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BONN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

Action now, not post-2020, say developing countries

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Double issue

Editor's Note

WHEN country delegates and civil society groups gathered in Bonn in November for the annual United Nations climate change conference, the moment could hardly have been propitious. 2017 was one of the warmest years on record, the Arctic was warming faster than models had predicted, and carbon emissions were rising once again after reportedly peaking. All this had manifested itself in an unprecedented spate of extreme weather events across the planet.

But evidently all this had no impact on Donald Trump, President of the United States, the country with the dubious distinction of being the second highest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world. Having dismissed climate change as a 'Chinese hoax', he had announced earlier in the year that his country was pulling out from the Paris Agreement adopted by the 2015 UN climate conference. Despite this announcement, as the legal formalities for such withdrawal had not been completed, the US had the right to attend the Bonn talks on fleshing out the implementation of the Agreement, which it did. There was however apprehension that the US delegation under the Trump administration would prove to be even more disruptive to achieving a consensus than earlier ones. The US was true to form but did not succeed in wrecking the conference.

Possibly it was this concern that prompted a contingent of US Congressional, state, city, business and NGO leaders to attend the conference to affirm their continuing support for the Paris Agreement. Operating under a banner which read 'We are still in', this unofficial US delegation sought to dispel the notion that Trump's views on climate change represent the views of the American people. Unfortunately, they did not have the legal standing to shape the conference's outcome.

The main task of the Bonn conference was to facilitate the implementation of the Paris Agreement by working towards producing guidelines and procedures which would guide the signatories in their work of implementation. While the negotiations to settle these rules have been protracted and exposed the familiar North-South divide, the larger concern of the developing countries was the attempt by the rich countries to confine the conference agenda largely to this one issue.

From the view of the developing countries, such partiality was unjust and unacceptable. The commitments under the Paris Agreement would only kick in in 2020 and it was incumbent to ensure that the rich countries honoured their outstanding commitments stemming from the pre-2020 period. The most important of these was the obligation to ratify the second commitment period (2013-20) of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol after the first commitment period had expired in 2012. Although new emission reduction targets for developed countries up to 2020 had been agreed in 2012 under the so-called Doha Amendment to the Protocol, the rich countries have been dragging their feet on ratifying the second commitment period. As a result, the new commitment period has yet to come into force.

For the developing countries, the Kyoto Protocol is of crucial importance as it imports the key element of equity into the climate talks by putting into practice the concept of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'. Speaking at the Bonn conference, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted that 2017 marked the 20th anniversary of the Protocol and urged 'all relevant nations that have not yet done so to ratify the Doha Amendment'.

In the end, although the developed countries were averse to discussing in detail the issue of pre-2020 commitments in Bonn, developing countries' persistence and discontent eventually led to an agreement that the issue would be considered in a dialogue and a stocktake to be held in 2018 and 2019 respectively, before the Paris Agreement becomes operative in 2020.

Furthermore, as part of the agreement, Fiji, which presided over the Bonn conference, has been asked to send letters to all the Kyoto Protocol parties which are yet to ratify the Doha Amendment calling on them to do so 'as soon as possible'. The developed countries have also been asked to give information by 1 May 2018 on the progress they have made on pre-2020 actions that relate to their obligations under the Kyoto Protocol.

As in previous UN climate conferences, the issue of climate finance proved to be a volatile issue at Bonn as well. Though the rich countries asserted that they would provide the poorer countries with such finance to tackle climate change, they were not willing to begin discussions on the level of finance to be provided after 2020, contending that it was too early in the process to begin discussions in this regard.

Our cover story for this issue is devoted to reports and analyses of the Bonn climate change conference. As noted earlier, much of the tension at the meet between the developed and developing countries was over the imbalance in addressing the pre-2020 issues as opposed to the post-2020 issues. We also highlight the efforts of the developing countries to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol remains integral to the implementation of measures necessary to combat climate change.

– The Editors

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Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/8nov.html)

A civil society demonstration outside the venue of the UN climate change conference in Bonn, Germany, in November 2017. At the Bonn talks, developing countries called for action to be taken now to tackle climate change, and not just after the Paris Agreement commitments come into play in 2020. 13

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High levels of antibiotic resistance in serious infections, says WHO

Surveillance data on antibiotic resistance released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) has found high levels of resistance in relation to several serious bacterial infections across a number of countries.

Kanaga Raja

The World Health Organisation has found widespread occurrence of resistance to antibiotics among 500,000 people with suspected bacterial infections across 22 countries.

IN a new report highlighting the first release of surveillance data from its Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS), WHO said that it has found widespread occurrence of antibiotic resistance among 500,000 people with suspected bacterial infections across 22 countries.

According to a 29 January WHO press release, the most commonly reported resistant bacteria were *Escherichia coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Staphylococcus aureus* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae,* followed by *Salmonella* spp.

The system does not include data on resistance of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, which causes tuberculosis, as WHO provides annual updates in a separate report on tuberculosis.

Among patients with suspected bloodstream infection, the proportion that had bacteria resistant to at least one of the most commonly used antibiotics ranged tremendously between different countries – from zero to 82%, said WHO.

Resistance to penicillin – the medicine used for decades worldwide to treat pneumonia – ranged from zero to 51% among reporting countries.

And 8%-65% of *E. coli* associated with urinary tract infections presented resistance to ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic commonly used to treat this condition, according to the WHO press release.

'The report confirms the serious situation of antibiotic resistance worldwide,' said Dr Marc Sprenger, director of WHO's Antimicrobial Resistance Secretariat, in the press release. 'Some of the world's most common – and potentially most dangerous – infections are proving drug-resistant.

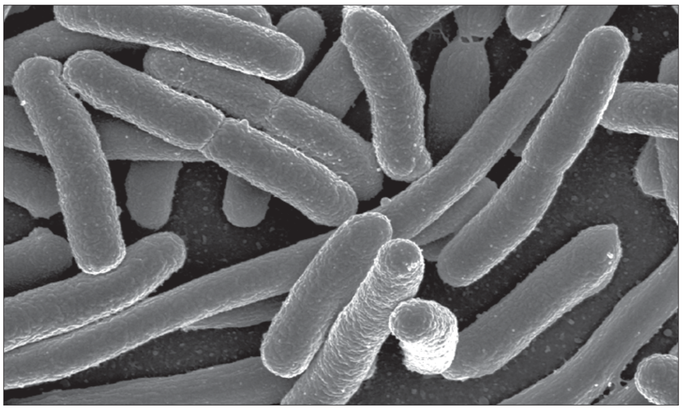
'And most worrying of all, pathogens don't respect national borders. That's why WHO is encouraging all countries to set up good surveillance systems for detecting drug resistance that can provide data to this global system.'

'The report is a vital first step towards improving our understanding of the extent of antimicrobial resistance. Surveillance is in its infancy, but it is vital to develop it if we are to anticipate and tackle one of the biggest threats to global public health,' said Dr Carmem Pessoa-Silva, coordinator of the new surveillance system at WHO.

Launched by WHO in October 2015, GLASS is the first global collaborative effort to standardise antimicrobial resistance (AMR) surveillance. The system is helping to standardise the way that countries collect data and enable a more complete picture of AMR patterns and trends, said WHO.

In its early implementation phase (2015-19), GLASS aims to combine data on the status of enrolled countries' AMR surveillance systems with AMR data for selected bacteria that cause infections in humans: *Acinetobacter* spp., *E. coli, K. pneumoniae, Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, *Salmonella* spp., *Shigella* spp., *S. aureus* and *S. pneumoniae*.

According to the WHO report,



Escherichia coli **bacteria viewed through a microscope. According to WHO surveillance data, 8%-65% of *E. coli* associated with urinary tract infections presented resistance to ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic commonly used to treat this condition.**

titled *Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS) Report: Early Implementation 2016-2017*, these pathogens cause worldwide common hospital and community acquired infections.

Rates of antibiotic resistance are reported to be increasing, to the point that infections caused by these pathogens might need to be treated with last-resort drugs, which might be not only less effective and safe, but also more resource-consuming and not widely available, particularly in low-resource settings.

For this reason, said the report, AMR in these pathogens is now considered to rank among the most important threats to public health globally.

According to WHO, to date, 52 countries (25 high-income, 20 middle-income and 7 low-income countries) are enrolled in GLASS.

For the first report, 40 countries provided information about their national surveillance systems and 22 countries also provided data on levels of antibiotic resistance.

In this data call, countries provided AMR data primarily for pathogens isolated from blood specimens, followed by urine, stool, cervical and urethral ones.

According to the report, the total number of isolates with submitted antimicrobial susceptibility testing (AST) results varied considerably, from a minimum of 72 isolates per country to a maximum of 167,331 (for countries' combined total of 507,746 isolates).

Only one country (Republic of Korea) submitted data on all selected pathogens.

According to the report, the most frequently reported were resistance patterns for *E. coli*, *K. pneumoniae*, *S. aureus* and *S. pneumoniae* (17 countries among the 22 countries reporting AMR rates), followed by resistance patterns for *Salmonella* spp. (15 countries).

AST results for *N. gonorrhoeae* and *Shigella* spp. were compiled by 11 and eight countries, respectively.

The GLASS report noted that antimicrobial-resistant organisms are found in people, food, animals, plants and the environment (in water, soil and air), and they can move between ecosystems.

AMR occurs naturally and over time when micro-organisms (such as bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites) are exposed to antimicrobial substances. As a result, treatments become ineffective and infections persist in the body, increasing the risk of spread to others. Although the emergence of AMR is a natural phenomenon, the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials is accelerating this process, said the report.

'Rigorous policy interventions to tackle AMR are paramount and global collaboration is necessary to improve the understanding of AMR dynamics and to inform containment and mitigation strategies to preserve human and animal health, and the environment,' it underlined.

According to the WHO press release, the rollout of GLASS is already making a difference in many countries.

For example, Kenya has enhanced the development of its national AMR system, while Tunisia has started to aggregate data on AMR at national level. Korea completely revised its national surveillance system to align with the GLASS methodology, providing data of very high quality and completeness.

Countries such as Afghanistan or Cambodia that face major structural challenges have enrolled in the system and are using the GLASS framework as an opportunity for strengthening their AMR surveillance capacities, said WHO. ◆

A hospital in Nairobi. Kenya is among the countries which have enhanced the development of their national AMR surveillance systems.

Kanaga Raja is Editor of the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS) *published by the Third World Network. This article was first published in* SUNS *(No. 8612, 1 February 2018).*

Big corporations like Nestle are aggressively making people even fatter across the globe

Developing countries are a hot market for Big Food's high-calorie junk food.

Martha Rosenberg

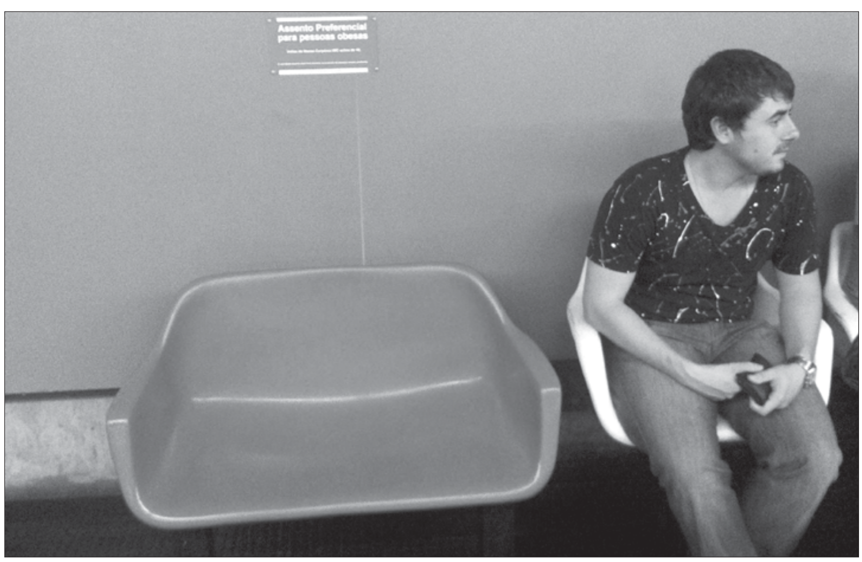
In Brazil, food giant Nestle sends vendors door to door hawking its products.

THERE are now more than 700 million obese people worldwide, 108 million of them children, reported *The New York Times* in September. In Brazil, food giant Nestle sends vendors door to door hawking its high-calorie junk food and giving customers a full month to pay for their purchases. Such a deal. Nestle calls the junk food hawkers, who are themselves obese, 'micro-entrepreneurs'. Right.

Big Food is increasingly targeting poor countries as 'emerging markets' to please shareholders, supplanting indigenous diets with fast food, packaged goods and soft drinks. In addition to creating obesity, diabetes, heart disease and chronic illnesses, the junk food supplants subsistence agriculture crops with sugar cane, genetically modified corn and soybeans. Even philanthropic groups like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have drunk Big Food's Kool-Aid about genetically modified crops 'feeding the world'. Actually, GM crops drench the fields of poor communities with toxic pesticides and pollute their waters.

Nestle's exploitation of the poor goes back more than 40 years when it convinced poor mothers to reject their own breast milk – the one thing poor mothers actually have to give their babies – in favour of its infant formula. Activist groups say babies die in poor areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America because their mothers bottle-feed them with Western-style infant milk.

In Brazil, meat giant JBS and Coca-Cola have donated millions to congressional campaigns and McDonald's $561,000, effectively burying dialogue about the health effects of junk food and its role in obesity. A few years ago, Reuters reported that the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Pan American Health Organisation takes hundreds of thousands of dollars and 'obesity' advice from junk food and soft drink companies. No wonder the advice stresses 'exercise' and gives junk food ubiquity and its marketing to children a pass.


A seat reserved for the obese in Brazil. There are more than 700 million obese people worldwide.

Keeping America fat

The beverage industry opposed a tax introduced last year in the US city of Chicago on sweetened beverages. The tax has since been repealed.

Big Food also keeps America fat. A 2014 movie by Katie Couric called *Fed Up* exposed how the US government admonishes people to eat right, while pushing the foods that make them fat, and how school lunchrooms have been bought by Big Food.

The film reveals how the egg, sugar and other Big Food industries revised guidelines generated from the 1977 McGovern Report that recommended people eat less foods high in fat and sugar to favour them and overruled Senator McGovern.

In 2006, a similar Big Food triumph occurred. Faced with the United Nations' WHO food recommendations that were similar to the McGovern Report's, then US Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G Thompson actually flew to Geneva to threaten WHO that if the guidelines stood, the US would withdraw its WHO financial support. Yes, US Ag was – and is – more important than world health.

In July, *The New York Times* revealed the devastating toll that junk food, obesity and diabetes have on poor people in the Appalachia region in the US, most of whom have minimal or no health care. People in Appalachia are sicker than in Central America, said Dr Joseph Smiddy, a health volunteer in Virginia state. 'In Central America, they're eating beans and rice and walking everywhere. They're not drinking Mountain Dew and eating candy. They're not having an epidemic of obesity and diabetes.' At least not until Nestle gets there.

High-fructose corn syrup, which is used as a sweetener in processed foods, is linked to obesity, diabetes, liver damage, memory problems and even possible mercury contamination.

In Chicago, there was a bitter fight last year over a penny-per-ounce tax (since repealed) on sweetened beverages. The beverage industry spent more than $1.4 million on television ads trying to reverse the decision and cast the desire to drink high-calorie, obesity-, diabetes- and dental cavity-producing soft drinks as 'consumer choice'. Poor communities, who are the most hurt by soft drinks, were the ones the beverage industry sought to enlist in the fight against the tax.

Someone on a typical 2,000-calorie-a-day diet should derive only 200 calories a day from sugar – equal to one 16-ounce soda. Yet most Americans consume at least twice the recommended amount and few people who have the soda 'habit' only drink one soft drink a day.

Once upon a time, 'sugar' meant sugar from sugar cane or sugar beets. But since 1980, soft drink producers have favoured high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and they have been followed by most major food producers and processors. Trade restrictions in other countries to protect local sugar production made sugar more expensive to use even as US farmers were growing copious amounts of corn because of farm subsidies. HFCS is also cheaper to produce, store and ship.

While HFCS is linked to obesity, diabetes, liver damage, memory problems and even possible mercury contamination, artificial sweeteners are not clearly better. An increase in the use of aspartame, found in Diet Coke, and sucralose, found in Pepsi One, actually correlated with a rise in the number of people who are obese, reported the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*.

Whether in Brazil or Chicago, Big Food is succeeding in adding 'poor health' to the plight of poor people. ◆

Martha Rosenberg is an investigative health reporter and the author of Born with a Junk Food Deficiency: How Flaks, Quacks and Hacks Pimp the Public Health *(Random House). The above article is reproduced from AlterNet (www.alternet.org).*

PPPs likely to undermine public health commitments

Public-private partnerships are being touted as the answer to cash-strapped developing countries seeking resources for development, especially with regard to public health. Real-life experience has, however, shown that claims that private sector participation in development projects has a transformative effect that guarantees success are exaggerated. *Anis Chowdhury* and *Jomo Kwame Sundaram* explain.

THE United Nations Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is being touted in financial circles as offering huge investment opportunities requiring trillions of dollars. In 67 low- and middle-income countries, achieving SDG 3 – healthy lives and well-being for all, at all ages – is estimated to require new investments increasing over time, from an initial $134 billion annually to $371 billion yearly by 2030, according to recent estimates by the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported in *The Lancet*.

Deprived of fiscal and aid resources, none of these governments can finance such investments alone. The UN Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing estimated in 2014 that annual global savings (both public and private sources) were around $22 trillion, while global financial assets were around $218 trillion.

The third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in mid-2015 recommended 'blended finance' as well as other public-private partnerships (PPPs) to pool public and private resources and expertise to achieve the SDGs. Development finance institutions (DFIs), particularly the World Bank, are the main cheerleaders for these supposed magic bullets.

Sensing the new opportunity for mega-profits, the private sector has embraced the SDGs. The World Economic Forum now actively promotes PPPs with DEVEX, a private-sector-driven network of development experts. A recent DEVEX opinion claims that PPPs can unlock billions for health financing. It invokes some philanthropy-driven global partnership success stories – such as the Global Alliance for Vaccine Initiatives (GAVI) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria – to claim that national-level PPPs will have similar results.

A managed equipment services (MES) arrangement with GE Healthcare in Kenya is also cited as a success story, ignoring criticisms. For example, Dr Elly Nyaim, head of the Kenya Medical Association, has pointed out that MES has not addressed basic problems of Kenya's health system, such as inappropriate training and non-payment of salaries to frontline health workers, encouraging emigration of well-trained health professionals to developed countries and thereby further worsening Kenya's already difficult health dilemmas.

It should be obvious to all that private sector participation in the development process is hardly novel, having long contributed to investments, growth and innovation. Not-for-profit civil society organisations (CSOs), especially faith-based ones, have also been significant for decades in education and health. Thus, in many developing countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia, health and education outcomes are much better than what public expenditure alone could fund.

However, PPPs have a long and chequered history, especially in terms of ensuring access and equity, typically undermining the SDGs' overarching principle of 'leaving no one behind', including the SDG and WHO promise of universal healthcare.

Also, partnerships with for-profit private entities have rarely yielded better fiscal outcomes, in terms of both finance and value for money (VfM).

Misleading claims regarding benefits and costs have been invoked to justify PPPs. Most claimed benefits of health PPPs do not stand up to critical scrutiny.

As a policy tool, they are a typically inferior option to respond to infrastructure shortfalls in the face of budgetary constraints by moving expenditures off-budget and transferring costs to future governments as well as consumers and taxpayers.

Typically driven by political choices rather than real economic considerations, PPP-incurred debt and risk are generally higher than for government borrowing and procurement. PPPs also appear to have limited innovation and raised transactions costs.

PPP hospital-building quality is not necessarily better, while facilities management services have generally reduced VfM compared to non-PPP hospitals. Underfunding and higher PPP costs lead to cuts in service provision to reduce deficits, harming public health.

