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The Paris Agreement: A step to enhance UNFCCC implementation, say developing countries

New Delhi, 6 June (Indrajit Bose) – In describing the Paris Agreement (PA) as being "historic" and an important "milestone", key developing countries stressed that the Agreement is to enhance the implementation of the UNFCCC and not to replace it.

At a side-event jointly organized by the South Centre and Third World Network on the first day of the Bonn climate talks (16 - 26 May), delegates from India, China and Egypt presented their views on the PA.

They also stressed the need for a balanced approach in the implementation of the PA, emphasizing the importance of all elements including mitigation, adaptation and the means of implementation. All the speakers underlined the importance of finance, technology transfer and capacity-building for developing countries to implement their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) under the PA.

The developing country delegates also underscored the importance of pre-2020 climate action, as the PA was focused on post-2020 actions.

China, represented by its head of delegation, **Su Wei**, said that his country would ratify the PA prior to the G-20 meeting in China (which will take place in September this year).

The other delegates who spoke at the meeting included **Ravi Shankar Prasad**, Head of the Indian delegation and **Mohamed Khalil** of Egypt. (Egypt is currently the Chair of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment).

Prasad said the PA was a milestone. He referred to it as a platform where most countries were comfortable to join. "The signing ceremony of the PA signifies the universal acceptance it has. It lays down what countries intend to do in the coming years. It provides a great degree of comfort to developing and developed countries, also because it has provided that platform where everyone can put forth ambitious actions on climate change," said Prasad.

He then elaborated on some of the key takeaways from Paris. "We are happy that the link with the Convention and key principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), sustainable development, links to climate justice, sustainable pattern of consumption and production are captured in the PA. We also see it strives to operationalize differentiation, clearly laying down that developed countries will take the lead and developing countries will need a longer timeframe to peak as regards emissions reductions."

Prasad explained further that as far as the means of implementation is concerned, support for it will continue. "We see many of the finance, technology and capacity building provisions in the Convention are further strengthened in the PA. We are hopeful that the new strengthened technology mechanism will be able to provide better means of undertaking climate action," he added. Prasad further emphasized that the technology framework would provide enabling and supportive environment for countries to fulfill their ambitious plans and actions on renewable energy as well as adaptation.

On the long-term vision, said Prasad, concepts such as facilitative dialogue (in 2018 to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal of limiting temperature rise to well below 2 degree C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degree C) and the global stocktake (in 2023 to assess the collective progress towards achieving the long-term goal) are useful because they enable the entire community to see how countries are shaping up their actions on climate change.

"These discussions are going to be holistic and comprehensive, and cover all elements, including finance and technology transfer. It will give us some form of reality check as to how we have been acting, where we land up and what we need to do to further our actions and take on mid-term course corrections," he added.

Prasad's emphasis was on pre-2020 climate action. "We must remember that irrespective of the PA signing and its early ratification, we still operate in the pre-2020 world, and there is a lot to do in the four to five years (between now and 2020). The substantial ambition gap needs to be filled. The $100 billion (a year) finance goal needs to be achieved. We are far below the kind of numbers we are looking at right now. We need to see greater clarity on how support for technology is to be provided and how the existing technology mechanism does a better job at delivering (technology transfer)," said Prasad.

He was hopeful that in the (May) Bonn climate talks, these issues would get further impetus and there will much more cooperation in the following years. "The operationalization of the PA will be possible if we take all the components in a balanced manner, in a way that they can help each other and actions that are required are undertaken. We can hope for further boost of actions," said Prasad, underlining the "very critical" role of civil society organizations in the processes.

Responding to a question on the $100 billion per year by 2020 mobilization commitment of the developed countries, Prasad said that there is provision in the Paris decision to scale the figure up beyond 2020 too. He added that there would be facilitative dialogues in 2016 (to assess progress in the implementation of the existing commitments under the Bali Action Plan and the Kyoto Protocol) and 2018. "Once we get into enhanced transparency framework (of actions and support), we will need to capture the kind of features for support and the roadmap (on support) and build on the information on the terms of the framework," he said.

Responding to another question on India's expectations of the Marrakech UNFCCC meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) to be held in November this year, Prasad said that Marrakesh will be an "implementation COP". "We are looking forward to climate finance and events on renewable energy," said Prasad.

Speaking about the implementation of the PA and UNFCCC, **Su Wei** said that there is recognition that the PA is a historic step forward. "But it's only a step, not the whole UNFCCC process. The PA should not be replacing the Convention, but enhancing its implementation to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2," he emphasised.

Su Wei further added that the PA had not resolved everything. "We need to unpack now and try to translate the political agreement into concrete operating rules and operational guidelines on implementation of all the elements. We need to deal with those issues in a comprehensive manner. Paris (Agreement) is not focused only on mitigation, but it is balanced between mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation. A balanced approach is necessary for implementation," stressed Su Wei. Post-Paris is the implementation phase, which Parties need to focus on in Marrakech, he said.

