

BASIC countries set out expectations for Cancun conference

Beijing, 13 October (Chee Yoke Ling) – Ministers from the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) reiterated the importance of the two tracks approach under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol for climate change negotiations, and reaffirmed that the outcome of the climate conference in Cancun, Mexico in November should be based on the balance between and within these two negotiating tracks.

In a joint statement on 11 October released in Tianjin, China the Ministers emphasized that the Cancun Conference should be open, transparent, inclusive, Party-driven and based on consensus.

They reiterated that the BASIC as part of the G77 and China will continue to work and strengthen the unity of the group, and play a constructive role in facilitating climate change negotiations. (The BASIC platform was formed for the four countries to coordinate among themselves for the 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen and since then have broadened to cooperation at the experts and technical level as well.)

The Ministers also rejected unilateral measures on the ground of combating climate change that are incompatible with the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC. They also agreed that intellectual property rights should not be allowed to become a barrier to technology transfer.

The 5th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change was held in Tianjin on 10-11 October, immediately after the negotiation session (4-9 October) in the same city of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP).

Attending the BASIC meeting were Xie Zhenhua, Vice-Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission of China, Jairam Ramesh, Minister of Environment and Forests of India, Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs of South Africa, and Luiz Machado, Ambassador and Director-General of the Department for the Environment and Special Affairs of the Ministry of External Relations of Brazil. Liu Zhenmin, Assistant Minister of China's

Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also present.

In line with the "BASIC-plus" approach started in the last ministerial meeting in Brazil, the Tianjin meeting there were also invited observers: representatives of Yemen (Chair of G77), Argentina (incoming Chair of G77 for 2011), Ethiopia (Chair of the African Union), Grenada (Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States), and Egypt (Chair of the 22-member Arab Group).

The BASIC meeting focused on issues related to the Cancun climate conference to be held late November this year.

The Ministers supported the reflection of the elements of the Copenhagen Accord that contains the political understandings in the negotiating texts of the AWG-LCA and AWG-KP.

(The Accord is controversial as it was negotiated by a small group of heads of states in the 2009 Copenhagen meeting of the UNFCCC Parties, and when it was presented at the final plenary there was no consensus to adopt it, with the Parties only "taking note" of this political document. The BASIC countries have associated themselves with the Accord but maintain that while it contains "political understandings" the UN framework is the appropriate one.)

The Ministers reiterated the importance of the two tracks approach, which envisages an ambitious and comprehensive outcome for the negotiations under both working groups in Cancun. They also emphasized that the outcome in Cancun should pave the way for a legally binding outcome next year in South Africa (where the 17th meeting of the Conference of Parties will be held in late 2011).

They stressed that the Cancun outcome should not in any way deviate from the mandate of the Bali Roadmap. (This refers to the carefully negotiated mandate in the Bali Action Plan in the 2007 meeting of the Conference of Parties in Bali that launched "a comprehensive process to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action, now, up to and beyond 2012, in order to reach an agreed outcome" for a decision to be adopted in 2009 in Copenhagen. This deadline was not met and the AWG-

LCA's work continues. The other component of the Bali Roadmap is the Kyoto Protocol negotiations that started in 2006 for the second commitment period of greenhouse gases emission reductions by Annex 1 developed countries when the first one ends in 2012. The original deadline has also passed.)

On the USD 30 billion fast start finance now and up to 2012 (pledged under the Copenhagen Accord), the Ministers underscored that this will be the key to enhance confidence in the multilateral process and enable success in Cancun. They emphasised that this should be made available as soon as possible in a transparent manner, and expressed concern with the lack of transparency and the relevant information on that fast start finance, reiterating that these resources must be new and additional to the existing ODA and bilateral funds.

On mid- and long-term financial support provided by developed countries, the Ministers agreed that this is also an important part of the Cancun outcome. They affirmed their full support for the establishment of a new fund under the UNFCCC and agreed that the public funding provided by developed countries should be the primary source of this fund.

On emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol second commitment period, they urged developed countries to commit to more ambitious targets, calling for developed countries that did not ratify the Protocol to undertake comparable emission reduction targets under the UNFCCC (this was referring to the United States that agreed under the Bali Action Plan to take on "comparable" efforts in relation to Protocol Parties).

The Ministers also noted the significant distinction between the emission reduction commitments by developed countries and the nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing countries both in terms of their nature and content.

(Under the UNFCCC developing countries do not have legally binding emission reduction commitments in recognition of their need for development and their historical low emission levels. BASIC countries have however announced their national mitigation actions, particularly in setting targets for reducing energy intensity per unit of GDP growth.)

On adaptation, the Ministers reiterated the need to deal with this as a matter of urgency in Cancun. They emphasized that developing countries are the most affected by the impact of climate change and that developed countries have an obligation to provide finance and technology support to developing countries for adaptation.

They further underscored the importance of developed countries fulfilling their obligations of technology transfer and agreed that intellectual property rights should not be

allowed to become a barrier to technology transfer. They were of the view that positive progress should be made in Cancun for the establishment of effective mechanism for technology development and transfer.

The BASIC Ministers reaffirmed their support for the aspirational objective of keeping global temperature increase well below 2 degrees C, bearing in mind that social and economic development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of developing countries. They also recognized diversity of views on more ambitious aspirational objectives (referring to the lack of consensus in the negotiations of "shared vision" in the AWG-LCA), and believed that the resolution to this issue links directly to reaching a political understanding of equity (referring to the concepts of historical responsibility of developed countries and the equitable sharing of remaining atmospheric space between developing and developed countries).

They also reaffirmed that equitable access to sustainable development will be the core of and foundation for any climate change agreement and that this will be the prerequisite for setting up any global emission reduction target. This must take into account historical responsibility of developed countries, the need for space and time to achieve sustainable development in developing countries, and the need for the provision of adequate finance, technology and capacity building support by developed countries to developing countries.

In addition to the ministerial meeting, experts from the BASIC countries also met on issues of equity, and trade and climate change as requested by the last meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A similar experts meeting was held in Rio.

The Ministers welcomed the results of the BASIC experts consultations and underlined the need for further collaboration among them on the issues concerned. They emphasized the importance of the issue of equitable access to sustainable development as a central element in building a comprehensive and balanced outcome for climate change negotiations. They called for the experts to continue discussions and to extend them to the equity dimensions of adaptation.

They also rejected the notion of unilateral actions against the products and services of developing countries on grounds of combating climate change, including tax and non-tax, or other fiscal and non-fiscal border or other measures, which are incompatible with the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC and will seriously jeopardize international collaboration on climate change and international trade.

The next and 6th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change will be hosted by India in February 2011, and the "BASIC-plus" approach will be continued.