Healthcare PPPs in low- and middle-income countries have raised concerns about: competition with other health programmes for funding, causing inefficiencies and wasting resources; discrepancies in costs and benefits between partners typically favouring the private sector; incompatibility with national health strategies; and poor government negotiating positions vis-a-vis powerful pharmaceutical and other healthcare service companies from donor countries.

Perverted priorities

Rich and powerful private partners often reshape governmental and state-owned enterprise priorities and strategies, and redirect national health policies to better serve commercial interests and considerations. For example, relying on antiretroviral drugs from PPPs has resulted in conflicts with national authorities, generic suppliers and consumer interests, which have undermined health progress.

Donor-funded PPPs are typically unsustainable, eventually harming national health strategies, policies, capacities and capabilities.

PPPs may divert domestic resources from national priorities, and thus undermine public health due to financial constraints they cause. Such redirection of investment exacerbates health disparities, adversely affecting vulnerable groups.

Health workers often prefer to work for better-funded foreign programmes, undermining the public sector. PPPs can thus lead governments to abdicate their responsibilities for promoting and protecting citizens' health.

Partnership arrangements with the private sector are not subject to public oversight. Therefore, selecting private partners, setting targets and formulating operating guidelines are not transparent, they only aid in creating more scope for corruption.

PPPs are certainly not magic bullets to achieve the SDGs. While PPPs can mobilise private finance, this can also be achieved at lower cost through government borrowing.

Instead of uncritically promoting blended finance and PPPs, the international community should provide capacity-building support to developing countries to safeguard the public interest, especially equity, access and public health, to ensure that no one is left behind. – *IPS* ◆

Anis Chowdhury is Adjunct Professor, Western Sydney University and the University of New South Wales (Australia); he held senior United Nations positions in New York and Bangkok. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a former economics professor, was UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, and received the Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought in 2007.

New evidence of Africa's systematic looting, provided by an increasingly schizophrenic World Bank

A new report by the World Bank concludes that annually Africa loses about $100 billion in Adjusted Net Saving, with natural resource depletion being one of the key drivers of negative ANS. The continent desperately needs economic diversification to overcome this problem, but thanks to the excessive influence of transnational corporations, governments of resource-rich countries do not undertake the necessary reforms, *Patrick Bond* explains.

A BRAND new World Bank report, *The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018*, offers evidence of how much poorer Africa is becoming thanks to rampant mineral, oil and gas extraction. Yet Bank policies and practices remain oriented to enforcing foreign loan repayments and profit repatriation by transnational corporations (TNCs), thus maintaining the looting.

Central to its 'natural capital accounting', the Bank uses an 'Adjusted Net Saving' (ANS) measure for changes in economic, ecological and educational wealth (see box). This is surely preferable to 'Gross National Income' (GNI, a minor variant of Gross Domestic Product), which fails to consider depletion of non-renewable natural resources and pollution (not to mention unpaid women's and community work).

A copper mine in Zambia. Natural resource depletion is driving a shrinkage in Africa's wealth.

In its latest world survey (with 1990-2015 data), the Bank concludes that sub-Saharan Africa loses roughly $100 billion of ANS annually because it is 'the only region with periods of negative levels – averaging negative three percent of GNI over the past decade – suggesting that its development policies are not yet sufficiently promoting sustainable economic growth … Clearly, natural resource depletion is one of the key drivers of negative ANS in the region'.

The Bank asks, 'How does sub-Saharan Africa compare to other regions? Not favourably.' Contrary to pernicious 'Africa Rising' mythology, the ANS decline for sub-Saharan Africa was worst from 2001-09 and 2013-15.

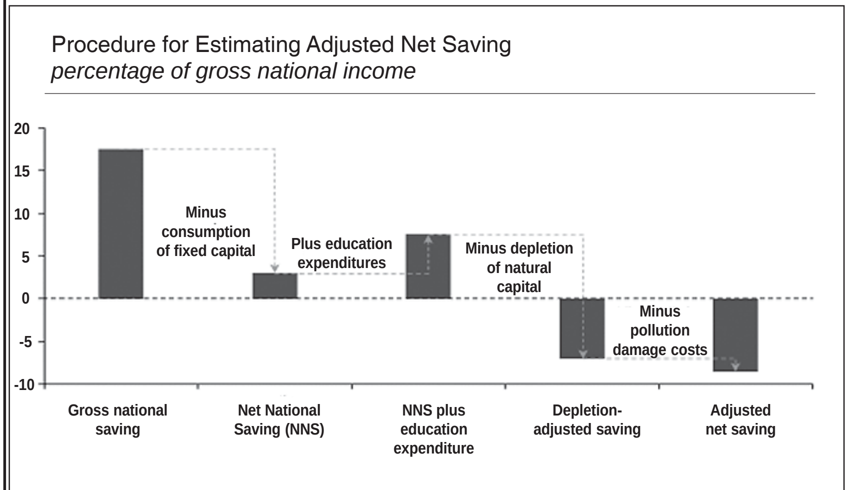
Other regions of the world scored strongly positive ANS increases, in the 5-25% range. Richer, resource-intensive countries such as Australia, Canada and Norway have positive ANS resource outcomes partly because their TNCs return profits to home-based shareholders.

Africa's smash-and-grab 'development policies' aiming to attract foreign direct investment have, even the Bank suggests, now become counterproductive: 'Especially for resource-rich countries, the depletion of natural resources is often not compensated for by other investments. The warnings provided by negative ANS in many countries and in the region as a whole should not be ignored.'

Such warnings – including the 2012 Gaborone Declaration by 10 African governments – are indeed being mainly ignored, and for a simple reason, the Bank hints: 'The [ANS] measure remains very important, especially in resource-rich countries. It helps in advocating for investments toward diversification to promote exports and sectoral growth outside the resource sector.'

Africa desperately needs diversi-

World Bank methods for bean-counting nature



Source: Lange, Glenn-Marie, Quentin Wodon, and Kevin Carey (eds.) (2018). *The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018: Building a Sustainable Future*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1046-6. Licence: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

By way of a brief methodological explanation, the World Bank calculates 'consumption of fixed capital' (wear and tear on machines), educational expenditure ('human capital'), depletion of non-renewable resources ('natural capital') and pollution damage. In the calculation above, says the Bank, 'About half of gross national saving is used for the consumption of fixed assets (depreciation), with a similar negative contribution (with some variation over the years) resulting from natural resource depletion. The losses from pollution are smaller, as is the positive contribution of spending for education.'

The negative contribution from mining is a conservative estimate, because 'some important resources are still not included because of a lack of data, notably platinum group minerals, diamonds, and other minerals'. Hence while three of South Africa's major mineral exports are calculated – coal, iron ore and gold – the trillions of dollars represented here by 85% of the world's platinum are not included. Vast levels of diamond extraction in Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Liberia are also ignored, so the alleged 3% annual decline in the region's wealth is likely to be far worse.

fication, but governments of resource-cursed countries are instead excessively influenced by TNCs intent on extraction. Even within the Bank such bias is evident, as the case of Zambia shows.

Zambia's missing copper

Last year, the Bank appointed Zambia the main pilot country study within the project 'Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services' (WAVES). Zambian forests, wetlands, farmland and water resources were considered the 'priority accounts'. Conspicuously missing was copper, the main component of Zambia's natural wealth.

Was copper neglected in WAVES because such accounting would show a substantial net loss? One Bank estimate of copper's annual contribution to Zambia's declining mineral wealth a decade ago put it at a huge 19.8% of GNI. Were such data widely discussed, it might compel a rethink in Zambia's desperate privatisation of mines and export of unprocessed ore.

Naturally most World Bank staff work not in Zambians' interests, but on behalf of other international banks and TNCs. This compels them to squeeze Zambia's scarce foreign exchange: first, so TNCs can take profits home, and second, so Lusaka repays loans no matter how unaffordable and no matter how corrupt the borrowing government. Repayment is now especially difficult given that the kwacha declined from a level around 1 to the US$ in the 1990s to around 5 to the US$ from 2003-15, to the 9-12/US$ range since.

From 2002-08, the Zambian government led by Levy Mwanamasa (1948-2008) came under severe pressure from the World Bank to sell the most valuable state assets to repay older loans, including those taken out by his corrupt predecessor, Frederick Chiluba (1943-2011). That debt should have been repudiated and cancelled.

Even then, when selling Africa's largest copper mine at Konkola, Mwanamasa should have ensured at least $400 million went into Zambia's treasury. But the buyer, Vedanta chief executive Anil Agarwal, laughed wickedly when bragging to a 2014 investment conference in Bangalore, India, that he tricked Mwanawasa into accepting only $25 million. 'It has been nine years and since then every year it is giving us a minimum of $500 million to $1 billion.' (Agarwal is now in the process of buying Anglo American's South African mining assets, having purchased 20% of the firm in 2016-17.)

Against the looting of Africa: top-down or bottom-up?

Zambia is not alone. The Bank reports that from 1990-2015 many African countries suffered massive ANS shrinkage (a process termed 'dissaving' as a polite substitute for 'looting'), including Angola (68%), the Republic of the Congo (49%) and Equatorial Guinea (39%). As commodity prices peaked in the 2007-14 super-cycle period, resource depletion was the major factor for Africa's wealth shrinkage.

What can be done? There are really only two ways to address TNC capture of African wealth: bottom-up through direct action blocking extraction, or top-down through reforms.

The futility of the latter is exemplified by the African Union's 2009 Alternative Mining Vision (AMV). It proclaims (without any reference to natural resource depletion capital accounting), 'arguably the most important vehicle for building local capital are the foreign resource investors – TNCs – who have the requisite capital, skills and expertise'.

Women from the Marikana slums of South Africa formed the Sikhala Sonke (which means ‘We Cry Together’) movement after police killed 34 mineworkers during a wildcat strike there in 2012.

South African activist Chris Rutledge opposed this neoliberal logic last year in an ActionAid report, *The AMV: Are we repackaging a colonial paradigm?*: ‘By ramping up models of maximum extraction, the AMV once again stands in direct opposition to our own priorities to ensure resilient livelihoods and securing climate justice. It is downright opposed to any type of free prior and informed consent. And it does not address the structural causes of structural violence experienced by women, girls and affected communities.’

The first strategy – community-based opposition – could be far more effective. According to a pamphlet prepared by Johannesburg faith-based mining watchdog Bench Marks Foundation for the civil society Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town recently, ‘Intractable conflicts of interest prevail with ongoing interruptions to mining operations. Resistance to mining operations is steadily on the increase along with the associated conflict.’

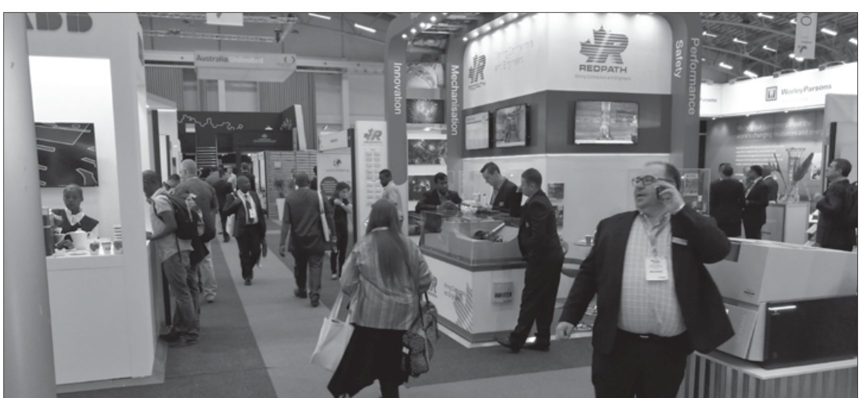
The Indaba’s challenge is to embrace this resistance, not retreat into reformist NGO silos – and not continue to ignore mining’s adverse impact on energy security, climate and resource depletion as it often has.

Indeed, three years ago, Anglo American Chief Executive Officer Mark Cutifani conceded that due to community protests, ‘There’s something like $25 billion worth of projects tied up or stopped’ – a stunning feat given that all new mines across the world were valued that year at $80 billion. (A map of these can be found at the Environmental Justice Atlas, http://ejatlas.org.)

Meanwhile, the World Bank’s lending staffers (distinct from the *Changing Wealth of Nations* researchers) are still subject to protests over mining in South Africa. Women living in the Marikana slums, organised as Sikhala Sonke, remain disgusted by the $150 million financing commitment made to mining company Lonmin, which from 2007-12 the Bank bizarrely considered its ‘best case’ for community investment – until the police massacre of 34 workers there during a wildcat strike. (Bank president Jim Yong Kim even visited Johannesburg two weeks after that, but didn’t dare mention much less visit his institution’s ‘best case’ mining stake.)

The Bank’s other notorious South Africa operations included generous credits to the apartheid regime, relentless promotion of neoliberal ideology after 1990, a corrupt $3.75 billion Eskom loan in 2010 (the largest ever Bank project loan, which still funds the most polluting coal-fired power plant under construction anywhere in the world), and ongoing lead-shareholder investments in the CPS-Net1 rip-offs of South Africa’s 11 million poorest citizens who receive social grants.

To top it all off, in spite of the embarrassing revelations about TNC exploitation unmistakeable in *The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018*, the Bank was a financial sponsor of the African Mining Indaba (conference) held in Cape Town in February. Each year, it’s the place to break bread and sip fine Stellenbosch wines (though perhaps not water in this climate-catastrophic city) with the world’s most aggressive mining bosses and allied African political elites, conferring jovially about how to amplify the looting. ◆



The 2018 African Mining Indaba (conference) was held in Cape Town, South Africa, in February, bringing together mining company executives and African political leaders.

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ECONOMICS

Missing billions

In spite of being rich in commodities such as gold, diamonds, gas, copper and rare earth minerals, many African countries are among the poorest in the world. One reason is tax dodging by international corporations, particularly in the commodities sector. To pay as little tax as possible in resource-rich countries, these companies take recourse to illegal as well as legal – though morally dubious – methods.

Nico Beckert

TAX evasion by international oil, gas and mining companies costs resource-rich countries billions of dollars in lost tax revenue every year. According to estimates by the United Nations and the World Bank, the total sum is in the double-digit billions.

Non-payment of taxes has serious social, economic and political consequences. The countries affected lack the money for basic public services. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), investing an annual $8.7 billion in healthcare in 46 African countries would save the lives of 4 million children a year. And $5.2 billion per year would be enough to pay for the teachers needed to allow every child in Africa to go to school.

Tax evasion and avoidance thus have an enormous impact. Governments of countries like Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Niger or Liberia spend less than $6 billion a year. While it is true that some African leaders embezzle part of their countries' revenue, corruption committed by politicians and civil servants makes up only a tenth of the amount that African countries lose due to tax avoidance by corporations, according to the research organisation Global Financial Integrity.

Because of lost tax revenues, countries struggle to develop sustainably and build strong economies. To promote entrepreneurship and create jobs, countries need basic infrastructure that includes roads, electric power, schools and research facilities. They must also be able to grant loans to encourage investments and new businesses. Without tax revenue, governments cannot provide these things and thus have to depend on outside help. According to numbers collected by the policy watchdog Global Policy Forum, the revenue lost is comparable to the amount of official development assistance (ODA) that sub-Saharan Africa receives.

Because of lost tax revenues, countries struggle to build basic infrastructure such as roads.

It will be next to impossible to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) if tax evasion and avoidance continue unchecked. According to UN estimates, between $750 million and $1.3 billion in public spending will be needed each year to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development worldwide. ODA will certainly not cover the entire cost.

Trickery and deceit

Multinational corporations and the natural resource sector use many tactics to avoid paying taxes. Even when negotiating mining contracts, companies use their negotiating power, their knowledge of contract clauses or plain bribery to ensure that they are exempt from certain taxes either entirely or for a long time.

Another trick is what is known as transfer mispricing. The company sells the commodity it has extracted to a subsidiary in a tax haven for far less than the market price. This means that the company makes little profit in the country where the commodity is produced and pays very little tax accordingly. On the other hand, little tax is incurred in the tax haven where the profit was shifted to – the country's low tax rates are what makes it a tax haven after all. If such no- or low-tax countries did not exist, companies would have fewer opportunities to evade and avoid taxes in commodity-rich countries. Dishonest practices are also used to avoid paying value-added taxes, excise taxes, licence fees and dividends.

Double-taxation agreements can be used to avoid taxes as well. They spell out which country an international corporation will be taxed in: for instance, the country where its corporate headquarters are located or the country where it earns its profit. While the objective of these agreements is to avoid taxing a company twice, many were designed in a way that disadvantages poorer countries.

The use of double-taxation agreements to dodge taxes is not illegal, but it is extremely dubious in moral terms. The international non-governmental organisation ActionAid has demonstrated as much with the example of an Australian mining company that operates in Malawi. In order to avoid taxes in Malawi, the company made use of a tax treaty that existed between Malawi and the Netherlands. It established a subsidiary, with no employees, in the Netherlands and sent its Malawian money there. The tax rate in the Netherlands was zero percent, so the money could flow without deductions on to the company's headquarters in Australia. Over six years, the company saved $27.5 million it would otherwise have had to pay Malawi's tax authority.

This case is not an exception, and the sum in question is comparatively low. According to the Dutch NGO SOMO, an oil company once tried to dodge tax payments of more than $400 million in Uganda. After lengthy court proceedings, Uganda was at least able to collect a portion of that amount.

Many of the affected countries are demanding that their interests be taken into account when it comes to the taxation of international companies, particularly in the mining sector. At the International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 in Addis Ababa, a group of 134 developing countries insisted that an intergovernmental commission be created at the UN level to give them a greater say in international negotiations on tax matters. However, many Western countries rejected the request, so nothing came of it. So far, international decisions concerning tax issues are still primarily being taken by members of the G20 in the context of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an umbrella organisation of rich nations. ◆

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At the 2015 International Conference on Financing for Development *(pic)*, developing countries called for the establishment of an intergovernmental UN body to give them a greater say in international negotiations on tax matters, but this was rejected by many Western countries.

Battling tax evasion

IN recent years, there have been multiple initiatives at the international level to fight tax evasion and avoidance with greater transparency and new standards. Both the US and the EU passed rules that require commodities companies to disclose tax and other payments they make to governments. In the US, however, industry lobbies resisted the implementation of the measures, and in early 2017, the US Congress decided to completely halt enforcement of the transparency rules.

The EU Accounting Directive has been criticised for only addressing illegal corruption. Critics contend that it does little to prevent more subtle cases of legal, but morally questionable, tax avoidance. The relevant data is still being concealed. Non-governmental activists believe that greater public pressure is needed to ensure proper behaviour as well as more rigorous investigation of corporate practices.

At the moment, the European Parliament and the European Commission are debating what information companies should be required to disclose and which companies would be affected. The Commission's proposal does not go as far as the Parliament's. Like the Accounting Directive, which only applies to the commodities sector, it would do little to remedy the unsatisfying current situation.

With regard to double-taxation agreements, so-called anti-abuse rules have been proposed. However, NGO activists and members of the European Parliament feel that these proposals do not really address the problem. The reason is that it will be very difficult for commodity-rich countries to prove that companies have taken advantage of loopholes. To apply the anti-abuse rules of double-taxation agreements, governments would have to provide such proof.

In order to stop transfer mispricing, donor governments' bilateral development agencies are training staff of tax authorities in commodity-rich countries to look for the signs. Detecting the practice is not easy. But NGOs do not think these measures go far enough. They want the OECD to adopt an entirely new approach called 'unitary taxation'. It would apply to the entire profits of a corporation, including those of all its subsidiaries. According to a formula that would be determined at the international level, all countries in which the company is active would then be entitled to tax a specific share of the profit. Unitary taxation would help to ensure that companies are taxed on the basis of their actual value and profit. The approach would also help to stem tax avoidance. – *Nico Beckert*/D+C (*January 2018*)

The 2017 Bonn climate talks – an overview

Although the main task of the Bonn climate change conference held in November 2017 was to lay the groundwork for a draft negotiating text for the implementation of the Paris climate agreement, developing countries were obliged to bring back to the conference agenda a number of issues in respect of which the West's commitment pledged in earlier conferences was now flagging. Among these were the ratification of the Doha Amendment to give effect to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and the issue of climate finance. *Meena Raman* reports.

