

Developed countries urged not to over-consume remaining atmospheric space

Bonn, 4 August (Meena Raman and Dale Wen) - Developed countries were urged at the climate talks in Bonn not to repeat history in continuing to over-consume the remaining atmospheric space

In a workshop on the scale of emission reductions to be achieved by Annex 1 Parties held on 3 August, under the working group of the Kyoto Protocol, Bolivian Ambassador Pablo Solon said that “if the developed countries (Annex 1 Parties) emit more greenhouse gas emissions beyond their fair share of the remaining carbon budget, they will not only be occupying the carbon space of developing countries but will also hurt Mother Earth”.

Solon in his presentation at the workshop pointed out that there is a limit on how much emissions can be allowed in the atmosphere if temperature rise is to be limited. He cited several scientific studies to propose a carbon budget as well as a way to allocate this budget.

The workshop on the scale of emission reductions to be achieved by Annex 1 Parties in aggregate and the contribution of Annex 1 Parties, individually or jointly to this scale was held under the Ad-hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) thirteenth session from 2 to 3 August. The workshop was organised at the request of the Parties at the AWG-KP’s previous session in June.

The workshop was chaired by Mr. Leon Charles from Grenada and Mr. Jurgen Lefevere of the European Union, who are co-chairs of the contact group under the AWG-KP on the scale of emission reductions by Annex 1 Parties.

The workshop was divided into three parts to address specific questions which were: (i) how Parties assess the current level of pledges and the scale of emission reduction by Annex 1 Parties (developed countries) in aggregate; (ii) what are the quantitative implications of the use of land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) and emissions trading, project-based mechanisms on the emission reduction by Annex 1 Parties in aggregate? How to ensure that efforts and achievements to date and national circumstances are taken into consideration and what could be the implications on emission reductions by Annex 1 Parties in aggregate?; and (iii) how to enhance transparency of pledges for emission reduction for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol?

Presenters at the workshop included some Parties from Bolivia, India, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Japan, the EU, Russia and Switzerland as well as from organisations and experts from both developed and developing countries.

Solon spoke at the third part of the workshop. He said that if Parties wanted to have a 67% chance of staying below 2 degrees C, the CO₂ emissions budget between 2010 and 2050 for the entire humanity is 750 Gt (Gigatonne).

“If Parties want to stay below 1.5 degrees C with a similar probability, the total budget would be 420 Gt. If this budget is exceeded, the probability of exceeding the temperature limit will be higher,” he said.

Solon then proposed that the budget allocation should be based on the principle of equity (in

terms of population) and historical responsibility (in terms of the climate debt i.e. what is owed by developed countries to developing countries).

Citing the estimates of UN DESA, Solon said that Annex 1 countries will have 16% of the global population between 2010 and 2050, and hence, they are entitled to 16% of the remaining global CO₂ budget, which is 120 Gt under the 2 degree scenario and 67 Gt under the 1.5 degree scenario.

“If Annex 1 Parties emit more than that, they will be occupying the carbon space of developing countries and will also hurt Mother Earth,” he added.

Solon said that the emissions of Annex 1 Parties in 1990 were 15.08 Gt CO₂. Based on the pledges of Annex 1 Parties under the Copenhagen Accord, and taking into account the high end of their combined pledges (which would be the best case scenario), the annual emission of Annex 1 Parties would be 13.3 Gt, said Solon.

According to Solon, for the period 2010 to 2020, Annex 1 Parties would therefore be emitting 133 Gt and will use up their entitlement of 120 Gt of the CO₂ budget under the 2 degree scenario in 10 years.

He pointed out that the above consideration had not taken historical responsibility into account yet. Solon said that in the last 160 years (1850-2010), 1300 Gt CO₂ has been emitted globally into the atmosphere.

According to Solon, given that the population of Annex 1 Parties averaged about 25% of global population, their fair share of the historical emissions budget was 325 Gt.

However, the Annex 1 Parties actually emitted 932 Gt CO₂ in the last 160 years, occupying 72% of the carbon space, said Solon. Hence, their over-consumption was 607 Gt CO₂ - a climate debt they owed to the non-Annex 1 Parties, he added further.

On the issue the transparency of the pledges, Solon said that transparency should be for meeting the objectives of the Convention and based on science.

During the question and answer session, Solon emphasized that ‘historical responsibility’ should not stay abstract or an empty word. Parties could discuss if they want to go back to 1850 or 1900, but historical responsibility can be measured, he said.

With the current Annex 1 pledges, history will be repeated where 16% of the population will over-occupy their fair share of the atmospheric space, said Solon.

Solon said that Parties have to be clear about the criteria that are used for deciding the pledges. There is need to be clear about the carbon budget and it would be a big and important step to agree on this. There is a budget for the 1, 1.5 and 2 degree C scenarios and this can be calculated. “The issue is how Parties are going to allocate the remaining budget,” he stressed.

“Developed countries will occupy again the space of developing countries. History will be repeated from last 160 years in the next 40 years. Developed countries will occupy more than their fair share of atmospheric space and it is important that something is done about this,” he added.

“The climate change issue is not only about science, but is also about equity between all developed and developing countries. If developed countries could not reduce their emissions fast enough to stay within their fair share of atmospheric space, they should compensate developing countries through finance and technology transfer, as well as in repaying their climate debt. This is why finance is not about aid, it is about equity,” he stressed further.