

[News](#) » Investigative Report

Power play in Copenhagen

The outcome of the climate change conference in Denmark poses a challenge to the UN philosophy of inclusiveness, equality and transparency among nations

- Published: 27/12/2009 at 12:00 AM
- Newspaper section: [Spectrum](#)

At the end of the last day of the Copenhagen Climate Summit everyone involved was exhausted, and there was a sense that what took place there - or didn't take place - would be haunting us all for many years to come. At best the historic and hugely built-up climate change conference in Denmark's capital offered a starting point for a lot more hard work at future summits. At worst, it may have all been for naught.



MOCKERY MONEY: A group of activists present mockery money during their demonstration inside Bella Center.

At the end of the marathon two-week conference the media and the global public were presented with the Copenhagen Accord, but instead of receiving high praise from the world as hoped, the accord has earned mostly harsh criticism and skepticism.

Lacking in concrete proposals, it contains ambiguous goals and undefined actions. But more importantly, its status is questionable as it came about outside of the pre-arranged procedures of the climate change convention, and poses a challenge to the UN philosophy of inclusiveness, equality, and transparency among nations to achieve outcomes desirable for all.

The negotiators from more than 190 countries - including Thailand, with a contingent of 30 negotiators - were trying to agree to a climate change strategy beyond the expiration in 2012 of the Kyoto Protocol, as proposed under the Bali Action Plan two years ago in a conference on the Indonesian island.

Since the first day of the negotiations on Dec 7 one main purpose was to seek agreements on deeper cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the short term - by 2020 - from 37 industrialised countries already committed to making cuts under Kyoto.

The other primary purpose was to seek ways to develop policies and actions to incorporate major economies not covered under Kyoto into GHG reduction schemes and pledges. These include major developed countries like the US that have never signed the Kyoto agreement as well as countries such as India and China which, as developing countries, were not required to make emissions cuts under Kyoto.

Also on the agenda was the quest for policies and actions regarding long-term adaptation to climate change and financial and technological transfers from developed to developing countries.

Delegates worked on the main negotiation tracks with the hopes of coming up with two draft texts, which would then be adopted in separate conferences of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

But up until the deadline - Dec 16, the ninth negotiating day - the negotiators could not come up with clean draft texts ready for adoption.

According to a negotiating source who wished not to be named from the G 77 plus China, representing most developing countries, the negotiators got stuck reaching an agreement on GHG cuts in the short-term, and thus agreements on long-term targets were also absent.

The target goals for GHG reductions were based on the studies from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), UN's climate change scientific body, on what would be needed to hold global warming at 2C and thus avoid the worst climate change scenarios. (Some recent studies, however, estimate that a 2C rise would have more dire consequences than those predicted by the IPCC.) The IPCC has suggested that developed countries should commit to cut GHG 25-40% below the 1990 levels by 2020, and developing countries should make cuts of 15-30% by 2020.

These figures were interconnected, the source said. If industrialised countries especially the EU agreed to the highest number - 40% - for the short-term target under the Kyoto Protocol's next period, developing countries would

bear the much less burden in the long-term framework, around 15% as initially estimated.

According to the source, developed and developing countries were stuck negotiating on these numbers and could not move on to other substantial issues. The source also said big countries in particular - both developed and developing - were locking horns over reductions numbers.

For fear that the negotiations would go nowhere, the chairs of the two working groups decided to formulate the two draft texts on Friday, Dec 11 - full of brackets in place of commitments. The apparent progress in the drafts was taken for good news.



CROWDED HOUSE: The Bella Centre was overwhelmed by more than 10,000 people wanting to learn the outcome of negotiations.

But according to the source, without agreements on long-term targets, no agreements could be made on other important issues, including the initiative known as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and the establishment of mechanisms for financial and technical transfer. These are things developing countries want.

"This is a dilemma for developing countries in particular. You don't want to bear the burden [of emissions reductions], but you don't want to lose new opportunities either," said the source after the first negotiating week had passed.

Many negotiators from developing countries expressed frustration and discontent at what they termed a "top-down approach" to drafting the texts. This actually first appeared during the first few days when the Danish government's "Adoption of the Copenhagen Agreement" was leaked. The document, which was widely circulated at the climate change summit, was said to outline an unfair deal for the world's poorer nations.

In the negotiation rooms, the games intensified during the second week with secret offers in exchange for the benefits, according to the another negotiating source from G77 plus China. For example, some major developed countries pledged to help smaller countries financially if they agreed with their target numbers. Approval for REDD, which offers considerable financial benefits to developing countries for protecting forests, was reportedly used as a negotiating carrot.

"You can say it's a form of neo-colonialism," said the source, adding that national politics and interests had overridden international procedures.

The sticking point remained the GHG reduction targets, and the second source said the atmosphere became ever more tense during the final days of the conference. There was no room for compromise.

THE FINAL DRAFT

In the end ministers and heads of states - instead of arriving at the conference's conclusion, formalising agreements and making statements as had been supposed - took on major roles in shaping the outcome in Copenhagen. On the morning of the second Friday there were no clean drafts in sight, but in the afternoon the draft Copenhagen Accord was leaked and circulated in the conference, reportedly the result of meetings between the world's top leaders, including US President Barack Obama.

However, the accord posted on the website of the UNFCCC did not present a list of the parties who developed it.