THE annual climate change talks under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the Paris Agreement (PA) took place in Bonn, Germany, on 6-18 November 2017, ending a day later than scheduled due to last-minute wrangling among Parties, mainly over issues related to finance.

The annual meetings were presided over by the Government of Fiji, with its Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama at the helm, a first for any island state. During the high-level segment of the talks which began on 15 November, about 25 heads of state and government and over 100 ministers were present.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, at the opening of the high-level segment, called on world leaders to show 'more ambition' and said that Parties 'must go further and faster together', stressing that at least a further 25% cut in emissions (based on 1990 levels) of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming is needed by 2020.

Referring to the latest UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report, the UN SG said that 'current pledges [under the PA] will only deliver a third of what is needed to stay in the safety zones' of the PA. He added that 'the window of opportunity to meet the 2°C target [i.e., to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels] may close in 20 years or less and there may be only five years to bend the emissions curve towards 1.5°C.'

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/6nov.html)

The main outcome of the Bonn climate change talks was the adoption of the 'Fiji Momentum for Implementation'.

There were many decisions taken at the end of the talks but the main outcome of the 23rd meeting of the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP 23) was the adoption of what was called by the Presidency the 'Fiji Momentum for Implementation' (also referred to as decision 1/CP.23).

Fiji Momentum for Implementation

The decision adopted was divided into three parts and dealt with: (i) the completion of the Work Programme under the PA; (ii) the design and process for the 2018 facilitative dialogue; and (iii) pre-2020 implementation and ambition. Details are provided below.

Completion of the Work Programme under the PA

The COP 23 closing plenary was supposed to convene in the morning of 17 November to adopt the final outcome decision, but it only began past 4.30 a.m. on 18 November.

The main cause of the delay was the stance of the United States, especially over some finance-related issues pertaining to the implementation of the PA. It took long huddles among Parties on the conference floor to iron out a solution allowing for a final decision.

Even though the US notified Parties that it does not intend to remain in the PA, it remains a Party until it legally withdraws from the Agreement in November 2020.

Despite its intention to leave, the US' role in the Bonn climate talks was viewed by senior negotiators from developing countries and some observers as being very problematic, especially as regards developed-country commitments related to finance.

Also viewed as outrageous by several delegates in the final hours of the conference was what was seen as an attempt by the UNFCCC Secretariat to 'cover up' the US opposition to an initial draft of the COP 23 decision.

The Secretariat informally told several delegations that there was a 'typo' in the initial draft document when it was asked to explain why the later version of the decision had some issues removed and was different from the earlier iteration. This drew protests from developing countries and led to further huddles among Parties.

The US was opposed to the reflection of some issues as part of the Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP), including 'modalities for biennially communicating information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries' under the PA and the setting of a new collective quantified goal on finance from a floor of $100 billion per year, which is to be agreed to by 2025.

According to sources, the US was of the view that there was no need to include these matters in the PAWP. Developing countries, on the other hand, wanted these issues to be included, as they were integral to the implementation of the PA and there could be no justification for excluding them from being considered.

Sources said that the US disagreed and maintained that there was no clarity that the additional matters were part of the PAWP or that they needed to be addressed by the first session of the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 1). The US was resolute in its stand and refused to accept the inclusion of these matters, despite pleas by developing countries. (The CMA 1 in this regard will take place in December 2018 in Poland.)

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/15nov.html)

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on world leaders to show 'more ambition' and said that countries 'must go further and faster together' to tackle climate change.

After lengthy deliberations in the huddle, a compromise was reached in the form of a footnote in the final decision on the issue of 'possible additional matters relating to the implementation of the PA'. Parties wanted to reflect that there was no consensus on the matters to be addressed under the PAWP and therefore, the footnote reads as follows: 'Different views are expressed by Parties on whether possible additional matters should be added to the work programme under the PA for the first session of the CMA…'

In the intersessional meeting to be held in early 2018, the issue of possible additional matters is bound to resurface and can be expected to be contentious.

Further, in the decision adopted, the Secretariat is requested to develop an online platform to provide an overview of the PAWP being carried out in the various subsidiary and constituted bodies, including the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA).

[When the PA was adopted in Paris in 2015, the task of drawing up the modalities, procedures and guidelines for its implementation (which is the PAWP) was distributed among the APA and the subsidiary bodies of the Convention.]

The convening of the COP closing plenary was also held up by the delay in the closing of the APA and divergences among Parties over finance issues regarding the Adaptation Fund, as well as a process to identify indicative quantitative and qualitative information that developed countries are required to communicate biennially under Article 9.5 of the PA.

The COP 23 Presidency carried out several rounds of informal consultations with Parties to address these differences, which were eventually resolved. (Details are provided below.)

2018 facilitative dialogue

The COP 23 decision also welcomed 'with appreciation' 'the design of the 2018 facilitative dialogue, to be known as the Talanoa dialogue … as contained in the informal note' prepared by the COP 22 and COP 23 Presidencies.

[In Paris, Parties had agreed to 'convene a facilitative dialogue … in 2018 to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal referred to … in the Agreement and to inform the preparation of nationally determined contributions (NDCs)…']

In the two informal meetings held ahead of the official UNFCCC talks [convened by the COP 22 President (Morocco) and the COP 23 President], according to sources, the design of the 2018 facilitative dialogue was pitched by the Fijian Presidency as a very important outcome and 'legacy' issue for COP 23. It was referred to as the 'Talanoa Dialogue' to reflect what the Fijian Presidency called the 'Pacific spirit' of sharing stories.

The dialogue was touted by the Presidency and some countries, particularly the island states, as a very important event to 'ratchet up' the NDCs of Parties under the PA.

Several developing-country delegations who spoke to the Third World Network said they had raised concerns about the mandate for the dialogue. Their view was that when the decision was taken in Paris in 2015 to convene a 2018 dialogue to inform the preparation of the NDCs, no one had expected the PA to take effect so soon in November 2016.

According to these sources, the Paris mandate obviously was to inform the preparation of the first NDCs to be communicated, prior to the ratification by countries of the PA, which was expected to happen after 2018.

Since Parties which ratified the PA had already communicated their NDCs well before 2018, some developing countries felt that the mandate for the dialogue was rendered futile and there was no further mandate to review or ratchet up the first NDCs that Parties had already forwarded to the UNFCCC.

In addition, some were of the view that 'any pressure' on them to ramp up their NDCs with no indication of any financial support would not be fair to them. Moreover, they were concerned that developed countries were not showing real leadership by enhancing their mitigation ambition in the pre-2020 time frame, and had failed to close the mitigation gap, thus shifting the responsibility onto developing countries.

Hence, there was much discomfort among some Parties over the strong focus of the Presidency on the design of the 2018 dialogue and the intention behind this effort.

Since the informal note by the COP Presidency on the design of the dialogue was not a negotiated document, how it was to be reflected in the COP 23 decision became a bone of contention. Some Parties, especially the small island states, wanted to 'endorse' the informal note, while other countries did not want to do so since it was not a negotiated document.

The informal note provided details about the features and design of the dialogue. The dialogue, said the note, will be 'structured around three general topics: where are we; where do we want to go and how do we get there'. It will consist of a preparatory and a political phase, with the COP 23 President and the COP 24 President (Poland) providing a summary of key messages from roundtables to be held in 2018. The note further stated that 'it will be important to send clear forward looking signals to ensure that the outcome of the dialogue is greater confidence, courage and enhanced ambition'.

During COP 23, the Fijian Presidency had further consultations with Parties on the dialogue. Sources said that apart from the disagreements on how to reflect the informal note in the decision to be adopted, there were also differences of view on the design elements of the dialogue around the involvement of expert institutions, the involvement of the Presidencies, and the outcome of the dialogue itself.

The US and New Zealand could not endorse the informal note as it 'was not negotiated by Parties' and was only a proposal of the Presidencies. The European Union (EU) said it could accept the design 'in the spirit of compromise'. The Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) were of the view that the dialogue should be a Party-driven process and that the reports of the dialogue should not be left to the Presidencies. They also had concerns about the involvement of 'expert institutions'.

After further consultations, Parties agreed to only 'welcome with appreciation' the design of the dialogue and not to endorse the informal note. The decision also states that the dialogue will start in January 2018.

Pre-2020 implementation and ambition

Developing countries, led by the LMDC and later supported by the Group of 77 and China, had insisted that the COP 23 agenda include an item on pre-2020 action. This was to enable Parties to consider if the existing mitigation obligations under the Convention and the KP were being met. This proposal was initially strongly resisted by developed countries.

The statements by the G77 and many other developing-country subgroups expressed a growing concern that the existing obligations of developed countries under the Convention and the KP were not being met to close the mitigation ambition gap in the pre-2020 time frame, with developed countries shifting their focus and responsibilities to developing countries post-2020 under the PA.

At issue was why the Doha Amendment to the KP had yet to be ratified by many developed countries, including those from the EU. The Doha Amendment is supposed to give effect to the second commitment period of the KP (2CP) for emissions reductions by developed countries for the period 2013-20.

(Parties had agreed in 2012 in Doha to amend the KP to ensure that under the 2CP, developed countries which are Parties to the KP would undertake aggregate emission cuts that would be at least 18% below 1990 levels. They also agreed that developed countries would revisit their emission reduction commitments by the end of 2014, with a view to increasing their ambition level. It was on this understanding that developing countries had agreed to negotiate the PA, where all Parties will undertake emission reduction obligations after 2020.)

Regrettably, the 2CP has not come into effect, nor has there been a revision and raising of the ambition level for the emission cuts of developed countries. To give effect to the Doha Amendment, and for the 2CP to come into effect, a total of 144 countries have to ratify it, including developing countries. Thus far, only 96 countries have done so. The PA, on the other hand, was ratified at super speed and came into effect in November 2016, within a year of its adoption in December 2015.

At COP 23, following informal consultations by the COP Presidency, consensus was eventually found on having a decision on 'pre-2020 implementation and ambition' in the final decision adopted, which was seen as a matter of significance for developing countries.

Among other things, the decision requests the President of the COP and the UNFCCC Executive Secretary to send joint letters to Parties to the KP that are yet to ratify the Doha Amendment urging them to do so as soon as possible. It also requests the Secretariat to consult the UN SG on ways to promote the ratification of the Doha Amendment.

The decision further notes that the 2018 facilitative dialogue will also consider pre-2020 action by Parties as well as the support provided to developing countries. In addition, it provides for a stocktake on pre-2020 implementation and ambition to be convened at COP 25 (in 2019); the stocktake will also consider the outcomes of the high-level ministerial dialogue on climate finance to be held at COP 24 in Poland.

The Paris Agreement Work Programme

A major task at COP 23 was to lay the groundwork for a draft negotiating text to be prepared for the various issues under the PAWP.

In the conclusions adopted under the APA, progress was noted at the session with the production of informal notes prepared by co-facilitators under their own responsibility, which were annexed to the conclusions. The informal notes, which are about 266 pages in length, cover the six agenda items of the APA: NDCs, adaptation communications, transparency of action and support, global stocktake, committee to facilitate compliance, and matters related to the implementation of the PA.

These informal notes contain the positions of all Parties on the various issues and will form the basis of further work and negotiations in 2018 towards a draft negotiating text, with a final outcome expected at COP 24 in December.

As pointed out earlier, the PAWP includes the work of Parties from not only the APA but also the subsidiary bodies of the Convention. In this regard, the APA also 'reiterated its recognition of the need to progress on all items in a coherent and balanced manner, and to ensure a coordinated approach to the consideration of matters relating to the PAWP by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the COP.'

To that end, the APA 'recommended that the President of the COP consider options for bringing together, under his own responsibility and without prejudice to the future work of the subsidiary bodies, the outcomes of the work of the APA, the SBI, the SBSTA and the COP on PAWP-related matters at this session.'

This recommendation resulted in the abovementioned request to the Secretariat (via decision 1/CP.23) to develop the online platform to provide an overview of the PAWP being carried out in the various bodies.

The APA co-chairs are also expected to issue a reflections note by early April 2018 that will suggest options for the way forward on the basis of the views of Parties reflected in the informal notes of the co-facilitators and in Parties' further submissions on textual proposals.

The APA plenary closed after 1 a.m. on 18 November, overshooting its scheduled closing by three days, mainly due to the need to find a resolution on the Article 9.5 issue.

The Article 9.5 issue

The issue of modalities for the provision of ex ante information by developed countries on public financial resources to be provided to developing countries under Article 9.5 of the PA was a major source of contention at COP 23.

Article 9.5 essentially provides that developed countries 'shall biennially communicate indicative quantitative and qualitative information' related to the provision and mobilisation of financial resources, 'including, as available, projected levels of public financial resources' to be provided to developing countries.

South Africa, on behalf of the African Group of countries, was the first to raise the point that Parties need to begin to discuss the modalities for communicating the information that is required under Article 9.5. In a formal submission at the COP on how to operationalise Article 9.5, the African Group called for the establishment of a process under the APA to define the modalities for biennially communicating information on the provision of public financial resources.

The African Group proposal was supported by the G77 and China but there was strong resistance from developed countries including from the EU and the Umbrella Group (which includes the US). The G77 and China fought very hard for the issue to be addressed and stated repeatedly that ex ante information on public financial resources from developed countries to be provided to developing countries would help the latter plan and implement their NDCs.

Developed countries were opposed to discussing the 'modalities' for the provision of the information, arguing that there was already an existing agenda item under the COP that deals with the 'process to identify the information to be provided by Parties in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA'. Developing countries, on the other hand, argued that the nature of the discussions under the COP is fundamentally different as it deals only with the 'process' to identify the information and does not address the 'modalities' for that information, which need to be addressed by the APA. According to sources, the word 'modalities' was a red line for the EU.

Given the divergence of views, it took several rounds of informal consultations by the COP 23 Presidency to resolve the deadlock in the final hours of the COP, with an eventual compromise reached on the issue.

The compromise was that the issue of the 'process' to identify the information (which was previously handled by the COP, which only meets once a year) would now be considered by the SBI at the May 2018 session, while the APA would continue deliberation of the issue of the 'modalities' for that information under its agenda. (The APA and the subsidiary bodies meet twice a year.)

A senior negotiator described the fight as a 'battle won' in terms of securing the space for discussions on Article 9.5 at the intersessional meetings in May and for deliberations to continue on the issue of the modalities under the APA, which developed countries did not want.

Fight over the Adaptation Fund

Developed and developing countries were also divided over the future and nature of the Adaptation Fund (AF) under the PA. The AF is currently under the KP. This divide was apparent in the discussions that took place under the APA.

The G77 and China want the AF to remain in its current form in terms of its operational policies and guidelines, for developing countries to access the Fund when it serves the PA. Developed countries, on their part, want to change the nature of the AF if it is to serve the PA.

In the input provided by the G77 and China at the APA, among the proposals was for the 'operational policies and guidelines for Parties to access funding from the AF' to 'be applied *mutatis mutandis* when the AF serves the PA.' ['*Mutatis mutandis*' means that in comparing two situations (viz., the AF under the KP and the AF under the PA), although there will be changes necessary to take into account the different situations, the basic points remain the same.]

The EU in its inputs said that 'the current composition of the [AF] Board has worked well' but 'potential revision of the composition depends on outcome of preparatory work, for instance sources and levels of funding.' It also proposed that Parties have to 'decide to what extent the previous guidance to AF …, including those agreed before adoption of the PA, shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the AF when it serves the PA.'

In the input provided by Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the US on 'governance and institutional arrangements', among the proposals made was that 'the AF enjoys appropriate legal personality to enable a new or revised relationship with the interim trustee, the Fund's secretariat, and any other contractual arrangements'. On the operating modalities, these countries proposed that 'eligibility [be] restricted to Parties to the PA from the date the Fund begins to serve the PA,' with 'prioritisation given to Parties that are particularly vulnerable – especially small island developing states and least developed countries.'

Given the proposals made by developed countries, developing countries were concerned that the nature of the AF as they know it could change when it serves the PA.

In the final decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties meeting as the Parties to the KP (CMP), one part notes 'the progress of the APA in undertaking the necessary preparatory work to address governance and institutional arrangements, safeguards and operating modalities for the AF to serve the PA, including sources of funding, to be defined by Parties, and looks forward to the recommendations thereon from the APA in 2018.'

Hence, the work of the APA in relation to the AF in 2018 is bound to be difficult and contentious, as Parties attempt to bridge the current divergence of positions as regards the AF serving the PA.

Other key issues

Apart from the above matters, several other key decisions and important outcomes were adopted by the COP, including outcomes on the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with climate change impacts (WIM), on a platform for local communities and indigenous peoples on climate change, and on a gender action plan. Details are provided below.

Loss and damage

During the first week of the climate talks, developing countries led by Cuba, representing the G77 and China, together with the Alliance for Small Island States pushed hard for a permanent agenda item under the subsidiary bodies to ensure discussions on the WIM take place intersessionally, so that the WIM can be effective in helping developing countries impacted by climate change. Presently, the only discussions in relation to the WIM are confined to a report of the work of the WIM Executive Committee to the COP.

Developed countries, however, strongly resisted the call by developing countries for a permanent agenda item on the WIM at the intersessional meetings of the subsidiary bodies.

Intense negotiations resulted in a compromise agreement to have an expert dialogue on loss and damage. According to the decision reached, the UNFCCC Secretariat, under the guidance of the WIM Executive Committee and the Chair of the SBI, is requested to organise, in conjunction with the SBI session in April-May 2018, 'an expert dialogue to explore a wide range of information, inputs and views on ways for facilitating the mobilisation and securing of expertise, and enhancement of support, including finance, technology and capacity-building, for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events'. The Secretariat is also requested to prepare a report on the expert dialogue.

Although a small step, this decision is seen as significant to advance the WIM to become effective and serve the interests of developing countries.

Local communities and indigenous peoples' platform

At COP 21 (2015), Parties recognised the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change, and established a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices on mitigation and adaptation in a holistic and integrated manner. COP 22 (2016) agreed to adopt an incremental approach to developing the platform with a view to ensuring its effective operationalisation.

Developing countries, led by the G77 and China, insisted on the further operationalisation of the platform at COP 23 by having a working group under the UNFCCC to advance the platform, but developed countries such as the US and New Zealand could not agree to this. The compromise reached was the establishment of a 'facilitative working group' which would not be a negotiating body.

COP 23 decided that the SBSTA would consider at its next session 'the further operationalisation of the platform, including the establishment of a facilitative working group, which would not be a negotiating body under the Convention, and the modalities for the development of a workplan for the full implementation of the functions with balanced representation of local communities and indigenous peoples and Parties, and ... conclude its considerations by making recommendations to COP 24 (December 2018).'

Gender and climate change

The SBI had been requested by COP 22 to develop a gender action plan (GAP) in order to support the implementation of gender-related decisions and mandates in the UNFCCC process.

At COP 23, the GAP was adopted. Among other things, it 'seeks to advance women's full, equal and meaningful participation and promote gender-responsive climate policy and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Convention and the work of Parties, the secretariat, United Nations entities and all stakeholders at all levels.'

The GAP states, among other things, that 'Gender-responsive climate policy requires further strengthening in all activities concerning adaptation, mitigation and related means of implementation (finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building) as well as decision-making on the implementation of climate policies. The GAP recognises the need for women to be represented in all aspects of the UNFCCC process and the need for gender mainstreaming through all relevant targets and goals in activities under the Convention as an important contribution to increasing their effectiveness.'

Conclusion

On the whole, COP 23 can be viewed as laying the groundwork for the intense and difficult negotiations that will take place in 2018, especially on the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the implementation of the PA.

In relation to the PA, while the 2017 talks succeeded in producing a lengthy document that captures the positions of all Parties on the various issues under the PAWP, the pressure is now on to produce a draft negotiating text that leads to a decision or decisions to be adopted at COP 24 on the PAWP. It is important that the text is produced through a Party-driven process that clearly sets out the various differing positions as options to be considered in proper text-based negotiations to take place, so that the decision/decisions are able to be adopted smoothly at the end of the year in Poland. Hence, the intersessional meeting that begins at the end of April this year will be an important moment in this regard. Another meeting on the PAWP is expected to take place in the later part of the year, before COP 24, to facilitate this.

