

### DURBAN CONFERENCE OF 2011

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This short piece describes the background and content of the Durban Conference on climate change, which was agreed in December 2011 by leaders of roughly 194 countries, including the vast majority of the world's major economies. The Durban Accord represents a political as well as a legal instrument that marks a significant breakthrough as participating countries agreed upon a legally binding process known as the Durban Platform. Both developing and developed countries proceeded with negotiations on the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as well as with the implementation of the Bali Action Plan and Cancun Agreements. The governments, including USA and excluding Russia, Canada and Japan, have signed up to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which reflects mitigation actions in an international instrument. The Platform includes a package of decisions for action-taking and preparation of an Ad Hoc working group for enhanced action, which started working at the beginning of 2012 with the aim to prepare a proposal for the plan until 2015 as well as to create a global, international Agreement to be valid from 2020. The package includes Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Committee, Standing Committee for climate finances, Technological Mechanism and Support to developing countries, institutions and procedures that are set to be fully operational in the beginning of 2012. The new Agreement adopted at the conference shall replace the first Kyoto Protocol and its provisions that expire in 2012.

#### **Durban Conference: A Background**

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) marked significant progress towards the implementation of ambitious, complex and legally binding framework of proceedings on climate change. The framework has been adopted by the majority of governments of developed countries (United Nations, 2012).

The Durban Conference brought a significant breakthrough in the community's response to climate change. It included the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP/17) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CMP7), where participants of the Kyoto Protocol met (COP17/CMP7 United Nations Climate Change Conference 2011, Durban, South Africa, 2011). The conference was held between November 28 and December 12, 2011.

The governments, including 38 industrialized countries, proceeded with negotiations on the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as with the implementation of the Bali Action Plan and Cancun

Agreements.<sup>1</sup> The governments, including USA and excluding Russia, Canada and Japan, have signed up to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol starting on January 1, 2013 (Gray, 2011). They agreed upon the preparation of the new legally binding Agreement with 120 countries (including Brazil, South Africa, alliance of the small island states).

The 194 countries participating in the Conference also agreed upon a legally binding process known as the Durban Platform. The Platform includes the package of decisions for enhanced action and preparation of the Ad Hoc working group for enhanced action (The Telegraph, 2011). It started working at the beginning of 2012 with the aim to prepare a proposal for the plan until 2015 as well as to create a global, international Agreement to be valid from 2020. The platform has further adopted work plans for mitigation of adverse impacts, which are or could be caused by human activities that in turn modify, or could modify ozone layer. In addition to this, programs for coordination of adaptation mechanisms, solutions for financing, technological development, transfer of information, transparency of actions and support for capacity building have been adopted. The package includes Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Committee, Standing Committee for climate finances, Technological Mechanism and Support to developing countries, which are set to be fully operational since the beginning of 2012.

The new Agreement adopted at the conference shall replace the first Kyoto Protocol, provisions of which expire in 2012. Within the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol from 2008 to 2012, developed countries have agreed to fulfill the goals concerning climate change. Only USA had not ratified the Kyoto Protocol (Harvey, & Vidal, 2011). The decisions adopted in Cancun intend to speed up the implementation of actions on climate change.

Leading representatives at the Conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun have agreed to hold the increased global warming temperature below 2°C.<sup>2</sup> The Climate Conference in Copenhagen at the beginning of 2009 took place with the goal of outlining new international agreement that were to replace the Kyoto Protocol. However, most economies are still not prepared to adopt such proceedings. Because of this, new trade mechanisms have been adopted in order to help developing countries reduce emissions at minimal costs. The adoption of new trade mechanisms aims to reinforce the building of a stable international carbon trade. This will mostly help small island states and developing countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Action Plan Bali is a process, which started in 2007 at the world UN conference concerning climate change, which was held in Bali, Indonesia. Representatives of governments established the Bali Rad Map, i.e. two years long negotiating process focused on preparation of ambitious and effective international treaty about climate change. The treaty represents the extension of the Kyoto Protocol (United Nations Information Service, 2009).