Su Wei also reiterated the importance of pre-2020 climate action. "Earlier, we discussed that pre-2020 (action) is the foundation of necessary conditions for the effective and faithful implementation of post-2020 enhanced action. Pre-2020 climate action is not a matter of technical expert meetings on mitigation and adaptation," he said.

"It is very important to address the necessary needs for finance, technology as well as capacity building support for developing countries to translate their very ambitious objectives, which are reflected in the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) into concrete actions. During this process, particularly in the initial stages, the needs for capacity building are huge. There is need for capacity building for transparency of actions and transparency of support. We cannot just wait till 2020 to begin work on implementation of the PA. It would be linked to pre-2020 implementation to achieve the targets and objectives of post-2020 enhanced actions," Su Wei stressed.

Outlining his expectations of the Marrakech COP, Su Wei said that while Marrakech would be an implementation COP, it would also be a starting point that would mark the beginning of the planning of various tasks before Parties could embark on formal implementation of the PA.

"It is very necessary to secure the financial support goal of USD 100 billion (a year) by 2020 and to put it in very concrete terms. Its implementation should have started after 2010. 2020 is not far away. We need to achieve that objective. It is important to engage very actively in the dialogue in the Marrakesh COP on how we achieve the $100 billion," underlined Su Wei.

Cautioning Parties against "complacency" after a successful signing ceremony, Su Wei said it was time for concrete steps to implement the PA. He added that for the implementation of its INDCs, China had already started putting in place policies and actions to achieve its INDCs through various five-year plans. "We have signed the PA. We are looking at an early ratification of the PA. We announced that we would ratify prior to the G-20 meeting in China (in September 2016)," he said.

Responding to a question on the G-20 giving importance to climate change, Su Wei said, the UNFCCC remains the main channel for negotiations on climate change. "The G-20 and other political processes would certainly discuss climate change which is high on the agenda. It is inevitable that the G-20 will give its views to mobilise the necessary support to the UNFCCC process. The G-20 is not something that is focused on climate and energy issues and there are other issues such as the economy that come first," said Su Wei.

He further added that as host of the G-20 meet in September, China has been very active to have the climate and energy issues on the agenda and that it intended to continue the political momentum that Parties achieved in Paris, to secure the early entry into force of the PA and to have the necessary steps required for its implementation.

Mohamed Khalil, representing the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), said Africa had the opportunity to analyse the PA and discuss it in depth. Referring to the decision adopted during the AMCEN meeting in Cairo early this year, Khalil said the decision affirmed that the implementation of the PA should be in accordance with the principles and provisions of the Convention, including equity and CBDR. Implementation should be comprehensive, balanced and rules-based and to fulfill the commitments under the Convention, including pre-2020 commitments and the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol (that established the second commitment period for emissions reductions by developed countries under the Protocol.)

The Cairo decision, he said, also affirmed that developed countries must fulfill their commitments and any deficiency should not be transferred to developing countries. Developed countries must raise their pre-2020 mitigation ambition to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C. The decision also stressed the need for crystallization for the tangible operationalization, especially for vulnerable countries, including the global goal on adaptation. It recognized the commitment of developed countries to provide support for the full range of actions, said Khalil.

The Cairo decision stressed the need for flexibility for Africa and called for the full operationalization of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with climate change impacts. The decision also stressed the need to advance fast-tracking of financing for developing countries, and urged developed countries to provide climate finance. It also called for significant adaptation finance, and to double financial support to adaptation action. The decision further stressed the need for technology framework for technology needs assessments, and the need to enhance capacity of developing countries, and establishment of the Paris Committee on Capacity Building, highlighted Khalil.

Khalil also said that the African Initiatives on Adaptation, and on Renewable Energy, were both launched in Paris. The African perspective on implementation is that the PA should enhance the implementation of the Convention and its provisions, principles, and pre-2020 action. Adaptation is a high priority for Africa, as is means of implementation, he added.

Responding to a question on efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degree C, Khalil said that Africa was the main driving force behind this being mentioned in the PA. "Africa's starting point was to reduce the burden on adaptation. Africa is underdeveloped and faces big challenges with respect to development. Adaptation is an extra challenge for the continent, in addition to the development challenges that exist. In the UNFCCC negotiations, the idea is to alleviate this burden and increase the mitigation stress on the developed countries. This is a political compromise. We need to examine the scientific evidence on how the 1.5 degree C will be achieved. What we managed to come with is a practical roadmap on how we come to 2 degree C, which is a just burden sharing and then the next stop will be 1.5 degree C," said Khalil.

Chairing the session, Mariama Williams of South Centre referred to a recent study that showed that the financial needs of implementing the INDCs of developing countries is over $4 trillion and that the $100 billion annually by 2020 (which is the floor for the finance goal post-2020) was way off the mark. Even the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has just $10 billion in pledges from countries, of which only about $6 billion has materialized in terms of actual commitments, said Williams. "We have a serious problem of seeing how the PA will be implemented if pre-2020 climate action is not ratcheted up. Pre-2020 and post-2020 are a single package," she stressed.

She lamented that "None of the INDCs of the developed countries talk of financing. If we want to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C, we need to act now," Williams said further.