At the heart of the matter is how developed and developing countries view the PA. While Parties from both sides of the divide say that the PA must not be reinterpreted when developing the rules for its implementation, there is no common understanding on how the PA must be viewed and operationalised.

What has clearly emerged in the last two years since the adoption of the PA are differences in interpreting what NDCs are (whether they are only about mitigation or if they also cover adaptation and the means of implementation) and therefore the information that is required to be communicated flowing from the components of the NDCs.

Another big difference is over how the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' is put into effect in the operational details for the PA implementation. While some developing countries take a firm view that the operational details must differentiate between developed and developing countries, developed countries are generally of the view that the rules for implementation should be common to all, with flexibilities for developing countries provided.

Hence, finding the 'landing zone' on some of these issues will be a great challenge.

Also of importance will be how developing countries continue to ensure that the pre-2020 implementation agenda and ambition is not sidelined. High on the radar of developing countries will be whether developed countries meet their pre-2020 commitments on climate finance, with the high-level dialogue on finance taking place at the end of the year.

Given all this, the road to and at COP 24 in Poland does not promise a smooth ride. ◆

Meena Raman is Senior Legal Adviser and Head of the Climate Change Programme of the Third World Network.

Climate talks open with call for urgent action

The opening day of the Bonn climate change conference provided an opportunity for developing countries to articulate their main concerns. *Zhu Zhenyan* reports.

THE meetings of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol (KP) and Paris Agreement (PA) as well as the meetings of the subsidiary bodies serving these treaties kicked off on 6 November.

In his opening plenary statement, the newly elected President of the 23rd session of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP 23), Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama of Fiji, said that 'the need for urgency is obvious. Our world is in distress from the extreme weather events caused by climate change – destructive hurricanes, fires, floods, droughts, melting ice, and changes to agriculture that threaten our food security.'

President of COP 23, Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama: 'We must not fail our people.'

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/6nov.html)

In light of such extreme events, he said, 'our job as leaders is to respond to that suffering with all the means available to us. This includes our capacity to work together to identify opportunities in the transition we must take. We must not fail our people. That means using the next two weeks and the year ahead to do everything we can to make the PA work and to advance ambition and support for climate action before 2020.'

UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa followed by saying that in record time, 169 countries have ratified the Paris Agreement, 'making it possible that we go from the era of hope ... to the era of implementation. Together with the [2030] Sustainable Development Agenda, we have a clear path forward to truly address climate change and sustainable development. Yet, it is an incomplete journey.'

Referring to the United Nations Environment Programme's latest Emissions Gap Report, she said the Paris national pledges only led to a third of the reductions in emissions needed by 2030 to meet climate targets.

She listed some specific goals that must be achieved in Bonn: the negotiations were expected to be the next essential step to ensure that the Paris Agreement's structure is completed, its impacts strengthened and its goals achieved. She added that there was also a need to move forward to fulfil the commitments due in 2020. In this regard, finance and mitigation pledges were essential, she stressed.

The Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Hoesung Lee, also spoke at the opening ceremony. He informed Parties that over 7,500 nominations for authors for the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report had just ended a week ago and this showed that 'we can draw on a superb range of talent and expertise for the IPCC's work, as implementation of the Paris Agreement begins.'

Meanwhile, he said, work continued apace on the Special Report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C*. The special report will assess how the rise in global temperatures could be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels; the impacts of a 1.5°C world compared with higher levels of warming; and the enabling conditions for meeting this target in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

Parties' statements

After the adoption of the COP 23 agenda, the session was adjourned and the President convened the CMP, which took up organisational and procedural matters and was then adjourned, which was also the same in the case of the CMA.

The President then held the joint plenary of the COP, CMP and CMA and invited Parties to make their statements.

Ecuador, on behalf of the G77 and China, said that it was ready to engage constructively in the textual work that is needed for the operationalisation of the PA, in a manner that reflects equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), in the light of different national circumstances, while continuing to enhance the full implementation of the Convention and its KP, without any renegotiation or reinterpretation of their principles and provisions.

On loss and damage, Ecuador stressed the need to fully implement Article 8 of the PA as a matter of urgency, in order to allow a better integration of loss and damage issues into the broader ongoing work of the UNFCCC, to identify and implement concrete alternatives of support and cooperation for developing-country Parties that are increasingly experiencing losses and damages resulting from extreme weather events.

To facilitate this full implementation, the G77 and China called for loss and damage to be included as a permanent item on the agendas of the subsidiary bodies (SBs), with a broader and more inclusive scope of inputs from all Parties that will be available at regular meetings of the SBs, including the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage and its five-year work programme. In this regard, the G77 and China stressed the need for special financial resources from developed-country Parties to cover activities and further actions in countries.

Ecuador also emphasised that it is crucial to preserve the delicate balance of the PA in its implementation phase and to ensure that no one will be left behind. 'We must ensure transparency, inclusiveness, a Party-driven process on the basis of consensus and balance of all issues and across different bodies.'

The G77 and China also stressed the need to enhance the pre-2020 ambition to provide a strong basis for post-2020 efforts under the PA. It also called for the ratification of the Doha Amendment by Parties that have not yet done so, so as to enable its prompt entry into force and expeditious implementation of the KP's second commitment period.

On adaptation, the G77 and China expected this COP to confirm that the Adaptation Fund will serve the PA, via decisions from the CMP and the CMA, so that the following sessions of the bodies of the COP and the next COP session can decide on the arrangements pending for this to happen.

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/6nov.html)

Ecuadoran delegate Walter Schuldt speaking on behalf of the developing-country Group of 77 and China at the opening of the Bonn climate conference. The G77 and China said it is crucial to preserve the delicate balance of the Paris Agreement in its implementation phase and ensure that no one will be left behind.

The G77 and China proposed to construct the proper way to recognise and register adaptation efforts and measures. It emphasised the importance of the work under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA) in relation to further guidance to the adaptation communication in order to enhance support for adaptation in developing countries. It added that expert guidance for modalities and procedures under the APA should be reviewed in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

The G77 and China noted with concern that the flows to finance adaptation actions through specific multilateral funds are rapidly declining. Funds under the guidance of the COP are demanding additional, unwarranted requirements that have not been agreed under the Convention and these place an additional burden on developing countries.

On finance, the G77 and China stressed the importance of having substantial and concrete advancement at this COP. It expected the discussions on long-term finance to help identify the needs and priorities of developing countries, in particular on adaptation, financing, technology and capacity building, which could also assist in the establishment of a new long-term financial goal, including through a new collective quantified goal beyond the already committed and yet insufficient floor of $100 billion per year, in line with decision 1/CP.21.

In addition, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has to include filling the policy gaps, Ecuador pointed out, in particular on eligibility criteria, the start of a replenishment process, and the linkage with the UN system so as to facilitate direct access to GCF funds. The sixth review of the financial mechanism will provide the opportunity to promote coherence in the climate finance architecture, it said.

On the provision of financial and technical support, the G77 and China expressed regret over the increasing difficulties and conditionalities faced by several developing countries in accessing financial resources from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), including through the establishment of programme priorities and eligibility criteria that have not been agreed at the intergovernmental level.

Deep concern was also conveyed

that some developed countries are unilaterally applying eligibility criteria that are not agreed to and that limit the access of funding to developing countries under the GCF. Such criteria are not compatible with guidance from the COP and are a clear departure from the letter and spirit of the Convention and the PA. Ecuador stressed that these institutions are creating continuous additional barriers to accessing financial resources for climate action, which severely undermine the level of ambition of developing countries in the global effort against climate change. The G77 and China expected this issue to be clearly addressed in the guidance of the COP to the financial mechanism.

'Our world is in distress from the extreme weather events caused by climate change...'

On response measures, the G77 and China reaffirmed the importance of giving full consideration to identifying necessary actions to meet the specific needs and concerns of developing-country Parties arising from the impact of the implementation of response measures, and to avoid the negative economic and social consequences of response measures on developing countries. It welcomed the pre-sessional workshop on modalities, work programme and functions under the PA of the forum on the impact of the implementation of response measures and looked forward to the report, inputs and recommendations from the roundtable to support the work of the improved forum. It also emphasised the importance of fulfilling the mandate of decision 11/CP.21 and advancing the work on the pre-2020 and post-2020 tracks on the modalities, functions and work programmes for the forum under the PA.

Iran, on behalf of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), said that for the LMDC, the key priorities are the principle of equity and CBDR, action on the ground with respect to adaptation, redress for loss and damage, national determination with respect to climate policies and actions, and having access to and receiving finance, technology development and transfer and capacity-building support from developed countries to undertake such actions.

Iran stressed that this COP must be 'an implementation COP' that fully addresses and resolves longstanding issues on adaptation, adaptation finance, loss and damage, and the provision of finance, technology and capacity-building support to developing countries. Developing-country Parties can effectively implement their commitments only when developed-country Parties implement their own commitments to provide the financial resources and transfer technology that developing countries need. Economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of developing-country Parties.

The PA and the COP 21 decision that adopted it constitute a delicately balanced outcome on both pre- and post-2020 actions. However, the LMDC said, no political will has been seen from developed-country Parties to increase their pre-2020 mitigation ambition nor to fully live up to their pre-2020 commitment to provide the means of implementation to developing-country Parties. This imperils the trust and sense of international cooperation that was created at COP 21 through the Paris outcome, according to the LMDC.

Iran pointed out that COP 23 should accelerate the implementation of pre-2020 commitments and actions, especially by developed-country Annex I Parties to the Convention. These include taking stock of the implementation by developed countries of their commitment to achieve and enhance their pre-2020 mitigation targets; their joint commitment to provide at least $100 billion of climate finance per year to developing countries; their rapid ratification of the 2012 Doha Amendment to the KP; and determining what further concrete actions and technical work can be undertaken up to 2020 to accelerate and enhance the ambition of the pre-2020 actions and the provision of support to developing countries. This was the reason why the LMDC suggested the inclusion of an item on pre-2020 issues in the COP's agenda, it emphasised.

With respect to the scope of the 2018 facilitative dialogue, Iran said it must include mitigation, adaptation and support in a holistic and balanced manner and focus on a comprehensive consideration of the pre-2020 gaps on actions and support that need to be addressed and the ways in which equity and CBDR and the overriding development and poverty eradication priorities of developing countries can be taken into account. The organisation of the 2018 facilitative dialogue must be simple and Party-driven, without any over-designing beyond its mandate.

With respect to the CMP, Iran highlighted that this conference should result in the entry into force of the 2012 Doha Amendment to the

KP in an expeditious manner. Five years have already passed after the Doha Amendment was agreed to in 2012, yet most developed countries have not yet ratified it. Neither have they, despite pledging to do so since 2012, revisited and increased their quantified pre-2020 emission reduction targets and mitigation efforts under the KP and the Convention. This shows a significant lack of will to urgently implement and enhance their pre-2020 mitigation targets, the LMDC spokesperson said.

On the outcome related to the implementation of the PA, Iran said it should fully reflect and operationalise the clear differentiation between developed- and developing-country Parties, leadership by developed-country Annex I Parties to the Convention, flexibilities for developing-country non-Annex I Parties to the Convention, the full scope and nationally determined nature of contributions, and linkage between the actions undertaken by developing-country non-Annex I Parties to the Convention and the support provided by developed-country Annex II Parties to the Convention, with no renegotiation or reopening of the principles and provisions of the Convention or its PA.

The LMDC stressed that the key elements of mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer and capacity-building constitute a single package and should be addressed in a balanced, comprehensive, interlinked and mutually supportive manner. This can best be done through a single draft negotiating text produced in a Party-driven manner, containing the entire package with all the elements and reflecting all Parties' options in a balanced manner. It is only in this way that the purpose of the Paris Agreement of enhancing the implementation of the Convention can be achieved.

Finally, Iran stressed that balanced progress in the treatment of issues is necessary, and expressed the deepest concern that the issues related to finance are left far behind compared with the positive progress made on the other issues.

Mali spoke on behalf of the African Group, highlighting that COP 23 should be a COP that provided clarity and resulted in Parties reaching a decision for advancing work under the different agenda items. It expected the negotiations at COP 23 to enhance the implementation of the Convention and its KP, and that the negotiations on the PA work programme would advance with a clear roadmap. The Group pointed to the importance of inclusivity and coherence on negotiating the PA work programme.

On the 2018 facilitative dialogue, Mali emphasised that this should address the pre-2020 emissions gap. It called on developed countries to find opportunities to close this gap, including through a facility to finance emission reductions, international cooperative initiatives, programmes and initiatives, amongst others, so as to avoid shifting the mitigation burden to developing countries post-2020. The dialogue should also highlight the state of play in implementing the roadmap to the $100 billion annual goal by 2020. In this regard, the African Group supported the proposed agenda item to discuss the pre-2020 issues.

It further emphasised that as the facilitative dialogue is a mandated event under the Convention, Parties should keep as closely as possible to the mandate.

On loss and damage, Mali expressed appreciation for the ongoing work on the clearing house for risk transfer, underlining the importance of the work of the clearing house for assisting particularly vulnerable developing countries and communities in implementing appropriate approaches to address risks associated with the adverse impacts of climate change.

It underscored the importance of the mandate given to the Task Force on Displacement and called for expediting its two-year work plan, as well as for adequate financial resources for implementing it. Mali stressed the importance of addressing both cross-border and internal displacement and migration associated with the adverse impacts of climate change. This important mandate should not, however, be misunderstood as allowing for the securitisation of climate change, it added.

The African Group also called for the acceleration of the implementation of the capacity-building work programme. It insisted on the urgent provision of funding for the Climate Technology Centre and Network process, in order to support developing countries to better access climate technologies.

On finance, it stressed that this is a cornerstone for the implementation of the Convention and for achieving the goals of the PA. The workshops on long-term finance should focus on enhancing accessibility of developing countries to financial resources. Mali highlighted that ensuring sustainable and predictable flows of finance should be a clear focus of different workstreams tackling finance issues, and in this regard guidance to the GCF and the GEF should be in line with the eligibility criteria laid down by the Parties to the Convention and its PA. The Standing Committee on Finance should focus more on the issue of securing and mobilising provision of finance.

The African Group reiterated its strong position on the importance of the Adaptation Fund serving the PA, while securing predictable and sustainable funds and its existing governance structure.

On finance issues related to the operationalisation of the PA, the African Group underlined the importance of initiating negotiations to set a new collective quantified goal from a floor of $100 billion per year, taking into account the needs and priorities of developing countries. Those discussions should begin no later than 2018, it said. Furthermore, it highlighted that the operationalisation of the PA should include the full operationalisation of Article 9.5 as the main enabler to unlock the potential of developing countries and allow for enhancing ambition. It considered Articles 4.5 and 9.5 and 9.7 together with Article 9.3 as main pillars of the post-2020 climate regime, be it under the transparency, finance or mitigation discussions with their direct link to enhancing adaptation actions. It further pointed out that the Group shall not be in a position to accept deferring those elements to a never-ending process under a subsidiary body or move forward in the clarifications of the Paris rules without significant progress on the modalities, procedures and guidelines of Articles 9.5 and 9.7.

Hard-won achievement

Brazil, on behalf of the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), welcomed the 169 ratifications to date of the PA, reaffirming that the Agreement is a hard-won achievement by the international community which enhances the implementation of the Convention in the post-2020 period and strengthens the global response to climate change in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, reflecting equity and CBDR-RC, in the light of different national circumstances. The BASIC group urged all signatories to stay the course and maintain their support to the PA for the good of all humankind and future generations.

It reiterated that the work on both the pre-2020 and post-2020 tracks should be in full accordance with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, emphasising the importance of openness, transparency, inclusiveness and the Party-driven nature of the negotiations.

The group recalled its request at COP 22 for pre-2020 issues to be given equal treatment at COP 23, including addressing this issue under a dedicated COP agenda item.

It expressed willingness to continue working constructively with other Parties towards the implementation of the PA, hence the need for advancing textual negotiations that reflect all Parties' views and inputs in a balanced manner to produce a comprehensive, Party-driven negotiating text covering all the matters that can serve as the basis for negotiations in 2018. Therefore, it was important that the COP 23 outcome capture the range of views as a set of alternatives and that the draft guidance operationalise CBDR-RC while not reinterpreting the PA, said BASIC.

The group reiterated that nationally determined contributions should cover mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation, taking into account differentiated responsibilities and obligations of developed- and developing-country Parties under the Convention and PA while respecting the nationally determined nature of Parties' contributions. It also emphasised that adaptation is an issue that requires an urgent global response and urged developed countries to provide adequate support to developing countries in meeting the cost of their adaptation actions.

Expressing its deepest concern over attempts by some developed countries to unilaterally apply new eligibility criteria for developing countries' access to funding under the GEF and the GCF, the BASIC group recalled that such criteria are not compatible with guidance from the COP and are a departure from the letter and the spirit of the Convention and the PA. Further, such attempts violate the terms of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility, as well as the Governing Instrument of the GCF, falling outside the mandate of the GEF Council and of the GCF Board on eligibility criteria. BASIC stressed that such attempts are tantamount to renegotiating the PA and potentially undermine the level of ambition of developing countries in the global effort against climate change.

BASIC emphasised the need for further clarity and robust methodologies to track and account for the provision of finance by developed countries, highlighting the importance of discussing modalities for communicating indicative information on the support to be provided to developing countries. The group also noted that effective implementation of developed countries' legal obligations regarding support will be paramount for trust-building among Parties in order to create an international enabling environment for successful implementation of the PA.

It urged developed countries to honour their commitments and increase climate finance to at least the $100 billion per annum goal by 2020, which is to be scaled up significantly thereafter. BASIC called for collaboration among the various mechanisms on adaptation, finance, technology and capacity-building, as well as the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.

Noting that the pre-2020 gaps exist not only in mitigation but also in adaptation and support to developing countries, BASIC stressed the urgency of accelerating the implementation of pre-2020 commitments and increasing pre-2020 ambition, underscoring the importance of having the Doha Amendment to the KP enter into force without further delay. It stressed further that developed-country Parties should revisit and increase their economy-wide quantified emission reduction targets, and that enhanced and urgent implementation of pre-2020 commitments is a prerequisite for mutual trust among Parties and for building a solid foundation for post-2020 implementation and ambition, in order to ensure that subsequent NDCs do not become unduly burdensome on developing countries.

The group looked forward to an outcome in COP 23 that would give clarity in the design of the 2018 facilitative dialogue, which would be an opportunity to consider collectively the overall progress made on the implementation of all pillars of the Convention in the global effort to address climate change. It emphasised the importance of outcomes that lead to the identification of challenges and opportunities to accelerate climate action and support, in the context of sustainable development, climate justice and poverty eradication as the overriding priorities of developing countries. Developed countries, BASIC said, must take the lead towards closing the ambition gap so as to avoid transferrring the burden from the pre-2020 to the post-2020 period onto developing countries. ◆

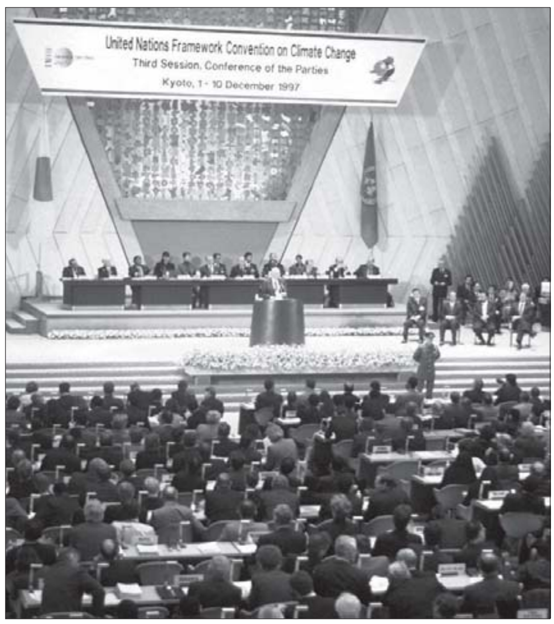
Zhu Zhenyan is a senior researcher with the Third World Network. This article was written with inputs from Jade Chiang.

