

## Dire warning by scientists as climate talks resume

As the global climate talks resume on 31 May, an article in *Nature* by prominent scientists has warned that the pledges made under the Copenhagen Accord are “paltry” and imply warming will exceed 3 degrees C by 2100.

Bonn, 31 May (Martin Khor)\* – As the UN Climate Change Convention resumes its meetings on 31 May 2010, a new article by prominent scientists in *Nature* has warned that recent pledges made by countries under the Copenhagen Accord are amazingly unambitious, could lead up to a 6% emissions increase by developed countries and a 20% global emissions increase by 2020, and a more than 50% chance that warming will exceed 3 degrees C by 2100.

The June session will be the first time since last December's contentious Copenhagen conference that the parties will engage in serious substantive talks.

In April, the Chair of the working group on long-term cooperative action (AWG-LCA), Margaret Mukahanana-Sangarwe of Zimbabwe, was asked to produce a new text to facilitate discussions. She was asked to draw on the previous Chair's draft adopted in Copenhagen, the COP reports arising from drafting groups in Copenhagen (but not adopted), as well as other new proposals by Members (which was understood to mean submission of the Copenhagen Accord and other proposals after the April meeting).

The new paper was recently issued. It uses the COP reports and the previous Chair's report as a base, and incorporates all the elements of the Copenhagen Accord as new options, thus “marrying” the controversial Accord with the mainstream documents.

But the new paper did not include elements from the most prominent of the new proposals, that of Bolivia which hosted a People's Climate Summit after the LCA meeting in April, and whose views

are different from the Accord. Also, in some key areas, such as the amount of funds to assist developing countries fight climate change, and in shared vision, the views of the G77 and China are missing.

It can thus be expected that countries and groupings will ask that their missing points and paragraphs be put in. The Chair has made known that she does not consider the text as being “closed” but that countries are expected to give their views. A revised text after this round of reading is thus a distinct possibility.

### Kyoto Protocol vs the Copenhagen Accord model

The Kyoto Protocol (KP) working group will also be meeting. The big issue is whether the KP will survive. Almost all the developed countries that are KP members have indicated they want to abandon it. They been very reluctant to have the KP working group make progress on their commitments on an aggregate emission reduction of developed countries, and on their individual targets.

There is a deadlock in the KP process, with developing countries insisting that the KP must stay alive, with a second commitment period starting in 2013, while most if not all Annex I parties in the KP are already preparing to jump ship to the Copenhagen Accord vessel.

Under the Accord, unlike the KP, there is no aggregate reduction commitment for developed countries as a whole, and there is no legally binding commitment for each country. Moreover, the developed countries do not have to give targets that

are adequate to keep the world's temperature within a 1.5 or even 2 degrees rise.

This “voluntary pledge” system of the Accord is opposite to the KP approach (with its binding nature of commitments, its science-driven aggregate target, and individual national commitments of Annex I parties). The Accord allows the developed countries to do as they like, and is thus a “Great Escape” for them, as one delegate put it.

### Attempt to re-write the Bali Road Map

Opponents to the continuation of the KP say that the US is not a member, nor does it capture the actions of developing countries. But this scenario had already been anticipated in Bali and the Bali Road Map (comprising both the Bali Action Plan and the KP decision) had catered to this situation.

The underlying understanding of Bali was that there would be (1) an agreement on a second period in the KP that would include an aggregate target and individual commitments of existing Annex I parties of the KP; (2) a separate decision (in a legal form to be determined) in the AWG-LCA to capture a comparable mitigation commitment of Annex I parties that are not KP members (with the US specifically in mind); and (3) a decision in the AWG-LCA on the nationally appropriate mitigation actions of developing countries, enabled and supported by finance and technology that would be measurable, reportable and verifiable.

If developed countries in the KP are no longer willing to undertake a second period, and opt for a non-binding system of voluntary pledges, and without a science-based aggregate target, then they would be proposing for themselves a major systemic climb-down from a binding regime.

