

Paris agreement will not be pulled out from a hat, assures French Foreign Minister

Bonn, June 2 (Meena Raman*) –The text of the new climate agreement to be concluded in Paris at the end of this year, will not be pulled out of a hat, assured Laurent Fabius, the Foreign Minister of France, at the welcoming ceremony of the climate talks which kicked off on June 1 in Bonn, Germany. Fabius is the incoming President of the 21st meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Stressing the need for Parties to make progress in the negotiations for the Paris agreement, he said that he did “not want to pull a text out of a hat”. “The objective is to have a pre-agreement in October”, said Fabius, so that at the COP in December, it will be “possible to have final outcomes and a solid agreement.”

The sentiment of the incoming Presidency was further explained by Laurence Tubiana, the Special Representative of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, who spoke later at the opening plenary session of Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), which followed the welcoming ceremony.

Tubiana said that by October, “we need to have a sense of the agreement on the main political points that have to be agreed in Paris.” Referring to the French Presidency, she said “we are not working on a text” and “we do not want to produce a text”, saying further that “we are supportive of a transparent and inclusive process,” in an apparent reference to a party-driven process.

(The ADP, which was launched in 2011, is expected to finally commence substantive negotiations on the Paris agreement at the Bonn session which ends on 11 June. The negotiations are based on a 90 page negotiating text called the “Geneva text”, which was the result of work done in Geneva in February this year. The task in Bonn is to produce a more

streamlined, concise and manageable negotiating text). (See separate article on this)

At the welcoming ceremony, Peruvian Environment Minister and COP 20 President, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal addressed Parties via a video message. Both he and Fabius outlined their views on the Paris agreement.

Pulgar-Vidal said that the Paris agreement could have a set of key components such as the following: a core instrument that is universal, legally binding and durable, and provides flexibility for different national circumstances; provide for some form of long-term goal which confirms that 1.5°C-2°C of temperature limit is established with a global objective of carbon neutrality and encourages national pathways for low carbon development.

He added further that the agreement could provide for mitigation commitments to be prepared, communicated, implemented and reported periodically with nationally determined contributions which are based on the principle of progression with flexible and evolving rules for review and accounting, in a facilitative process for the fulfilment of national objectives.

Pulgar-Vidal also said that there could be acknowledgement of the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) in the decision to register them in a multilateral framework as Parties move forward towards the ratification of the agreement. He added further that the agreement could have a long-term and qualitative goal for adaptation to give vision and purpose to climate resilient development around the world; a commitment to prepare and implement national adaptation plans (NAPs) to establish a global process of cooperation to feed the institutional knowledge and financial and technical gaps for adaptation action.

He added further that the agreement could provide substantial progress on climate finance to improve

methodologies and definition for accounting to reinforce the existing monitoring and review mechanisms on support; ensure the efficient disbursement of resources by the Green Climate Fund (GCF); explore in the future, a new possible aggregate financial target at the global, sectoral or regional level and to promote in the corporate banking and insurance sector climate sensitive portfolios.

He also said that the Paris outcome could have institutional arrangements and international cooperation to deal with the issues of loss and damage, in particular risk management, insurance schemes, rehabilitation measures and humanitarian issues; and launch a global effort to scale up technology and capacity building support to developing countries.

Pulgar-Vidal also stressed the acceleration of pre-2020 climate action through the fulfilment of existing obligations and engagement of subnational actors, the private sector and civil society around the world, as well as a decision to pursue the treatment of workstream 2 issues of the ADP both before and after 2020. (Workstream 2 relates to pre-2020 ambition while workstream 1 deals with the post 2020 agreement).

He added that these are just examples of what could be in the outcomes and does not cover the whole range of matters, saying further that “convergence on these issues are necessary and possible.”

The COP 20 President said further that “under the banner of the ‘Lima Paris Action Agenda’, we want to carry the cause of climate action all the way to Paris. We have seen the commitment of stakeholders who are acting and to increase engagement beyond Paris. To support national governments, Paris needs to embed this action into the paradigm of progress in the UNFCCC.” He said that the Paris outcome needs to formally recognise action by all actors across levels, catalyse further action and cooperation initiatives.

In his remarks, Fabius said that “we will not win the battle for development and elimination of poverty if we do not win the fight against climate change.” On what is wanted in Paris, he said “we want to limit global mean temperature rise to 2°C or 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels. This can give a clear signal to the world, to local government, to businesses that we are moving into transition towards low carbon economy and granting equitable access to sustainable development.”

He identified four pillars for the climate agreement as follows: (i) This is a universal legally binding agreement according to a legal formula that will be decided on the basis of the Durban mandate; it must cover mitigation and adaptation; it must take into account the responsibility and capacities of all and these are evolving; it must be sustainable and help progressively attain the long-term objective; (ii) On the INDCs, it is important for each country to present its national contribution with commitments on mitigation and also adaptation projects; (iii) On finance, technology and capacity building support, trust must be built that the commitment made in Copenhagen will be kept, i.e. to raise USD 100 billion per year from public and private sources, with part of it going to the GCF. Rules and incentives must be established to ensure reorientation of public and private flows to low carbon economy; (iv) The ‘Lima to Paris Action Plan’ seeks to bring in non-state actors, local authorities and businesses so that they also make commitments and this is to support not replace commitments, and strengthen collective efforts, even before 2020.

Fabius stressed that Parties at the Bonn session must make progress on three areas: what matters comes under the legal instrument and what come under COP decisions; simplify and shorten the negotiating text, promptly drafting the provisions that have consensus and isolating the major rather political options that ministers must decide on; and finally prepare a decision on pre-2020.

He added that climate change negotiations are complicated in getting a balanced agreement, saying that he did not want “to pull a text out of my hat.” He said that it is therefore important to reach a pre-agreement in the ADP in October and on that basis, there is a text that is clear to everybody as Parties go to Paris.

The COP 21 President also said there are plans to involve heads of states and governments to give political guidance and strong mandates to negotiators, with a meeting planned in New York in September, as well as to have them be present at the opening of the COP in Paris if they wish. Fabius added that the ministers will be involved from the second week of the Paris COP and stressed that the failure of COP 21 would be a terrible thing and a fatal blow to the negotiating process. He said that “we have to absolutely succeed.”

(* With inputs from Indrajit Bose)