Celebrate 20th anniversary of Kyoto Protocol with second commitment period, say developing countries

Although some five years have elapsed since the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, it has yet to come into force as a result of the failure of many of the developed countries to ratify it. In a bid to inject a sense of urgency in the matter, developing countries held a press conference on the sidelines of the Bonn conference to urge the developed countries to ratify the document without any further delay.

Jade Chiang

THE climate talks in Bonn could be a historic moment if Parties were able to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) by ensuring the entry into force of its second commitment period (2CP), said developing countries at a press conference organised by the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) along the sidelines of COP 23 on 9 November.



The Kyoto Protocol was adopted at COP 3 in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997.

Walter Schuldt (Ecuador), Chair of the Group of 77 and China, representing 134 developing countries, said, ‘We are celebrating the second anniversary of the Paris Agreement adoption but we are really looking forward to the stronger celebration of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the KP with the implementation of its second commitment period.’

‘All we are asking is to bring this sense of urgency to be translated into concrete actions in the pre-2020 time frame,’ said Schuldt.

He emphasised the need for urgency on ambition, and reiterated solidarity with and sympathy for victims of recent extreme weather events.

Schuldt also noted that the request to have the pre-2020 matter included in the COP 23 agenda was not a new proposal as there was a strong linkage to the Bali Action Plan (adopted in 2007), adding that ‘we are here to support the Fijian Presidency’ and that ‘we are all in the same canoe’.

‘We recognise there are many gaps in terms of mitigation and financial support that developed countries need to address,’ he stressed.

Apart from the G77 and China Chair, other members of the LMDC also spoke at the media conference and echoed similar sentiments on the need to show urgency in addressing the ambition gap in both mitigation and finance.

Majid Shafiepour (Iran), the spokesperson of the LMDC who facilitated the event, said that the LMDC, which represented 50% of the world population, had called for the inclusion of an agenda item at COP 23 which sought more ambitious and accelerated climate action in the pre-2020 period. He added that the LMDC was trying to keep the dialogue on pre-2020 actions alive and noted the urgency to take stock of progress of the ‘unfinished business’ that remained.

(At that stage of COP 23, the LMDC proposal for the inclusion of the pre-2020 agenda item could not be realised due to objections from developed countries including the United States and the European Union.)

Paul Oquist, Minister-Private Secretary for National Policies of the Nicaraguan Presidency, said the pre-2020 item was surprisingly dropped from the agenda of COP 23 after many years of working on it.

‘At Durban and Doha, we issued blank cheques with no amount [on the level of emissions reductions under the 2CP] and no date [on the duration of the commitment period],’ he recalled, in reference to decisions adopted at COP 17 (2011) and COP 18 (2012) that launched the work which paved the way for negotiations on the post-2020 time frame that resulted in the PA and the Doha Amendment that anchored the 2CP of the KP.

(The Doha Amendment recognised the need for Parties to deposit their instrument of acceptance of the 2CP without delay in order to ensure the prompt entry into force of the amendment to the KP, and also decided that developed-country Parties would revisit their respective quantified emission limitation and reduction commitments for the 2CP at the latest by 2014 and increase that to at least 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020.)

'Five years after Doha, the ratification of the 2CP has not been fulfilled. It is, therefore, incomprehensible to talk about post-2020 when the developed-country Parties failed to comply with their commitment,' lamented the Nicaraguan Minister.

He said further that the 2CP is in 'the intensive care unit'.

'As a consequence, the message of COP 23 would be that it does not see the urgency, and that flies in the face of the climate realities and science is thrown overboard,' added Oquist as he listed a string of extreme weather events in the Latin American region.

He also pointed out that many scientific analyses are warning that 'if we do not get our act together' by 2020 by cutting emissions drastically now for a 66% chance of keeping temperature rise to 2°C by 2100 and 50% chance of staying below 1.5°C, 'we can forget' about the 2°C or 1.5°C limit. He said the technology and capital exist but what is lacking is the political will.

Arun Kumar Mehta, Additional Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, said that 'there cannot be argument that between now and 2020 is not important. [Honouring] pre-2020 commitment is to build trust and all Parties have to move together ... Delaying actions will not benefit anyone'.

Developed countries are supposed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions during the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which has however yet to come into effect.

Referring to paragraphs 3 and 4 of decision 1/CP.19 adopted at COP 19 in Warsaw (2013) – in which developed countries are supposed to provide support and undertake the highest possible mitigation efforts to enhance ambition in the pre-2020 period, including the entry into force of the 2CP – Ravi Prasad of the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change said that developing countries made a humble request to bring on the table the follow-up actions of those decisions.

He further pointed out that there was no space among the many agenda items to discuss these past decisions and how Parties had (or had not) honoured them.

Prasad said that timelines could be proposed in May or June 2018 for the ratification of the Doha Amendment to ensure the coming into force of the 2CP and for submissions from all developed-country Parties indicating the actions they have taken on paragraphs 3 and 4 of decision 1/CP.19.

'If we see this forward movement, there will be clarity, trust and commitment to take these actions forward. We hope we can take this decision at this COP to ensure that trust in this multilateral process continues and we are on track to bridge this ambition gap and be on track for post-2020 actions,' he emphasised.

Chen Zhihua, Director of the Department of Climate Change of the National Development and Reform Commission of China, underscored the importance of the pre-2020 actions not only for the LMDC but for all developing countries. He said all developing countries were very firm on this matter because they felt there is still a very big gap not just on actions but also on support.

'The Paris Agreement already entered into force but it has been five years since the adoption of the Doha Amendment and we only have two years left to 2020. We want to highlight that this year is the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the KP and the best way to commemorate it is to put the 2CP into effect ... that will be the historical moment,' said Chen.

'The other action is to put in place a mechanism to realise the revisit mechanism of Doha and Warsaw with regard to enhancing ambition [of developed countries]. It is clear that the developed countries need to examine their commitment on the mitigation targets and explore ways to close the gap,' he added.

He said Parties were busy negotiating the modalities, procedures and guidelines of the Paris Agreement but the agreement was to be implemented after 2020. It was more urgent to take action now, he stressed.

'If we do not respect the decisions [taken in the past], how do we trust the process and lay good foundation for the implementation of the Paris Agreement?' he asked.

The media conference was well attended, with many journalists and civil society representatives present, and was beamed live around the conference centre. ◆

Addressing 'equity' in the global stocktake under the Paris Agreement

The issue of equity in the implementation of the Paris climate treaty is of crucial importance to developing countries. The periodic stocktake provided for by the Paris Agreement should offer an opportunity for developing countries to address this issue.

The Paris Agreement was adopted at the Paris climate conference in 2015 *(pic)*. The Parties to the Agreement are to 'take stock' of its implementation 'in a comprehensive and facilitative manner ... and in the light of equity...'

ON 11 November, Parties to the UNFCCC's Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA) had an interesting exchange on how equity can be operationalised in the global stocktake (GST) that will take place in 2023.

The special session under the informal consultations on the GST was organised following requests from Parties to discuss the various aspects of equity in relation to Article 14.1 of the Paris Agreement. Article 14.1 states: 'The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement shall periodically take stock of the implementation of this Agreement to assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of this Agreement and its long-term goals (referred to as the "global stocktake"). It shall do so in a comprehensive and facilitative manner, considering mitigation, adaptation and the means of implementation and support, and *in the light of equity* and the best available science [emphasis added].'

There were various views from Parties on how equity can be operationalised in three activity areas of the GST process involving: the preparatory phase, which includes gathering information from different sources; a technical phase, which involves holding dialogues; and a political phase, which involves the outcome of the GST.

These activity areas were captured in what Parties referred to as the 'building blocks' of an informal note prepared by the co-facilitators, which was expected to be agreed upon in the coming days. Further, on 13 November, Parties requested the co-facilitators to reflect the discussions on equity better in the building blocks.

Below are some of the highlights of the interventions during the special session.

Speaking for the G77 and China, the Philippines said equity is a cross-cutting element and must be made operational in the different activities of the GST process, including the information-gathering stage for mitigation, provision of adaptation support, financing and technology, and assessing how much has been provided by developed countries against their commitments.

Equity in the GST, said the Philippines, is also about how Parties individually and nationally determine how equitable and fair their successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs) will be. In the outcome of the GST, equity would mean how much Parties want to enhance their successive NDCs and it would be up to Parties to do that.

Speaking for the African Group, Ghana said equity means reflecting the right of developing countries to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and how developing countries can be helped to achieve these through the operationalisation of the differentiated obligations in the PA.

Ghana also said that equity in the GST should be an overarching principle, and in the different activities of the GST, there should be support for developing countries to participate in the discussions. It underscored that non-state actors from developing countries should be provided support to ensure there is a geographic balance in their participation in the GST process.

Speaking for the Arab Group, Saudi Arabia said, 'As GST is focused on the collective progress of

Parties, it should help identify barriers related to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, especially with regard to helping developing countries overcome obstacles in order to enhance their actions. It should also identify the impact of those actions and the effects of the implementation of response measures under the Agreement to ensure a cohesive understanding of actions and impact.'

Saudi Arabia also said that the mechanism in place should ensure 'sustainable development, equity, considering individual developing Parties' national circumstances and limitations, as well as take into account the different roles and responsibilities between developing and developed Parties, highlighting how developed countries are taking the lead'.

Saudi Arabia added that the mechanism should not entail any undue burden on Parties, and its outcome should be recognised and agreed to by all Parties. Saudi Arabia said that equity is directly linked to sustainable development and the impacts of response measures. 'In practice, this can be done throughout the GST process from start to finish...'

Speaking for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Solomon Islands said that equity is about how the LDCs would be protected and how the have-nots would be helped.

India underscored that equity under the GST is no vague concept, and neither is the concept of equity new. It said that equity has been a part of the UNFCCC's various Articles and the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR), which is a form of equity. India added that the special circumstances of developing countries, sustainable development and poverty eradication are all examples of how equity can be operationalised in the GST.

India said that equity could be understood in the context of equity for an individual, where an outcome would affect all individuals equally, and gave the example of per capita emissions. It said that equity considerations should also entail looking at the development stage of a country, including indicators such as consumption patterns, historical accumulation of greenhouse gases etc. 'Thereafter the global goal needs to be looked at. The nations that have enjoyed the benefits of development have limited the available carbon space for those nations that are not on a high development trajectory. Equity will help the latter attain their development goals,' stressed India.

It said further that inter-generational equity needs to be employed to understand equity, adding that a sufficient natural environment needs to be provided for future generations to survive and it is an imperative for Parties to focus on sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

Various options exist to operationalise equity in the GST process, such as per capita emissions, historical emissions, ability to pay, etc, said India. For the preservation of future development opportunities, composite indicators like the Human Development Index could be used, it added.

It also stressed that the process and the outcome of the GST process should capture equity. 'Countries which have enjoyed the carbon budget are not reducing emissions at the same scale which allows a just distribution of the budget. Equity in the GST must pave the way for development space and carbon space for developing countries,' said India.

China said there are three ways to reflect equity: historical responsibility of developed countries; capacity to provide solutions to the global problem of climate change; and recognising there are different rights at stake, including the right to development. It also said countries must not follow a one-size-fits-all approach and that the GST must look at the distribution of actions that countries have undertaken.

It further said that in the information-gathering stage, historical responsibility, the different development stages of countries and national circumstances should be considered. During the technical consideration, the focus should be to ensure that all Parties, especially developing countries, have their capacities enhanced to address climate change. China also called for equity in the process and for supporting the participation of developing countries in the GST process.

South Africa said that equity is a matter of fairness and helping those with less capacity to meet the gaps in action and to enable ambitious action. Equity is not about agreeing on single indicators, but to have an aggregation of what fairness means. It referred to historical responsibility and the contribution to temperature increase, and the capacity of countries, to determine fairness.

On the sources of input, South Africa said there exists a lot of information and there should be a call for inputs and analysis on equity. For the technical phase, equity is about looking at mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation, and ensuring that poorer countries do not suffer more. Funding for adaptation is a matter of equity and technical considerations should therefore look at who will pay for the gap in finance, technology and adaptation.

Equity is not about Parties having a mathematical formula because it is nationally determined, said South Africa. It also referred to the equity reference framework (ERF) proposal of the African Group, and said that the ERF could be used to determine whether countries' NDCs are fair and ambitious.

Brazil said Parties should not spend too much time talking about the details of how equity could be defined because equity itself should be discussed in 2023 and reflected in the outcome in terms of fairness and ambition for the successive NDCs of Parties.

It also said that equity in the information-gathering phase would mean gathering from the inputs on equity from various sources, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). For the technical consideration phase, equity means looking at all the inputs and trying to put an equity frame, depending on how the 2023 process plays out.

Equity in the political consideration means Parties should be enabled to have some reference or guideline as to how equity is considered by Parties in preparing their successive

NDCs and could include references and benchmarks.

Brazil emphasised that the consideration of equity issues could happen at the national level in consultation with national stakeholders. On the national part, Brazil said it could for instance use global mean temperature increase as an objective criterion to demonstrate how ambitious its NDC is.

For Norway, equity means an integrated way of working and capturing the notion of fairness while walking together on different pathways to contribute to climate action. It said that in practical terms, equity should be addressed in mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation (finance, technology development and transfer, capacity building).

For mitigation, the GST should be used as a space where Parties share experiences and elaborate how they accounted for equity in their previous NDCs. Norway called for looking into the social dimensions and said Parties must share experiences and challenges but caution must be exercised that it should not be used for 'naming and shaming'. It also said that there could be no shared criteria for determining whether the Parties' previous NDCs were ambitious or not.

For adaptation, equity involves better understanding the impacts of climate change, said Norway. In relation to the means of implementation, equity means looking at the overall flows, the balance between mitigation and adaptation, and the provision of grants to LDCs and small island developing states.

The EU said that equity could serve as a bridge between the long-term goals of the PA and the nationally determined actions in a manner where the latter contributes to the long-term goals. The EU said that in the input stage of the GST process, equity must be reflected by being inclusive in relation to sources of inputs, which may include IPCC reports, reports of the Standing Committee on Finance, synthesis reports by the UNFCCC Secretariat and the transparency framework.

For the technical consideration phase, equity should be considered in mitigation, adaptation and finance in three separate dialogues and the dialogues must also focus on how international cooperation could be improved, said the EU. For the political phase, equity should be in the form of a political discussion focusing on how the outcome of the GST could be taken by Parties to frame their NDCs in a nationally determined manner.

The Indian representative said that the special circumstances of developing countries, sustainable development and poverty eradication are all examples of how equity can be operationalised in the global stocktake.

Switzerland said there was no need to settle on the various approaches to operationalise equity at present because Parties could work on it over the forthcoming years. It said that equity is 'bottom-up' and about an aggregated assessment of the previous NDCs serving as the basis to inform the subsequent set of NDCs. In terms of information from sources, it called for information from all sources, including civil society. It said that equity in the process means a joint contact group of the subsidiary bodies, with something such as a 'structured expert dialogue' to assess the information.

For Canada, equity means fair access to the economic benefits of climate action. In the context of the GST, Canada said Article 2.1(c) of the PA should serve as the basis for considering equity. [Article 2.1(c) refers to 'making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.']

Canada also said that there should be a synergistic consideration of mitigation, adaptation, means of implementation, and development issues. It added that part of the equity consideration in the GST is to invite other international organisations to provide inputs on investment flows going into green investment sectors.

Japan said the challenge is to agree on a set of indicators on equity, and that equity for the GST means 'inclusiveness'.

Australia said that equity was already reflected in differentiation and in national determination, and that equity should realise and enable ambition over time, based on trust. Equity in the GST process means inclusiveness, extending to non-Party inputs, it said further.

New Zealand said equity has been dealt with in the UNFCCC through CBDR and flexibility, which are already captured in the PA. It also said that equity in the GST is about participation and about assessing the global collective progress and ensuring that the voices of those that are not being heard are heard. It gave the example of indigenous peoples' voices. It also said that the purpose of equity in the GST process should not be to address inequity, and that Parties should not look at carbon space since the way forward for countries is to go the renewable energy route.

In response, the Philippines said that while shifting to renewable energy is an important part of the conversation, as part of equity, discussions must also look at who controls technologies and who owns technologies. 'When we talk about equity, it is about how to make the GST a process and result which encourages those who have to help those who have less and those who have not,' it stressed. – *TWN* ◆

Call to show more ambition and to move faster together on climate change

The opening of the high-level segment of the climate talks in Bonn presided over by Fiji saw world leaders calling on all Parties to show more ambition and to move faster together on climate change.

Prerna Bomzan

Fijian boy Timoci Naulusala called for leadership and action on climate change, relating how his life was in chaos when his island was hit by Cyclone Winston in 2016.

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/15nov.html)

ADDRESSING the high-level segment of the climate talks in Bonn, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for 'more ambition' and said that Parties 'must go further and faster together'. He added that in the 20th anniversary year of the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Parties which had not done so should ratify the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol (to give effect to the KP's second commitment period). He also called on world leaders to 'ratify and implement the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol to phase down the use of hydrofluorocarbons, which destroy the ozone layer'.

Guterres stressed that at least a further 25% cut in emissions (based on 1990 levels) is needed by 2020.

The high-level segment began on 15 November with about 25 heads of state and government and over 100 ministers.

At the opening event, Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama gave the floor to 'a special child' Timoci Naulusala, who had travelled all the way from Fiji to share his story. Bainimarama said that he wanted to present the human face and dimension of climate change and no one could do that better than a child.

Naulusala shared how his life was in chaos when his island was hit in 2016 by Cyclone Winston, which he said was the strongest in the southern hemisphere. He called for leadership and action, saying that climate change deserves to be a huge priority. He referred to former US President Barack Obama who had said that climate change 'is happening here, and is happening now' and urged world leaders 'to walk the talk'.

Bainimarama then took the floor to say that 'future generations are counting on us like Timoci and we hear his cry, we hear his plea'.

The Fijian Prime Minister said that he felt a great sense of history as the first leader of a small island developing state to preside over a COP. He recalled the history of efforts to tackle climate change, from the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the late 1980s to the signing of the mother agreement, the UNFCCC, in 1992 and achievement of the landmark Kyoto Protocol with major reduction targets in 1997. Then, after several COPs came the historic breakthrough in 2015 with the Paris Agreement, which entered into force in 2016, and now COP 23, which was crucial for the implementation phase of the PA.

Bainimarama reminded Parties that with only two days left at COP 23, deliberations must conclude on time, and that there had been progress in many negotiating terms, with key decisions ready to be adopted, highlighting the decision on pre-2020 action. He said Fiji was very proud to lead the process and to bring its culture to Bonn, including in framing the upcoming Talanoa dialogue.

UN Secretary-General Guterres said it was fitting that the conference was led by Fiji, a nation on the frontlines. 'In the battlefield, when the frontline is decimated, the whole army is lost. And the same would happen to the planet with climate change.'

'We need to do more on five ambition action areas: emissions, adaptation, finance, partnerships and leadership,' said Guterres. He stressed that at least a further 25% cut in emissions is needed by 2020, citing the latest UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report which shows that current pledges will only deliver a third of what is needed to stay in the safety zones of the PA. The window of opportunity to meet the 2°C target may close in 20 years or less, and there may be only five years to bend the emissions curve towards 1.5°C. He added that there has been a start on decoupling emissions from economic growth and that massive economies such as China and India are on track to surpass their Paris pledges. 'It is crucial for all countries to follow through on their Paris commitments.'

With regard to the second area of ambition, adaptation, Guterres said that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) can play a catalytic role and appealed especially to its donor members to bring the mechanism fully to life.

On finance, he stressed that greater ambition on emissions, adaptation and resilience is inextricably linked to funding, hence the need to mobilise the agreed $100 billion annually for developing countries. 'Upholding this promise is essential for building trust and confidence,' he underlined.

He further said that markets need to be reoriented away from the counter-productive and the short term when in 2016, an estimated $825 billion was invested in fossil fuels and high-emission sectors. 'I will be working to scale up international financing in renewable and energy efficiency projects to reduce at least 1 gigaton or more of carbon emissions by 2020,' said the UN chief. Infrastructure investment would be crucial and the world should adopt a simple rule: if big infrastructure projects are not green, they should not be given the green light. 'Investing in climate-friendly development is where the smart money is needed.'