And if they then press for enhanced mitigation actions of developing countries with a MRV system, that are above and beyond the existing practice and obligations in the Convention, then a major imbalance will emerge. In effect, the developed countries are allowed to climb down massively from commitments to voluntary pledges, accompanied by the killing of the Kyoto Protocol, while the new obligations would be on developing countries. Needless to say, such a scheme would be profoundly against the Bali understanding and the Bali Road Map.

### Scientific Findings on Effects of Copenhagen Accord

The devastating effects of a voluntary regime like the Copenhagen Accord have been highlighted in a recent article in 22 April 2010 issue of the scientific journal, *Nature*, written by Joeri Rogelj, Malte Meinshausen and other scientists from Potsdam Institute, Climate Analytics and Ecofys in Germany.

Entitled “*Copenhagen Accord pledges are paltry*”, the article concludes that the present emission-reduction pledges made under the Accord will lead to a world with global emissions of 47.9 gigatonnes to 53.6 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (GtCO<sub>2</sub>-eq) per year by 2020. This is about 10 to 20 per cent higher than today's levels.

And if nations proceed on the basis of the few pledges they have made for 2050, the Copenhagen Accord will almost certainly miss its own 2 degrees centigrade goal (to limit the mean global temperature increase to 2 degrees higher than pre-industrial levels). **The scientists estimate that the current pledges mean a greater than 50% chance that warming will exceed 3 degrees by 2100.**

[According to scientific estimates, an increase above 2 degrees (new evidence indicates 1.5 degrees is actually the required threshold) will cause immense damage, while a 3 degree temperature rise will be catastrophic for life on Earth.]

No wonder the article, looking at 76 countries' pledges made by 13 April, says: “It is amazing how unambitious these pledges are.” This is quite a strong criticism in a scientific journal, but even then it is an understatement.

What is most disturbing is the article's findings on the pledges of developed countries. Not only were their pledges inadequate, these countries can also benefit from “loopholes” such as the use of “surplus allowances” (earned by some countries especially Russia for emitting less than their allocated share in recent years) and land-use accounting rules..

These loopholes allow the countries to emit an estimated 12 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents in surplus allowances after use in 2012 and further allowance increases of 0.5 gigatonne per year for land-use rules, on top of their pledged amounts.

In their pessimistic projection (based on the lowest-ambition end of the pledges plus use of the loopholes), the scientists estimate that the developed countries in 2020 would emit 19.9 gigatonnes, or 6.5% above their 1990 emissions.

[This compares with the 25-40% reduction that developed countries should undertake, according to the most cited scientific estimate, and with the cut of 40% that developing countries are asking them to do].

**“That level substantially exceeds projections of what would happen in developed countries if no additional mitigation action was taken by 2020,” according to the article. “In other words, in the worst case the Copenhagen Accord pledges could permit emission allowances to exceed our business-as-usual projections.”**

Even in the optimistic scenario, where the developed countries would not use surplus allowances and would meet the high end of the range in their pledges, they would emit 15.7 gigatonnes in 2020, or 15.6% below 1990 levels.

Both the pessimistic and optimistic numbers (6.5% increase and 15.6% decrease) miss the 25-40% target and “illustrates the massive deficiency of the Copenhagen Accord,” says the article.

It also estimates that after including the developing countries' emissions, the global emissions in 2020 could be 47.9 to 53.6 gigatonnes.

#### Among the main conclusions of the article:

- **A 48 gigatonne level in 2020 “is not on track, it is equivalent to racing towards a cliff and hoping to stop just before it,” say the scientists, who indicate that any 2020 level beyond 44 gigatonne is dangerous.**
- **They warn that prospects for limiting global warming to 2 degrees or to 1.5 degrees are in “dire peril.” Instead, “current pledges mean a greater than 50% chance that warming will exceed 3 degrees C by 2100.”**
- **Many countries have called for what is required, a global and comprehensive agreement with a robust and legally binding structure, and “the Copenhagen Accord is not that”, conclude the scientists.**

This is a sombre article that should be the backdrop of the climate talks these two weeks.

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