Cancun Agreements: At the COP16 meeting on December 2010 in Cancun, developed countries agreed to reach the set goals through development of low carbon mechanisms and mitigation of emissions. It was decided that they would report on their progress every two years. The Cancun talks touched upon the topic of financing for the quick start of the process. The negotiating countries achieved compromise, which is binding for all parties and according to which they have to decrease emission levels. The so-called Cancun Package included items such as goal to keep the global temperature below 2°C (3.6 Fahrenheit), New Green Fund which helps poor countries to cope with climate change, and a new plan to stop deforestation (United Nations Information Service, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The Copenhagen Agreement was adopted at the Meeting of the Parties COP15 in December 2009. It was the first time that an agreement globally supported the goal to keep the global temperature at the maximum level of 2°C in comparison with the average temperatures before the industrialized era. The Agreement serves as a basis for the important financial start.

The governments approved new market mechanisms such as mechanism like clean development, which comprises of investments of rich countries in the so-called clean projects in the developing world in an exchange for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions credits. These new market mechanisms are meant to support the developing countries in their pursuit of commitments laid down by the Convention.

One of the surprises related to this conference was the decision of Canada to withdraw from the agreement. Canada will not support the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. One of the main reasons leading to this step was the fact that Canada has been increasing its green gas emissions. According to the statement of the Conservative party in the Canadian government, it would only be possible to meet these commitments if extreme arrangements were adopted, e.g. cutting of heating in every building in the country. Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol was criticized by China in particular.

Finally, at the Durban Conference the parties agreed on the actions to be carried out by the Adaptation Commission, which will cooperate with national institutions outside of the framework of the Convention. The actions and activities of the Commission were approved within the framework of the work plan.

## **Key Processes and Institutions Set Up in Order to Reach Goals of the COP17 in Durban**

- **Green Climate Fund**

In accordance with their commitments, countries have already started contributing towards the creation of a climate fund, which is scheduled to start operating in 2012. At the same time, they can help developing countries to get ready to access the fund. The Green Climate Fund, i.e. the advisory body of the financial mechanism of the Convention, supports their efforts to set their own energy future and adapt to the existing climate change. The developed countries agreed to mobilize approximately 100 billion USD every year after 2020 in order to meet the needs of the poorest countries and to support them in fighting the climate change. The fund will be governed by a committee composed of 24 members, equally representing developing and developed countries. During the first three years of its existence, the administrator of the fund shall be the World Bank.

- **Standing Committee for climate finances**

The Standing Committee keeps overview of the climate finance and assists the Conference of the Parties. It is composed of 20 members representing developing and developed countries. The work program on long-term finance was agreed with the aim to contribute to effective financing. It will analyze options for mobilization of resources from a wide variety of sources.

- **Technological Mechanism**

The technological mechanism will accelerate technological progress as well as adaptation to and alleviation of consequences of the climate change. It will become operational in 2012.

- **Adaptation Framework and Adaptation Committee**

The Adaptation Committee, composed of 16 members, will report to the COP on its efforts to improve on the coordination of adaptation action at a global scale. The adaptive capacities of the poorest and most vulnerable countries are to be strengthened. National Adaptation Plans will

allow developing countries to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. The most vulnerable countries are to receive better protection against loss caused by extreme climate events.

- **Support to developing countries**

Governments agreed on a registry to record the activities related to the support to be given to developing countries. The registry will be a flexible, dynamic, web-based platform. The regulation for the strengthening of environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol through the stable accounting framework as well as through solutions to surplus in emission levels from the first commitment period will be controlled every five years. The effective and acceptable rules for the negotiations about new emission levels were adopted. They are expected to enter into force in 2020.

As a next major step, the multilateral UNFCCC Climate Change Conference, COP 18/, and CMP 8, are to take place between November 26 and December 7, 2012 in Qatar, in close cooperation with the Republic of Korea.

[www.gpotcenter.org](http://www.gpotcenter.org)



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