He stated that carbon pricing is a key instrument for driving down greenhouse gas emissions and more than half of the nationally determined contributions of the PA cite the need for it. In 2016, carbon pricing initiatives generated $22 billion but to reach the Paris goals, at least 50%

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/15nov.html)

UN General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak: 'Putting words on paper is one thing, acting is another.'

global coverage and a higher price on carbon is needed to drive large-scale climate action.

On the fourth ambition action area, Guterres said 'partnership – with the private sector, local and regional governments and civil society – will make or break efforts to implement the PA'. 'In particular, the only way to keep below 2°C and as close as possible to 1.5°C is to mobilise the private sector to move on an energy transformation.' He stressed the need to engage global technological giants, the oil and gas sector and the automotive industry so that their business plans are consistent with the Paris goals, including the need to engage the agricultural and forestry sectors to ensure climate-friendly land use.

With regard to the fifth area of ambition, leadership, he highlighted the 'need for heights of political leadership' and encouraged Parties to be bold in their deliberations and decisions in Bonn as well as at home. 'More immediately – in this 20th anniversary year of the adoption of the KP and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the UNFCCC, I call on all relevant nations that have not done so to ratify the Doha Amendment' and on 'world leaders to ratify and implement the Kigali Amendment to phase down the use of hydrofluorocarbons, which destroy the ozone layer'.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that climate change impacts are felt more year by year, being the cause for crisis and strife, and this dramatic and urgent situation requires all to hurry up and act with resolve. He stressed that in this scenario, the fast-growing economies play an important role as they are among the largest emitters, singling out China as having a long way to go. Paris would be a breakthrough only if the agreement is followed by deeds, he said. In recent years, important milestones have been reached like the PA, the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, and these success stories with occasional disappointment along the path are worth the effort.

President of the UN General Assembly Miroslav Lajcak expressed delight in a small island nation presiding over the COP, referring to how it is representative of people who are constantly wondering if and when their communities will be swallowed up by the sea. He said climate change is different from the threats which faced humanity when the UN was created and that it can only be abated through multilateral agreement and action. The PA in 2015 was the biggest multilateral event for climate change in history and 'this agreement will not be renegotiated'. He stated that only two months ago at the UN General Assembly, he saw the highest number of references to climate change on record (84%), highlighting it as priority.

He further stressed that 'putting words on paper is one thing, acting is another'. Therefore, action is needed urgently sticking to the agreements made. He also referred to the UNEP

Emissions Gap Report, which validates that current pledges will not be sufficient to keep global warming below 1.5°C and in fact not enough even for the baseline commitment of 2°C, which makes the situation unacceptable. With the alarming rate of climate change impacts, there comes the need for both mitigation and adaptation. However, the shrinking finance is a clear message that it is not sufficient. 'We must agree to the goal of $100 billion by 2020 to support action in developing countries,' he said, adding that 'we have common but differentiated responsibilities.'

Following the opening of the high-level segment, several leaders spoke.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the common message is to protect our planet, hence the need to stand by the PA. The need is to stand together to implement it, and 'that is the rulebook on which the Conference is working', she said.

She further stated that in Europe, efforts are being made to reach an emissions reduction target of '40% by 2020, which is a legally binding obligation and we will do it'. The EU member states have agreed on how to reach this common goal with necessary rules, for example on emissions trading, the instrument being orientated towards serving the goal.

Merkel said that Germany has planned medium- and long-term strategies to underpin greenhouse gas neutrality by concrete measures aligning with 2020, 2030 and 2050 timelines. 'We still use a lot of coal, particularly lignite, and coal needs to be given particular attention.'

She said the G7 leading industrial nations had affirmed 'a path of decarbonisation' as industrialised countries have a specific contribution to make with necessary technology capacity. She added that 'we also have a historical responsibility to reduce emissions'. She stressed on initiatives guided by energy transformation, referring to a broad alliance of actors in the US supporting a commitment called 'America's Pledge', irrespective of President Trump leaving the PA. In Germany, Merkel said, the 'strongest pillar' in the energy mix is renewable energy, for which there is growing support and which there is

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/9nov.html)

A civil society demonstration outside the venue of the Bonn climate conference. Speaking at the high-level segment of the conference, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said markets need to be reoriented away from the counter-productive and the short-term, noting that an estimated $825 billion was invested in fossil fuels and high-emission sectors in 2016.

no longer a need to subsidise.

She also made mention of creating necessary conditions to mobilise private finance and referred in this regard to an upcoming meeting in Paris in December 2017 to be hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron.

With a growing world population, increasing conflict over natural resources is inevitable, and hence, Merkel said, Germany has asked the UN Security Council to focus more on security aspects of climate change. She also referred to the provision of €100 million to the least developed countries to help adaptation. The German Chancellor urged everyone to do their part, accepting the PA as a starting point, and to match words with deeds, showing the necessary courage and goodwill.

French President Macron said that climate change adds injustice to an unfair world, focusing its effects on the already underprivileged, and is therefore by far 'the most significant struggle' for which all must come together to establish ambitious goals. 'The PA is a starting point which we are determined to observe,' he added.

He stated that at the international level, scientific work is vital and the IPCC is a major component of this work. This, he said, is however threatened today by the US decision to not give funding to the IPCC. He proposed that 'Europe replace the US' in this regard and appealed to member states to come together to compensate for the lack of US funding so that by 2018, it will have all the money it needs. Macron drew attention to the December climate finance meeting in Paris which would have the goal of mobilising public and private funds; a collective goal to compensate for the US gap and to promote innovative financing that will allow transformation of international assistance for adaptation to vulnerable countries which desperately need it.

The French President elaborated on priorities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Europe: bilateral cooperation between Germany and France on renewable energy; the need for a carbon 'border tax' to protect EU industries and economic interests against countries that do not respect its climate goals; and integrating environmental goals into trade and not entering into trade agreements with countries which do not respect these goals. He also said that France has a new commitment to withdraw from fossil fuels and to transform the energy model, including by banning all new permits for exploitation of hydrocarbons and closing all coal-fired power stations by 2021. 'We need European partnership to accelerate the closure of nuclear power stations.'

Macron said 'we are not stepping back from our commitments' and 'rich countries have a dual responsibility since we have been a part of the climate change problem'.

Many other world leaders also addressed the high-level segment, which would continue in the remaining days of the climate conference.◆

Prerna Bomzan is a researcher with the Third World Network.

Conclusions adopted to advance Paris Agreement Work Programme

The concluding session of a key working group at Bonn was delayed by three days as a result of failure to agree on matters relating to implementation of the Paris Agreement. A consensus was finally reached as a result of informal consultations and the final session resumed on 18 November for the conclusions to be adopted to advance the Paris Agreement Work Programme.

Prerna Bomzan and Meena Raman

THE meeting of the UNFCCC's Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA) eventually closed after 1 a.m. in the early morning of 18 November with the adoption of conclusions to advance the Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP), overshooting its scheduled closing by three days.

The delay was due to the search for resolution on the issue of addressing the modalities for ex ante information on public financial resources to be provided to developing countries referred to in Article 9.5 of the Paris Agreement (PA).

The need to address this issue had been taken up by South Africa on behalf of the African Group, and was supported by other developing countries but strongly resisted by developed countries. Following informal consultations by the COP 23 Presidency, a resolution on the matter was found (see the article 'Intense wrangling on modalities for addressing the issue of public finance' in this issue), which made it possible for the APA to proceed with its closing plenary and for conclusions to be adopted on the way forward in advancing the work on the implementation of the PA.

Adopted conclusions

In the conclusions that were adopted by Parties, 'the APA noted the progress made at this session as reflected in the annex to the conclusions'.

The annex contains the 'informal notes prepared under their own responsibility by the co-facilitators' of the six agenda items (items 3-8) under the remit of the APA. The six agenda items are nationally determined contributions (NDCs), adaptation communications, transparency of action and support, global stocktake, committee to facilitate compliance, and matters related to the implementation of the PA. The informal notes run to some 266 pages.

The APA also noted that 'substantive progress in the deliberations under agenda items 3-8 needs to be accelerated to ensure all issues achieve a sufficient degree of maturity and detail to allow for the timely completion of the work by December 2018.'

The APA also 'reiterated its recognition of the need to progress on all items in a coherent and balanced manner, and to ensure a coordinated approach to the consideration of matters relating to the Paris Agreement work programme (PAWP) by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the COP.'

'To that end, the APA recommended that the President of the COP consider options for bringing together, under his own responsibility and without prejudice to the future work of the subsidiary bodies, the outcomes of the work of the APA, the SBI, the SBSTA and the COP on PAWP-related matters at this session.'

[In the decision adopted by the COP after the APA closing plenary (decision 1/CP.23), Parties requested the Secretariat to develop an online platform to provide an overview of the work programme of the PA being carried out in the various subsidiary and constituted bodies, including the APA.]

The APA also 'noted the intention of its Co-Chairs to issue, by early April 2018, a reflections note with an overview of the outcomes of this session and to suggest options for the way forward on the basis of the views and ideas that Parties put forward at this session and in their submissions for the session, including as these have been reflected in the informal notes prepared at this session. The note will aim to advance the work of the APA without prejudging any options or proposals Parties may put forward in the future.'

In recalling the APA's general call for submissions by Parties, the APA 'noted that focused textual proposals would be most helpful in allowing Parties to focus on substance in their deliberations on the APA agenda items.'

The APA also expressed its view that 'additional negotiating time in 2018 may be useful, depending on the progress being made and the feasibility of convening an additional session in a cost-effective manner while also allowing effective participation of experts from developing countries.'

APA contact group

On 14 November, the APA met as the final contact group to hear brief final reports on each of the six agenda items by the respective co-facilitators as well as to consider the draft conclusions prepared by the co-chairs, which would then be put forward for adoption at the closing plenary, scheduled for the next day.

APA co-chair Sarah Baashan (Saudi Arabia) took Parties through the proposed draft conclusions and opened the floor for comments and statements by Parties.

South Africa, on behalf of the African Group, stated that it was important to capture the points reflected in agenda item 8 (on matters related to the implementation of the PA) in the draft conclusions. It said that page 3 of the informal note on this agenda item contained three options as the way forward on the matter of Article 9.5 of the PA (on the issue of modalities for ex ante information on public financial resources to be provided to developing countries). It reiterated that this issue was very important for the African Group and a number of developing countries.

South Africa drew attention to a submission by the African Group in this regard which was contained in a conference room paper (CRP) that highlighted that the operationalisation of Article 9.5 is an important element of the comprehensive outcome of the work of the APA.

The European Union (EU), Australia on behalf of the Umbrella Group and the United States did not support the proposal by South Africa.

China echoed the concerns voiced by South Africa and said that a proper way could be found to address the concerns in the conclusions.

The other key issue of divergence was whether the informal notes should be annexed to the APA conclusions.

Brazil, Ethiopia (for the Least Developed Countries), Iran (for the Like-Minded Developing Countries), the Maldives (for the Alliance of Small Island States) along with the EU, Switzerland and Norway were in favour of this, while Australia and the US did not see the need to annex the notes to the conclusions.

The other issues in the draft conclusions which were debated upon were the need for an additional call for submissions, the need for the secretariat to streamline the informal notes and the need for an additional negotiating session.

Iran on behalf of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), India and China did not want the secretariat to streamline the informal notes.

China supported keeping the compilation of the existing informal notes as an annex, adding that 'some Parties have concerns that their options and views will be eliminated and merged in the streamlined proposal.' Putting the informal notes together will be 'pragmatic as the way forward to digest' the document, it added.

In response to the feedback from Parties, APA co-chair Jo Tyndall (New Zealand) said that the informal notes would be annexed to the conclusions. In relation to further submissions by Parties, she proposed that the APA note that 'focused textual proposals would be most helpful in allowing Parties to focus on substance in their deliberations'. She also proposed the deletion of any streamlining of the informal notes by the secretariat.

In response to the African Group proposal on the Article 9.5 issue, Tyndall said that there was no consensus by Parties on the matter but the co-chairs 'do recognise that proposal is of high importance to the Group and the support from Parties was also expressed'. She said that a report on the APA outcomes would be included in the report to the COP.

South Africa in response wanted to 'reflect collectively' on the matter and 'come back to you'. It insisted that the African Group's concerns had not been addressed by the co-chairs.

Tyndall concluded that a revised draft of the conclusions would be done and adjourned the meeting, announcing that the scheduled closing plenary would take place the next day (15 November).

APA closing plenary on 15 November

On 15 November, the APA met at the scheduled closing plenary to consider the revised draft conclusions for adoption presented by the co-chairs.

Co-chair Baashan said that there was no consensus on the proposal by the African Group on the Article 9.5 issue, and that given the 'high importance and support from other Parties', the co-chairs intended to refer to this issue in their oral and written reports to the COP on the outcome of the APA.

South Africa, on behalf of the African Group, stated that they had consulted with the COP Presidency, who pledged to consult with all groups on the matter. Therefore, it requested an adjournment of the closing plenary until the consultations with the Presidency were concluded.

Baashan reiterated the co-chairs' understanding of the importance of the issue to the African Group and of the information provided about their consultation with the Presidency on the matter. The co-chairs' suggestion was to reflect the issue in their oral and written reports, while the closing plenary could not be postponed.

South Africa took the floor again, underlining the fact that the adoption of the conclusions required consensus by all Parties and that at this stage, there was no consensus on the matter. It said it trusted the COP Presidency and its process and requested awaiting the outcome of the Presidency's consultations with all Parties on the issue.

Baashan responded that 'we note your reservation' and, 'noting your difficulty to engage in the process', called for opportunities for other Parties to express their views. She further reiterated that there was no agreement in the room and that other Parties must be allowed to give their perspective on the draft conclusions and to work out the way forward.

Australia, on behalf of the Umbrella Group, said it did not support the proposal by South Africa and supported the proposal by co-chair Baashan on the way forward.

Baashan responded by opening the floor for general comments and views.

South Africa again took the floor, stating its understanding of the process. It said that the nature of its intervention was to adjourn and that 'engaging on the substantive is not consistent with the rules of procedure'.

Ecuador, on behalf of the G77 and China, said that adoption of the conclusions needed to reflect consensus by all Parties. It further said that what was involved was a request by a group of countries from the G77 and it was an issue of all developing countries, adding that attention should be given to the issue.

Iran, for the LMDC, supported the proposal by South Africa and requested an adjournment to allow for consultations 'in a very expeditious manner'.

The EU, while saying it respected the African Group and the trust it had in the COP Presidency, requested the co-chairs not to adjourn the meeting. Japan echoed the views of the EU.

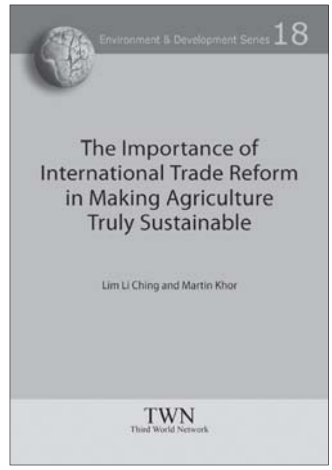
Baashan then responded that the co-chairs proposed suspending the meeting for 20 minutes before coming back with the way forward.

Following the suspension, which took more than the allotted time, Baashan informed Parties that the co-chairs were still working for a possible solution, proposing to suspend the meeting and come back later in the afternoon. She said 'colleagues will benefit by suspending this meeting now' and thus suspended the meeting, announcing that the venue and time of the resumed session were yet to be decided.

The APA closing plenary eventually resumed on 18 November after informal consultations on the Article 9.5 issue found resolution. ◆

The Importance of International Trade Reform in Making Agriculture Truly Sustainable

Lim Li Ching and Martin Khor



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Reforms of the international trade regime require a significant reduction or removal of harmful subsidies currently provided mainly by developed countries, while at the same time allowing special treatment and safeguard mechanisms for developing countries in order to promote their smallholder farmers' livelihoods. Such reforms, coupled with policies in support of sustainable small-scale agriculture in developing countries, would improve local production for enhancing food security.

There is also a need for regulatory measures aimed at reorganizing the prevailing market structure of the agricultural value chain, which is dominated by a few multinational corporations and marginalizes smallholder farmers and sustainable production systems. Policies that increase the choices of smallholders to sell their products on local or global markets at a decent price would complement efforts to rectify the imbalances.

In addition, a shift to more sustainable and ecological agricultural practices would benefit smallholder farmers by increasing productivity while strengthening their resilience to shocks, such as climate change, and reducing the adverse impacts of conventional agricultural practices on the environment and health. The trade policy framework should therefore support such a shift.

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COVER

Intense wrangling on modalities for addressing the issue of public finance

Article 9 of the Paris Agreement obliges the developed countries to provide financial resources to assist developing countries with respect to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Further, Article 9.5 requires them to communicate to developing countries on a biennial basis clear quantitative and qualitative measures of such aid as they intend to provide. Attempts by developing countries to place Article 9.5 in the centre of the continued discussion on the implementation of the Paris Agreement met with stiff resistance from the developed countries, which clearly are cagey about making any firm commitment on climate finance.

DEVELOPED countries' reluctance to address the modalities for the ex ante information on public financial resources to be provided to developing countries referred to in Article 9.5 of the Paris Agreement (PA) delayed the closing of the UNFCCC's 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) as well as the closing of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the PA (APA).

Resolution was found in the final hours, which eventually led to the closing of the APA and the COP in the early morning of 18 November when the talks had been officially scheduled to end a day earlier.

The need to address the Article 9.5 issue was first raised by South Africa on behalf of the African Group of countries, and this was supported by other developing countries including the G77 and China, but strongly resisted by developed countries.

The G77 and China fought tooth and nail to keep the issue on the table and stated repeatedly that ex ante information on public financial resources from developed countries to be provided to developing countries would help the latter plan and implement their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the PA, and that the issue was intrinsically linked to the PA Work Programme (PAWP) that relates to the implementation of the PA.

Photo by IISD/Kiara Worth (enb.iisd.org/climate/cop23/enb/17nov.html)

Developed-country delegates 'huddle' to discuss Article 9.5 issues, among other matters, in the final hours of the Bonn conference. Developed countries' reluctance to address the modalities for communicating information on finance for developing countries under Article 9.5 of the Paris Agreement delayed the closing of the conference.

It took several rounds of informal consultations with the COP 23 Presidency (Fiji) to resolve the deadlock in the final hours of the COP on 17 November, and a compromise was eventually reached on the issue.

(Article 9.5 of the PA reads: 'Developed country Parties shall biennially communicate indicative quantitative and qualitative information related to paragraphs 1 and 3 of this Article, as applicable, including, as available, projected levels of public financial resources to be provided to developing country Parties. Other Parties providing resources are encouraged to communicate biennially such information on a voluntary basis.'

(Article 9.1 states that 'developed countries shall provide financial resources to developing countries…'; and Article 9.3 states that 'developed countries should continue to take the lead in mobilising climate finance…'.)

The discussions on Article 9.5 cut across two different agenda items under two different bodies of the UNFCCC: agenda item 8 of the APA and agenda item 10(f) of the COP.

Agenda item 8 of the APA deals with 'Further matters related to the implementation of the PA'. This item comprises a sub-item titled 'Modalities for biennially communicating finance information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5'.

(The Article 9.5 issue under agenda item 8 of the APA is in relation to what Parties refer to as the 'homeless' or 'orphaned' issues. In Paris in 2015, COP 21 assigned various tasks related to PA implementation to several bodies, including the APA and the subsidiary bodies of the Convention. There were several matters that were not assigned to any of the bodies, which Parties referred to as the 'homeless' issues. 'Modalities for biennially communicating finance information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5' is one of the 'homeless' issues being discussed in the APA.)

The COP under its agenda item 10(f) deals with the 'Process to identify the information to be provided by Parties in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA'.

Developing countries wanted the discussions under both the agenda items to continue because they argued that the nature of the discussions is fundamentally different in the two agenda items. They said that the COP deals with only the 'process' to identify information, whereas the issue of 'modalities' for the information under the APA agenda goes beyond just identifying information and includes setting methodologies, definitions, reporting formats, underlying assumptions etc. Moreover, according to developing countries, there had not been any substantive progress under the COP agenda item except for a workshop held in May 2017.

