stigmatise the GEF, developing countries have not failed to note that wealthy countries are partially responsible for this situation. The latter were able to mobilise considerable emergency funds in response to the financial crisis, and yet they have difficulty making adequate contributions to the fund in an ongoing manner.

For its principal donors, the GEF must remain the financial mechanism in the Convention, contrary to the implicit desires of some developing countries. It has a role to play in catalysing investment. The reforms underway within the GEF must allow it to become more efficient and more effective, and better meet developing countries' needs. However, will the GEF's efforts be enough to convince these countries that the GEF has an important place in the financial architecture for the climate beyond 2012? It's anyone's guess!

[3] Den Elzen and Höhne, 2008.