An analysis by Martin Khor, executive director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental think tank of developing countries, showed that the three-page accord did not specify commitments to cut GHG by developed countries, but did make note of climate change mitigation actions from developing countries. In addition, it did not state clear procedures regarding the \$100 billion (3.34 trillion baht) in new climate change funding to be given by developed countries to developing countries by 2020.

More importantly, as Mr Khor pointed out, the accord was only "taken note" of by the Conference of Parties, the meeting of all UN member countries to consider a framework for long-term goals and actions.

"In the language of the UN, 'taking note' gives a low or neutral status to the document being referred to," Mr Khor wrote in the Third World Network's Copenhagen News Update. "It means that the document is not approved by the meeting [in such a case the word 'adopted' would have been used]. Thus, there is no obligation, legal or political, for a Party to the Convention as such to implement the Accord."

At the top of the accord document it is written that "the Heads of States, Heads of Government, Ministers, and other heads of the following delegation present at the conference noted the results of the work done by the working groups for the short-term and long-term frameworks, endorsed a decision to continue the work of these groups, and having agreed on sections regarding future efforts to help cut GHG, to put a new adaptation fund in place as well as other technological and financial transfers, and to push forward reducing emissions from forest sectors in developing countries."

Mr Khor called the accord "a thin document, containing hardly any new commitments by developed countries, with a weak global goal, and attempts to get developing countries to do more." "It is a sad reflection of the Copenhagen Conference that this thin document is being held up as its main achievement," he noted.

Buntoon Srethasirote, of MEASwatch, a state-sponsored project monitoring multilateral environmental agreements and climate change strategy, said the accord has reflected that the negotiation has not actually reached a conclusion. This affects developing countries, including Thailand, as they have not obtained commitments on any of the proposed measures to help them cope with climate change.

"The status of the accord is questionable, whether it can really commit everyone involved. This reflects what we have managed to get from the top-down approach. It's vague and it's very loose," said Mr Buntoon.

Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the UNFCCC was quoted as saying in the press release on Saturday, December 19, that the world now has a package to work with and begin immediate action. "However," he added, "we need to be clear that it is a letter of intent and is not precise about what needs to be done in legal terms. So, the challenge is now to turn what we have agreed politically in Copenhagen into something real, measurable and verifiable."

On Friday, the world leaders who were allegedly involved in developing the accord started to leave the conference. Thailand's leaders also declined to attend the ongoing debate on the status of the accord, instead choosing to gather at the premises of the Thai ambassador to Denmark.

Negotiations held behind closed doors

Every day Suthi Atchaisai, a Thai activist who has fought against industrial pollution in Map Ta Phut, in Rayong, walked around the Bella Centre, where the climate change conference took place, trying to find where he could go to learn about the negotiations.

But the discussions he wanted to learn about took place mostly behind closed doors, leaving people like Mr Suthi and some of his colleagues from forest conservation groups outside, in the cold.

Mr Suthi said he came to Denmark to find out what the world was saying about climate change. It is something new to him, but is not far from what he expected.

"The world is changing fast, and everything that has come to us has come from elsewhere. Worse, we never knew about it before it reached us," said Mr Suthi, referring to the suffering he and his people in Rayong province have endured due to decisions made by past governments to allow hundreds of factories to be built near their homes.

Mr Suthi did not learn much about what happened at the conference. Like many there, they were kept away. The places where they could voice and share their concerns were the non-governmental forums, side-events to the main meetings, held outside the Bella Centre.

Mr Suthi said as the world changes, the government should be prepared for what is to come, so that it can prevent people suffering. "The crucial point," he said, "is the build-up of its [the government's] own knowledge so that it can keep up with what is talked about around the world. We should not have to wait and listen to what others tell us. Otherwise, we will never have the freedom to make any decisions."

Public participation was among one of the more controversial topics at the conference. Several campaigning groups tried to raise the issue, and tried to find ways to become involved in the negotiations, which were largely governmental affairs.

Some groups have been trying to raise the issue of indigenous peoples' rights in the negotiations. They have met with some success, as the recognition of such rights appeared in the text regarding the forest sector.

However, the UN process has been a failure, said Dorothy Guerrero from Focus on the Global South, which rallied protestors until the last day of the conference.

"It is against the spirit of the UN; it has been undemocratic, with bullying on the inside and repression of our rights. The people of the global South are particularly being silenced. And inside [the conference], southern nations are subject to bullying.

"This is the beginning of global solidarity for 'Climate Justice'. With or without the negotiations, an inclusive movement that brings together the aspirations of communities both in the North and the South is growing and trying to find just and equitable solutions to the climate crisis," she said.

Mr Suthi, along with members of other groups, began to pack his bags and flew home in the first week of the conference. In the second week, NGOs were barred from the negotiations, with only a few being admitted as observers and delegates.

About the author



Writer: [Piyaporn Wongruang](#)

Position: Reporter

Keep this article in your social bookmark:

- [Delicious](#)
- [Digg](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Stumbleupon](#)
- [Technorati](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Republishing permission](#)
- [Print this](#)
- [E-mail this](#)

Latest stories in this category:

- [Power play in Copenhagen](#)
- [Foreign prostitutes being targeted by extortion gang at hotel disco](#)
- [Family law in thailand Part XVII: Adopting a child in Thailand - the initial process](#)
- [Training and planning are crucial for success](#)
- [Very Versatile](#)
- [Bangkok's sleazy street of shame](#)
- [The unwanted](#)
- [Royal Thai Navy Special Forces training](#)