Given the importance of the issue, developing countries proposed that they find a 'home' or 'body' for the item and suggested that the APA deal with the matter to advance work on the issue.

Developed countries opposed this, contending that the matter of Article 9.5 was already being handled under the COP through its agenda item 10(f). No amount of arguments by developing countries clarifying the difference between the 'process' for

The Paris Agreement, in Article 9.1, states: 'Developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation....'

identifying information and the 'modalities' helped during the APA discussions. Sources said that the word 'modalities' was a red line for the European Union (EU).

The COP 23 Presidency took up the matter, given the lack of consensus in the APA to address this issue. The Presidency conducted several rounds of informal consultations on 16-17 November. Various proposals on how to resolve the issue emerged.

During the first round of informal consultations by the Presidency with the heads of delegation on 16 November, sources revealed, the G77 and China wanted to table a proposal on how to deal with the issue, but the United States and the EU raised points of order, to the surprise of developing countries, and did not allow the proposal to be tabled.

The EU said it could accept conceptual discussions but no textual proposal could be put forth. The G77 and China thus had to verbally explain the proposal, the crux of which was to have an appropriate mandate on Article 9.5 in addition to the COP agenda item. It also wanted the issue to be discussed at the next inter-session (in May 2018) and any additional session likely to be convened in 2018 because Article 9.5 was integral to the PAWP.

There was no consensus and the meeting had to be closed.

A couple of hours later, the Presidency convened another round of informal consultations and presented a proposal to Parties. The proposal took developing countries by further surprise, as none of what they had proposed was included in there. The Presidency proposed that a pre-sessional dialogue, a pre-sessional structured dialogue or a forum be convened on the issue in conjunction with the May 2018 inter-session and any additional session in 2018. The G77 expressed concerns regarding the outcome of such events and wanted the outcome to be time-bound and linked to the PAWP. They also insisted that Article 9.5 under the APA agenda should continue being considered, which developed countries did not agree to. The discussions went on till midnight on 16 November, with no resolution in place.

On 17 November, the Presidency issued another proposal, which developing countries were willing to consider. Developed countries, however, pursued giving up the Article 9.5 issue to be discussed under the APA agenda.

After further negotiations, it was eventually agreed that COP item 10(f) would be handled by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) for its consideration at the May 2018 session, while the APA would continue deliberation of the issue under agenda item 8.

A senior negotiator described the fight as a 'battle won' in terms of securing space for discussions on Article 9.5 in 2018 during the inter-session. 'It was an important fight to have. We have now secured space for further deliberations on Article 9.5, which the developed countries wanted to kill altogether,' the negotiator told the Third World Network (TWN).

The negotiator also described as a success how an issue initially pushed by the African Group was supported by the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), the Arab Group, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), leading to the G77 and China owning the proposal.

'Information on ex ante financing by developed countries will help us plan our future climate action. We could not have afforded to bury the issue, which our negotiating partners wanted,' another negotiator told TWN.

How the matter was resolved

APA informal consultations on Article 9.5 under agenda item 8

During the informal consultations on 9 November, APA Co-chair Jo Tyndall (New Zealand) said that it was clear from previous discussions (at previous sessions) that there was no consensus on the Article 9.5 issue. She said that some Parties were of the view that the COP could mandate the APA or the SBI to undertake work on the possible additional matter; other Parties considered no additional mandate was necessary given that the work was already happening under the COP agenda item 10(f); while some Parties did not agree that the COP agenda item addressed the issue at hand.

Several developing countries explained the rationale for keeping alive the mandate on modalities of information. Developed countries, however, maintained that Article 9.5 and its associated paragraph 55 in decision 1/CP.21 (from Paris) were already reflected in the COP agenda [item 10(f)].

[Paragraph 55 of 1/CP.21 reads: 'Decides to initiate, at its 22nd session, a process to identify the information to be provided by Parties, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph 5, of the Agreement with a view to providing a recommendation for consideration and adoption by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement at its first session' (CMA 1).]

Canada said the agendas of the APA and the subsidiary bodies were full, concerned with items for finalising the 'Paris rulebook'. 'It would not be to our advantage to add new items that are taking place in other agenda items,' it said. It added that it was not neglecting the concerns of those countries that said the issue might not be discussed to their satisfaction, 'but whatever discussion needs to take place might happen within the existing discussions taking place in the COP'.

The EU said neither Article 9.5 nor paragraph 55 talked of 'modalities' and therefore, it would only be a procedural decision to take on whether to discuss Article 9.5 under the APA or not. It said that it looked forward to discussing Article 9.5 and paragraph 55 under the COP item 10(f). Australia, Japan and the US echoed the EU.

India said that Article 9.5 is a very important issue for developing countries because it is expected to provide clarity and predictability of climate finance flows and how these flows take into account the country-driven strategies and needs and priorities of developing countries.

China said that Parties had agreed that work would progress in a balanced manner on all the PAWP elements, and stressed that Article 9.5 was one of them, calling for substantive discussions on the matter.

Egypt said that operationalisation of the PA means covering all the elements, including Article 9.5, which must therefore be reflected in the APA agenda. Egypt added that because 'modalities' were not mentioned, it did not mean it could not be discussed. 'The work of the APA should have a placeholder for Article 9.5. The COP is dealing with the issue of "information" and there is nothing happening there. There was one roundtable in the last session and that was it. If we are talking about balanced progress, we have to include Article 9.5 [in our work] and that will be the way to move forward,' it said.

Ecuador, speaking on behalf of the LMDC, said that two types of reporting need to be done on finance. One is ex post information, which is being discussed by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), where both elements of 'information' and 'modalities' are considered. While 'information' includes categories of data, 'modalities' include methodologies, definitions, reporting formats and underlying assumptions. The idea is to have overall information (from developed countries) so that it is comparable. Ex ante information is discussed under the COP.

'If we do not discuss modalities, we will end up with information without explanation on methodologies, definitions, underlying assumptions and so on. We heard opposing arguments that there is no mandate to discuss modalities under COP agenda item 10(f), but we are not dealing with this agenda item here. We heard people say this is being dealt with in 10(f), but that is not true. Without modalities, ex ante information will be impossible to aggregate, and we need to aggregate the information for planning and implementing our NDCs and reaching the goals of the PA,' emphasised Ecuador. It also proposed that the APA should take up the work.

South Africa, for the African Group, lamented the 'clear lack of political will to launch discussions'.

With no consensus, the matter was taken up at a subsequent informal consultation on 10 November.

APA informal consultations on agenda item 8, 10 November

Speaking for the G77 and China, the Philippines said that there has been no real progress on Article 9.5 under the COP agenda. It underscored the need for balanced treatment of all elements of the PA.

South Africa, for the African

Group, said it would submit a conference room paper (CRP) on Article 9.5 in relation to the modalities, which should be included in the APA co-chairs' informal note. (The CRP includes a draft decision to establish a process under the APA to define modalities for biennially communicating information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries; it states the objective of the modalities, which include supporting the communication, recording and consideration of information, facilitating multilateral consideration of the biennial communications, and addressing timeframes.)

Reacting to developing countries stressing on balanced progress, New Zealand said it often heard the word 'balance' but balance would mean on what was agreed and not adding new mandates. 'For us to proceed, we do not support a new item. We need to stick to the mandates we got from Paris,' it stressed.

Canada also spoke about balance and said that it was important to realise that all Parties compromised in Paris and that every Party can 'air a ton of things they have with decision 1/CP.21 and even the PA'.

The Philippines, for the G77 and China, asked what action would follow once a process to identify information was initiated. 'We need to have the negotiating space in which we could discuss the substance of this and come to a decision, which we can bring to the attention of the CMA,' it said.

Egypt said operationalisation of Article 9.5 means including 'information' as well as 'modalities' and called for balanced progress of the PAWP.

The US however said that the list comprising 'homeless' matters under APA agenda item 8 was only about 'possible additional matters' with no status, and there was no consensus that the additional matters should be added to the agenda 'either now or in the future'.

Norway said that adding a new element to an already full work programme would be highly controversial.

Informal consultations with the Presidency, 16 November, 3 p.m.

According to sources, during the informal consultations with the COP Presidency on 16 November, the Presidency made it clear that the discussion should focus on how to create a space to discuss Article 9.5 and asked Parties to get into the substantive elements of the issue.

Ecuador stressed the need to discuss the issue of Article 9.5 in the inter-session, rather than leaving it to be discussed at the COP at the end of the year.

Egypt said it was concerned about going into the 'where' and 'how' of the issue rather than addressing the 'what'. Egypt said the G77 and China had a proposal in the form of a paragraph on the way forward.

South Africa, speaking for the G77 and China, requested the COP Presidency to have the text projected on screen so that Parties could engage. It attempted to provide an introduction to the text when the US and the EU raised points of order one after the other, opposing the projection of any text on screen.

Canada said that it had no idea of the text certain Parties were referring to and suggested that Parties meet in a bilateral setting first. Australia also said that Parties could not put text up and suggested moving to bilaterals.

Responding to the points of order raised, South Africa said it did not understand the relevance of a point of order in an informal consultation. It said the G77 and China was contributing to the discussions through a proposal and it failed to understand how there could be opposition to that.

In response, the COP 23 Presidency said that if South Africa provided text, others would also begin to do so and the Presidency could not have 'text raining on us to hold conversations in an effective way'.

Brazil expressed grave concern that the Article 9.5 issue would not receive adequate treatment between COP 23 and COP 24.

Tuvalu, speaking for the LDCs, said the issue was fundamental and was part of the Paris package that had to be delivered upon. It added that Parties would have to find 'formal means' to create inter-sessional work for Article 9.5. It further requested that the G77 and China text be put on the screen, but the EU objected and said that they were willing to discuss the issue at a 'conceptual level'.

On behalf of AOSIS, the Maldives said 'it is fair to have a look at [the text] and then see where we move. We do not see a reason why we cannot entertain ... even [having] a look at the proposal'. It added that procedurally, it was unfair to turn to points of order.

At this point, the COP Presidency said that she had heard calls for a strong need to have a space for discussion on Article 9.5, and that she was also hearing about balanced progress of the PAWP, and that it was not enough to put off the issue of Article 9.5 for discussions until COP 24. She also said that she did not hear anyone say that the discussions should not be under the COP. She further added that Parties would have to decide on whether to have space for discussions, in what form and in which manner.

China clarified that while it was ready to engage with the three questions of the COP Presidency, the G77 and China was asking for an appropriate space for addressing the mandate on Article 9.5 in addition to the COP agenda item. Responding to the Presidency's questions, China said that it was necessary to have more space and time to discuss Article 9.5. 'We have just one session for the COP each year. We think it would be necessary that [in] any session we have, either the inter-session in May 2018 or an additional session [later in 2018], this agenda item should also be on the table, which is under the COP now. That will mean we will have equal treatment,' it clarified. China also said that it was flexible about the APA or one of the subsidiary bodies taking up the job.

Ecuador, referring to the stance of developed countries, said that 'when you ask Parties whether inter-sessional work is needed, you will hear that the mandate sits with the

COP. You will hear that it is not on the subsidiary bodies' agenda. It is a matter of willingness. If we want to change the work being given to one of the subsidiary bodies, we can do that. Looking at space, it is definitely something we need.'

South Africa said the G77 and China's view was that the SBI would be the appropriate platform for addressing the question of space and time. South Africa also said that what Parties should reflect in the discussions mattered relating to the communication of the information, which was linked to discussions under the APA agenda item 8. The idea was to provide further guidance on communication on information, it explained further.

Norway said that on the COP agenda item 10(f), the question was how to proceed with the work in the following year. On Article 9.5 under the APA, it said the issue was whether to include the matter in the PAWP. Having said this, it wanted to move to smaller consultations to find a solution.

Ecuador responded that Article 9.5 was an integral part of the PAWP. 'The compilation of informal notes may turn into a decision that the CMA might adopt next year. The APA is not addressing several issues emerging from decision 1/CP.21, and these are recognised by placeholders. Article 9.5 does not have such recognition now. It needs to be part of the outcome in the PAWP,' Ecuador emphasised.

In response, the US said that Parties had trouble in the existing space on the COP agenda item 10(f) because there was an argument on the mandate. 'Any outcome should resolve both space and what the mandate is. Until we can reach that type of understanding, we cannot provide additional space to the issue.'

The COP 23 Presidency said that Parties had exhausted the format and there was a need to have discussions in a smaller setting, with the heads of delegation only.

Informal consultations with the Presidency, 16 November, 5.15 p.m.

According to sources, the COP 23 Presidency presented the following proposal to the heads of delegation during the informal consultations:

'1. Pre-sessional dialogue to exchange views and deepen Parties' understanding with respect to the information to be provided by Parties in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA. In conjunction with the session of the SBs [subsidiary bodies] in April-May 2018. The co-facilitators, to be appointed by the Presidency, to prepare a report on the dialogue under their own responsibility.

2. Pre-sessional structured dialogue

• to advance consideration of the recommendations to be finalised at COP 24 pursuant to paragraph 55 of decision 1/CP.21

• to provide an opportunity to further explore the possible additional matter being considered under agenda sub-item 8 (a) of the APA with respect to the modalities for biennially communicating the finance information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA.

Immediately before the session of the SBs in April-May 2018. To be facilitated by two co-facilitators to be appointed by the Presidency.

3. Forum on matters related to the implementation of Article 9.5 of the PA and paragraph 55 of 1/CP.21. In conjunction with the session of the SBs in April-May 2018 and with any additional session of the SBs. To be facilitated by the Presidency. The report on the Forum to be considered by COP 24 in the context of finalising the recommendations under agenda item 10(f).'

Sources also said that there were no hard copies of the proposal made available and the G77 and China had a number of things it wanted to reflect on. South Africa, for the G77 and China, it seems, said that they needed to understand the format and the scope of issues and the ability for the format to convene and whether the output would be out in time to reach a balanced PAWP. South Africa also said that the proposal did not provide for treatment of COP item 10(f) in a manner that would allow an outcome by COP 24.

The meeting with the heads of delegation was suspended for Parties to further consult on the proposal among themselves.

Informal consultations with the Presidency, 16 November, past 10 p.m.

According to sources, the consultations started with the COP Presidency drawing out convergences. According to the Presidency, there was agreement among Parties that: there should be a space to talk; there was a need to make progress; the event that would provide the space should be in conjunction with the inter-session or pre-sessional; the space was to discuss content of COP agenda item 10(f); discussion should be recorded; and that the COP should use the report emerging from the event.

The Presidency, it seems, said that it was uncertain what would happen to the APA agenda item since the EU, the Umbrella Group and the Environment Integrity Group were of the view that the Article 9.5 issue under agenda item 8 should no longer be discussed.

Sources revealed that, speaking for the G77 and China, South Africa said that it saw the SBI as the body to take up the work and that the Presidency's perceived convergence on space did not reflect the views of the G77 and China. South Africa said that the SBI needed to address how the information is communicated, how it is recorded and how it is synthesised. It further said that the outputs of the agenda item should have sufficient standing for a decision to be taken by the CMA, and that it was not the group's view that the event should be in conjunction with the inter-sessional or pre-sessional. It also added that in the light of an event, it could not accept the view that the issue under agenda item 8 of the APA would not be further considered.

With no further interventions, the consultations came to an end and the COP Presidency informed Parties that it would inform them on the next steps.

Informal consultations, 17 November, around 11 a.m.

When the consultations convened, sources said that the COP Presidency had a different proposal for Parties. According to the new proposal, the COP would have a place for work on Article 9.5 in the May session in 2018 and COP 23 would request the SBI to build on the work of the COP.

According to the proposal, an informal note would be prepared and if there was to be an event, the informal note would feed into it. The Presidency said that if there would be an additional session, the SBI's work on Article 9.5 would be included in it. The Presidency also said that the discussion on possible additional matters would remain under the APA.

According to sources, in response, South Africa, for the G77 and China, said that its understanding of the proposal was that it did not impact the work under APA agenda item 8, and with that understanding and with some minor changes, it was willing to go along with the proposal. It also said that there should be an additional item on the organisation of a one-off workshop on matters related to Article 9.5, especially on the process of communicating the information. The intent of the workshop would be to discuss how the information is communicated, how the information is recorded and how the information is synthesised.

The US however said that while Parties seemed to be getting closer to a resolution, they were 'not there yet'. It said that the overarching point was that conclusion of the item was related to the conclusion of other items that were still open. It further added that discussion on agenda item 8 of the APA would need to be concluded if Parties were seeking additional time at the COP on item 10(f). 'We continue to believe that this should not be a new agenda item under the SBI. It should be a workshop or roundtable,' said the US, which also wanted a reference to Article 9.5 linked to the PAWP removed.

Switzerland said that Parties would have to deliver on the agreed mandate under the COP agenda item 10(f) and if they did not close discussions under item 8 of the APA, that meant that there was no common understanding of the mandate.

The EU was reported to have said that having a workshop or a roundtable was a step forward towards a compromise and that any output would need to conclude the discussion of Article 9.5 under the APA agenda item 8.

With the deadlock, sources revealed, the Presidency asked Parties to consult among themselves and said that another meeting would be called later in the day.

Informal consultations with the Presidency, 17 November, around 8 p.m.

According to sources, in the informal consultations, the COP Presidency made the following proposal:

'Proposed paragraphs in relation to Article 9, paragraph 5 of the PA

Requests the SBI to consider, beginning at its 48th session and at any subsequent sessions, in the context of the Paris Agreement Work Programme, identification of the information to be provided by Parties, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph 5, of the PA and to forward a recommendation for consideration and adoption by COP 24 in accordance with the mandate set out in paragraph 55 of decision 1/CP.21.

Requests the SBI to consider the matter referred to in paragraph X above taking into account the deliberations among Parties under agenda item 10(f) at COP 23.'

Sources revealed that the EU in response said that Parties had stretched their limits and had finally come to an agreement on how to handle the Article 9.5 issue. It said that according to the proposal presented, agenda item 10(f) under the COP would go to the SBI and APA agenda item 8 would remain part of the discussions.

The G77 and China supported the proposal.

The US reportedly said that it had drafted a text along the lines of the proposal, which 'several Parties' had seen.

The session was adjourned with South Africa reiterating its understanding that the G77 accepted the Presidency's proposal, with APA item 8 staying as is. It added that it could not endorse the language proposed by the US since it had not seen it.

In the decision that got adopted under the COP 23 agenda item 10(f) on the 'process to identify the information to be provided by Parties in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA', the relevant parts of the final compromise agreed to are as follows:

'5. Requests the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to consider, beginning at its 48th session (April–May 2018) and at any subsequent sessions on the Paris Agreement work programme, identification of the information to be provided by Parties, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph 5, of the Paris Agreement, and to forward the outcomes to the COP at its 24th session (December 2018), with a view to the COP providing a recommendation for consideration and adoption by the CMA at the third part of its first session (December 2018);

6. Also requests the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to consider the matter referred to in paragraph 5 above taking into account the informal note...'

[The informal note refers to the note by the co-chairs of the contact group that discussed agenda item 10(f) on the 'process to identify the information to be provided by Parties in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA'.]

As agreed to under the APA, Parties will continue the consideration of Article 9.5 under agenda item 8 on the issue of 'modalities for biennially communicating finance information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5'.

The May 2018 session is bound to see continued intense wrangling between developed and developing countries over the issue of 'information' and 'modalities' in relation to the Article 9.5 mandate under the PA. – *TWN* ◆

Developing countries welcome decisions at COP 23, register concerns over finance issues

While expressing satisfaction with the adoption by the Bonn conference of some key decisions, developing countries were critical of the failure of the developed countries to commit themselves to deeper cuts in their carbon emissions. They were also unanimous in registering their dissatisfaction with the way the issue of climate finance was addressed.

Jade Chiang and Meena Raman

DEVELOPING countries welcomed some key decisions adopted at COP 23 but also emphatically registered their unhappiness over how the finance issues were addressed at the closing of the climate talks on 18 November.

They also expressed disappointment over the reluctance of developed-country Parties to engage on accelerating action and support in the pre-2020 period.

