

Delegates return from climate talks with more homework

By Joydeep Gupta

Bonn, June 12 (IANS) Over 4,000 delegates from 183 countries gathered for the June 1-12 conclave in preparation for a climate summit in Copenhagen this December ended their talks Friday with a draft treaty four times larger than what they started with, indicating the differences on how to tackle the global menace.

Michael Cutajar, who chairs the group on long-term cooperative action under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said "the text is now much bigger and much richer. The talks have been surprisingly calm and good humoured, but there will be storms ahead, as countries are not agreeing on basic issues."

The disagreement went to the extent that five countries including the US submitted a proposal for an entirely new international protocol to tackle climate change, though

US delegation leader Jonathan Pershing told IANS "this is not meant to replace the Kyoto Protocol", the existing international treaty under which industrialised countries have to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The US is the only industrialised country that has not ratified the protocol.

The GHG emissions are leading to climate change, which is already affecting farm output, making droughts, floods and storms more frequent and more severe, and raising the sea level. India is among the countries worst affected.

According to Pershing, the US proposal said that apart from the industrialised countries reducing their GHG emissions "substantially more", major developing countries such as China and India would "have to act" in a way that satisfied the international community.

India has consistently refused to be tied down to a cap on its GHG emissions, arguing that industrialised countries had put almost all the extra GHG now in the atmosphere. Industrialised countries on their part point out that China is now the world's largest GHG emitter and India is fourth.

Under the US proposal, "industrialised countries will have quantitative limits on GHG emissions; the actions of developing countries will be binding, but not the outcome. Plus, advanced developing countries (such as China and India) will have to state by when they will take on these commitments," Pershing said.

"You don't have to take action now, but tell us when you are ready to take some action."

He agreed that additional funding from industrialised countries would be needed to help developing countries take these actions as well as adapt to the climate change already here, but said he was looking largely to the private sector to provide this funding "by changing the direction of their investments" to greener technologies.

Apart from the US, Japan, Australia, Costa Rica and Tuvalu had also proposed new protocols. As differences between industrialised and developing countries became more entrenched, the other part of the negotiations, under the Kyoto Protocol, became bogged down.

Industrialised countries were supposed to declare here the extent by which they would reduce their GHG emissions after 2012 - when the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires - but few of them did so.

The emission reductions promised by industrialised countries which did make commitments added up to a maximum of 24 percent, short of what would be required to arrest global warming to within two degrees Celsius, the "tipping point" about which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had warned in its benchmark 2007 report.

UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer said: "Industrialised countries must set their sights higher for mid-term emission cuts."

Pavel Zamyslicky of the Czech Republic, the current president of the European Union, said: "There was lack of progress under the Kyoto Protocol."

Zamyslicky joined the US in saying "we want to see in clearer terms what developing countries are going to contribute" to GHG emission mitigation. "Only that will give sufficient confidence throughout the world for an agreement in Copenhagen."

Overall, according to de Boer, the conclave had been a "significant session which has advanced our work in important ways", and had "made clear that the governments are committed to a deal in Copenhagen", where he expected a "comprehensive rather than a framework" agreement.

But hundreds of activists shadowing the meeting were bitterly disappointed by the lack of any substantial outcome after 12 days of talks.

Speaking on behalf of the Climate Action Network, an umbrella group of 460 NGOs around the world, Julie-Anne Richards of Oxfam said: "The cause of the gridlock is the lack of political will in industrialised countries."