Parties expressed their remarks and also posted their full statements at the joint closing plenary of the 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 13) and the second part of the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 1.2).

The joint plenary session was presided over by Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, who was COP 23 President.

The G77 and China noted that in spite of the good stories coming out of COP 23, 'the story on financing is not necessarily a happy one'. It however welcomed several decisions that were delivered at COP 23, such as decisions on furthering work on the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM), including in addressing financial resources for the mechanism; the operationalisation of the local communities and indigenous peoples' platform through establishment of a 'facilitative working group'; a decision on agriculture following years of negotiations to advance further work; as well as an agreement on the first gender action plan in relation to climate change.

The African Group expressed disappointment that developed countries had little appetite to accelerate the pre-2020 actions, highlighting the fact that the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol (KP) has yet to come into force and the means of implementation to developing countries are declining.

Apart from developed countries not living up to their pre-2020 actions, the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) cautioned against the attempt by developed countries to shift responsibilities for climate change actions in the post-2020 period (under the Paris Agreement) more and more to developing countries.

Although the United States did not deliver its statement, it uploaded a four-paragraph statement on the UNFCCC website saying that the $100 billion finance goal 'is aspirational in nature, is not legally binding – either collectively or on any Party individually – and does not create rights or obligations'. The US also stressed that the 'financial pledges made by the last administration are not legally binding'.

Highlights of closing statements

Representing the G77 and China, Ecuador said the Group was proud that it had contributed in advancing the textual work on the Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP) towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement and several other deliverables that were very important for developing countries.

Among those successes, it highlighted the important decision on pre-2020 implementation and ambition that includes a stocktake on the status of the pre-2020 work, recognising that the enhancement of pre-2020 action and support in finance, technology and capacity-building from developed-country to developing-country Parties is the solid foundation for post-2020 implementation.

It looked forward to the assessment of the progress of implementation of the decisions taken in Warsaw (in 2013) to accelerate the implementation of the commitments in relation to the provision of means of implementation for developing-country Parties.

'This is of particular importance for our countries, including in the context of the 20th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the increasing adverse impacts of climate change in our countries that keep reminding us that we need climate action and support now, and not only after 2020,' emphasised Ecuador.

On the operationalisation of the WIM to tackle the consequences of extreme and slow-onset weather events related to climate change that have affected different regions of the world, it welcomed the strengthening of the five-year rolling work plan of the WIM Executive Committee (ExCom) and the call for the Suva Expert Dialogue as the first step to the future establishment of an expert group on action and support and the call for the mobilisation of resources for averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage. However, it noted that the work plan of the ExCom still remains a long way from achieving the full implementation of the WIM under Article 8 of the PA.

Ecuador was also proud that the G77 and China was able to contribute to the longstanding aspiration of local communities and indigenous peoples that they are no longer considered mere observers of climate change but have the opportunity to become real actors in the solution, including through the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices on climate change action in a holistic and integrated manner. 'The establishment of the facilitative working group and the development of its work plan are fundamental and concrete steps towards the full operationalisation of the local communities and indigenous peoples' platform,' said Ecuador.

It expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved in agriculture after several years (of negotiations), calling it an important first step for climate actions in the sector which is most vulnerable and is linked to food security.

[In the decision adopted at the COP, among other things, Parties requested the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) to 'jointly address issues related to agriculture, including through workshops and expert meetings, working with constituted bodies under the Convention and taking into consideration the vulnerabilities of agriculture to climate change and approaches to addressing food security.']

The G77 and China also welcomed the establishment of the first gender action plan in relation to climate change and several other important decisions such as those on capacity-building; education, training and public awareness, public participation and public access to information; and the common metrics to calculate the carbon dioxide equivalent of greenhouse gases.

On finance matters, it said 'the story on financing is not necessarily a happy one. On such an important area, we have not seen progress on core elements such as in resolving the eligibility criteria adopted by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). We reiterate that the access to financial resources must be granted to all developing country Parties.' (The G77 and China was expressing concern over some developing countries not being able to access the resources of the GEF.)

Ecuador reiterated its 'rejection to the usage of criteria outside of the scope of the UNFCCC or the governing instrument of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in the assessment and discussion of developing countries' funding proposals.' (The G77 and China was referring to decisions taken at the recent GCF Board meeting in Cairo where the United Kingdom had opposed funding applications from Argentina and Paraguay due to the 'level of income' of those countries.)

On the 'Open Dialogue' between Parties and non-Party stakeholders held during the first week of the talks, the G77 and China stressed the responsibility to enhance transparency. It believed 'that existing frameworks, principles and rules in other areas of the UNFCCC as well as in other organisations can serve as good examples to promote enhanced participation while addressing the realities of the different constituencies and specifically the capacity of some to unduly influence outcomes to serve their own vested interests'. (The G77 and China was referring to calls by civil society groups to have norms in dealing with big corporations which may unduly influence policy outcomes in the UNFCCC due to their vested interests.)

Mali, speaking for the African Group, welcomed the decision that mandated the SBI to consider the identification of the information to be provided by developed-country Parties on their indicative quantitative and qualitative information on the projected levels of public financial resources to be provided to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA.

(Developed countries had strongly resisted the push by developing countries to have a decision at COP 23 to mandate the SBI to discuss the modalities for biennially communicating information on the provision of public financial resources to developing countries in accordance with Article 9.5. The final compromise was for the SBI to consider the identification of the information to be provided.)

Mali also welcomed the decision on the Adaptation Fund (AF) that provided further assurance for the Fund to serve the PA, noting that the decision provided clarity and built trust among Parties in further deliberating the procedures needed to finalise the AF serving the PA.

(In deciding whether the AF 'shall serve' the PA, developed and developing countries had been divided over whether the Fund will be 'exclusively under the guidance of' and be 'accountable to the CMA' or would also be accountable to the CMP, which established the AF. This issue saw much haggling among Parties, which delayed the closing of the climate talks. The final decision adopted under the CMP is for Parties to consider the matter further at CMP 15 in 2019.)

The African Group expressed disappointment that there was 'little appetite to accelerate pre-2020 action, as exemplified by the fact that the Doha Amendment has not yet come into force and means of implementation to developing countries [are] declining.'

'The ramping up of ambition in the pre-2020 period by developed country Parties is a crucial signal to our people that we are serious about fulfilling our commitments. Therefore, we call on all developed country Parties to urgently implement their pre-2020 pledges and increase their ambition including the provision of additional, new and predictable support to developing countries,' it added. It reiterated the need for the immediate entry into force of the second commitment period of the KP.

The African Group also reiterated the importance of the continued consultations on the issue of special consideration for Africa with a view to adopting a decision on the matter as soon as possible. It stressed the need for consideration of Africa's special circumstances in relation to its economic and development status, which it said 'is not comparable to any region in its abilities to meet its obligations under the PA.'

On behalf of the LMDC, Iran said it had come with the expectation that developed-country Parties would share its objective for COP 23 to be an adaptation, finance, and loss and damage COP. It had expected the COP to advance these priorities for moving forward in the negotiations to implement the Convention and the PA, without rewriting or renegotiating the Convention and the PA, and catalyse urgent action on the implementation of pre-2020 commitments and actions.

'Instead, in the various negotiations and meeting rooms – whether under the APA [Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement], the subsidiary bodies or the COP – developed countries have repeatedly proposed that developing countries finance and adapt by themselves to loss and damage, and adaptation issues themselves have been lost and damaged. Addressing the impact of response measures has also been blocked ... developing countries were told to look to our own strained resources and to the private sector for such financing and technologies.

'We have also seen constant attempts by developed countries to reflect the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) in ways that would be inequitable and which focus on common and not differentiated responsibility.'

This seems to be a concerted effort to shift responsibility for climate change action in the post-2020 period more and more to developing countries, said Iran.

In addition, it said that some developed countries have applied unilateral coercive economic measures on some LMDC members contrary to international law and thereby increasing hardship in these countries, it said, warning that these are not conducive to building trust moving forward.

Despite the initial difficulties in the treatment of pre-2020 issues that the LMDC had tabled at the start of this COP, supported by the G77 and China, Iran was glad to note that a constructive way forward has been found.

It noted the EU's announcement that it would conclude its ratification of the Doha Amendment to the KP by December 2017 and looked forward to other developed countries following the EU example. It further called on the UN Secretary-General and the UNFCCC Secretariat to accord the same level of political attention and celebration to the Doha Amendment, including deposits of the instruments of ratification of the Amendment, as had been given in 2016 to the signature of the PA.

'We look forward, together with our partners, to keeping a focus in the years up to 2020 on how pre-2020 commitments are being met. This includes doing so in the Talanoa Dialogue next year and also in the annual stocktake on pre-2020 issues that the COP will undertake in 2018 and 2019,' Iran emphasised.

Brazil, representing the BASIC grouping (comprising Brazil, China, India and South Africa), said it was dismayed over the initial divergence among Parties in views on how and where to address the pre-2020 actions although all Parties agreed on the importance.

'Pre-2020 action is back as we have collectively decided ... the stocktake sessions mandated by this COP for each year up to 2020 will serve to inform actions by countries and contribute to raise collective ambition. The urgent need for entry into force of the Doha Amendment to the KP is also highlighted,' it added in relief.

BASIC welcomed the decisions reached on agriculture, the gender action plan and the concept of equity as a central element of the design of the global stocktake (under the PA, to be conducted in 2023). It voiced satisfaction over progress made for the PAWP with the range of Parties' views captured in informal notes that would serve as basis for negotiations in 2018, and called on Parties to 'redouble' their efforts in 2018.

It however expressed concern over developed countries' resistance to the call for greater transparency and predictability in the provision of information on finance in accordance with Article 9.5 of the PA.

BASIC also expressed profound concern over attempts by developed countries to unilaterally apply new eligibility criteria for access to funding under the GEF and GCF. It understood that the compromise reached required the GCF Board to ensure that all developing countries have access to all financial instruments available in line with eligibility criteria in the GCF's governing instrument, relevant COP decisions and application of agreed policies of the GCF.

On the Talanoa Dialogue, it expected 'developed countries to demonstrate what they are doing to close the ambition gap so as to avoid transferring the gap to developing countries from the pre-2020 to the post-2020 period.' Brazil also said that it is offering to host COP 25 (in 2019).

The Maldives, for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), said that 'exceeding the Paris goals requires renewed political commitment if we hope to peak global carbon emissions by 2020 and put the world on a path to keep warming to less than 1.5°C.' It called for the Talanoa Dialogue to ramp up ambition and the acceleration of finance to small island developing states which are already suffering acutely from climate change by expanding access to grants and concessionary loans, systematically simplifying access to finance including to address loss and damage, and creating international instruments to incentivise private finance flows towards building resilience and ensuring timely disbursement of funds.

Ethiopia, for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), said 'the overarching outcome of the Talanoa Dialogue must lead to an increase in ambition by all countries to put us on track to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C through strengthening of our national contributions, managing a phase-out of fossil fuels, promoting renewable energy and implementing the most ambitious climate actions.'

On loss and damage, it said the scale of destruction is already beyond LDCs' capacity to respond or cope and to lift their people out of poverty. While recognising that Parties could not agree on introducing loss and damage as a standing agenda item under the subsidiary bodies, it appealed for actual support and said that the Suva Expert Dialogue that was agreed to would lay a strong foundation for further raising the profile of loss and damage and in delivering the concrete actions needed by vulnerable developing countries.

It expressed concern that climate finance appeared to be tapering downwards but welcomed the important decision taken at COP 23 that firmly integrated the Adaptation Fund into the architecture of the PA as a crucial adaptation funding source for developing countries.

Representing the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) warned of the dangerous precedent set by the Secretariat in not including the DRC's proposal for an agenda item at COP 23 called the 'gateway to encourage, measure, report, verify and account for greater ambition from corporate entities, investors, regions, states/provinces, cities and civil society organisations.' It said the proposal would be back on the agenda of COP 24 and that it would be organising voluntary consultations in this regard at the Bonn inter-session in May 2018.

(Informal consultations initiated by the COP Presidency did not lead to consensus among Parties to include the DRC proposal on the COP 23 agenda.)

China said the outcome in Bonn highlighted and consolidated the political momentum for international cooperation for climate change and the promotion of global green and low-carbon development. It noted the heavy task in 2018. 'The historical momentum of the PA is not reversible ... China will continue on the basis of building a community of common human destiny. It will take robust domestic actions to deal with climate change and implement in earnest its declared nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and other targets,' it added.

Mexico, for the Environmental Integrity Group, said that the approval of the PA work plan and the Talanoa Dialogue remained two important features for 2018 while noting that some issues still lag behind.

In its intervention posted on the website, Australia, for the Umbrella Group, welcomed the design of the Talanoa Dialogue and believed that concept would ensure the Dialogue is 'collective, inclusive and transparent' in helping to raise future ambition.

It said a strong and effective enhanced transparency framework applicable to all Parties and guidance on how Parties account for their emission reduction commitments under the PA is fundamental to ensuring credibility and public confidence in Parties' efforts. It was pleased with progress to that end across the PA work programme.

Estonia, for the EU, said it had come to Bonn in search of progress with a view to honouring the international agreement that Parties had worked hard to achieve in Paris. 'Let us be clear ... next year will not be easy nor shall we pretend that we have found solution to all outstanding challenges here. The journey ahead is long and complicated ... but the EU is not in the business of walking away from difficult situation.

'We heard concerns of our developing country partners and we understand their anxieties in the face of what seems to be overpowering challenge of climate change. We all know it is no longer about science alone but about livelihood of our people.'

Estonia reiterated that the work to enhance pre-2020 actions remains a priority for the EU, which is proud of its record. It said as a sign of its commitment, the EU was planning to deposit the instrument of ratification of the Doha Amendment by the end of 2017.

The US reiterated that it will withdraw from the PA unless it can identify suitable terms for engagement, and said that its participation in COP 23 including in the negotiations at the session did not indicate a change in its position.

'We note that while the US continues to develop its policies, the decisions adopted at this session are without prejudice to our future positions on the matters addressed at this session and the content included in the adopted decisions.

'Additionally, with regard to finance matters, and in particular the $100 billion collective finance goal, the US notes that it is aspirational in nature, is not legally binding – either collectively or on any Party individually – and does not create rights or obligations. As such, actions to mobilise finance taken by any country – either developed or developing – remain a domestic decision. In this context, the US reiterates that the financial pledges made by the last administration are not legally binding.'

It further said: 'As a global leader in innovation, the US anticipates continuing support for developing countries' energy, land-use, and resilience activities where mutually beneficial to our broader foreign policy, economic development, and national security objectives. In particular, the US will endeavour to work closely with other countries to help them access and use fossil fuels more cleanly and efficiently and help deploy renewable and other clean energy sources, given the importance of energy access and security in their NDCs.' ◆

Climate change in the courts

There has been a proliferation of climate-related suits around the world as activists and citizens turn to the courts to compel their governments to address the serious threats posed by global warning.

A LACK of robust national climate policies has left many questioning just how committed their governments are to taking serious climate action within a meaningful time frame. Yes, the global community came together around the Paris climate agreement in 2015, but lack of sufficient national-level action has left people fed up. So fed up, it seems, that folks from Portugal to Pakistan to South Africa are taking their elected leaders to court.

According to a study released in 2017 by the United Nations Environment Programme and Columbia Law School, there has been a proliferation of climate-related cases brought by citizens and environmental groups, primarily against their governments. In some cases, legal strategy is anchored to the Paris Agreement, in others to national policy, and in still others, to planning requirements for specific projects – say, a coalmine or a pipeline – that will contribute to climate chaos.

More of these cases have been brought in the US than anywhere else, and in general, the lawsuits are concentrated in developed countries. So far, citizens have taken their governments to court over climate in at least 24 nations. Here's a glimpse at some of the fights that have wound their way through the courts, or that are still making their way through the legal system.

Urgenda/Chantal Bekker

In 2015, a court in The Hague ruled in favour of around 900 Dutch citizens who had sued their government for failing to sufficiently protect them from the threat of climate change. Picture shows some of the claimants celebrating the court decision.

United States

More than 600 climate change cases have been filed in the US, roughly three times the number in all other countries combined. These include suits by citizens, environmental groups, and city and county governments. One of the best known is a suit by 21 children and young adults against the federal government. The lawsuit, supported by the non-profit Our Children's Trust, argues that climate change violates the plaintiffs' rights to life, liberty and property by decimating assets that are part of the public trust – think air and water and coastlines. It crossed a major legal hurdle in 2017 when a federal district judge in Oregon ruled that the case could proceed to trial. The trial is set to begin in early 2018.

Portugal

Following in the footsteps of the 21 so-called 'climate kids' in the US, a group of children in Portugal are raising money to sue 47 European countries for their failure to address climate change. They argue that a lack of sufficient climate action threatens their right to life. The children, ages 5-14, are all from Portugal's Leiria region, which suffered devastating forest fires last summer. Combined, the countries targeted in the suit are responsible for 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Holland

In 2015, in what has come to be known as a landmark case for the international climate movement, a court in The Hague ruled in favour of some 900 Dutch citizens who had sued their government for failing to sufficiently protect them from the threat of climate change. The court ordered the Dutch government to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 25% within five years. It was the first time that any court had directly ordered a government to make emission reductions. The case has been credited with inspiring other lawsuits around the world, and indeed, similar efforts have popped up across Europe, including a suit by a group of artists, filmmakers and musicians in Belgium, and a case brought by a group of nearly 800 senior women, aged 65 and above, against the Swiss government.

Pakistan

Pakistani farmer and law student Ashgar Leghari sued his government in 2015 for its failure to implement national climate change policy. His argument? Delayed action on climate change would contribute to heavy floods and droughts that threaten water and food security countrywide. Leghari also pointed to the direct impact of water scarcity on his family farm. And he won: Citing the rights to life and human dignity, the high court ordered the Pakistani government to create a climate change commission to address the serious threats posed by global warming, and to implement the climate policy framework it had created several years prior.

New Zealand

Law student Sarah Thomson sued the New Zealand government last summer over its national emission reduction plans, which include a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 11% below 1990 levels by 2030. Thomson argues that New Zealand – which has the fifth highest per capita emissions rate in the world – has an obligation as a developed country to set emission targets under the Paris Agreement that are compatible with scientific consensus around climate change, and that it has failed to do so. And she asks that the country's Minister for Climate Issues explain just how this target was set. The case has yet to go to trial.

South Africa

In what has been described as the country's first climate change case, a high court in South Africa ruled in 2017 that the Department of Environmental Affairs misstepped by authorising a proposed coal-fired power plant without first assessing the impact it would have on climate change. The case follows similar project-specific suits elsewhere, including a case in Austria in which a court blocked expansion of an international airport because it would lead to a rise in emissions, and an ongoing case in Norway that challenges the government's decision to grant new oil drilling licences in the Arctic. ◆

Sources: Price of Oil, Slate, The Guardian, *Greenpeace, Columbia Law School, United Nations Environment Programme,* Huffington Post

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Trump's National Defense Strategy has something for everyone (in the military-industrial complex)

While on the campaign trail, Donald Trump did articulate some sober and sane foreign policy ideas which appeared to be a break from previous bellicose US policies. However, once in office, he has clearly succumbed to the pressures of the 'military-industrial complex' and is now pursuing a highly militarised foreign policy. *Danny Sjursen* explains why this volte face should have come as no surprise.

THINK of it as the chicken-or-egg question for the ages: Do very real threats to the United States inadvertently benefit the military-industrial complex or does the national security state, by its very nature, conjure up inflated threats to feed that defence machine?

Back in 2008, some of us placed our faith, naively enough, in the hands of mainstream Democrats – specifically, those of a young senator named Barack Obama. He would reverse the war policies of George W Bush, deescalate the unbridled Global War on Terror and right the ship of state. How'd that turn out?

In retrospect, though couched in a far more sophisticated and peaceable rhetoric than Bush's, his moves would prove largely cosmetic when it came to this country's forever wars: a significant reduction in the use of conventional ground troops, but more drones, more commandos and yet more acts of ill-advised regime change. Don't get me wrong: as a veteran of two of Washington's wars, I was glad when 'no-drama' Obama decreased the number of boots on the ground in the Middle East. It's now obvious, however, that he left the basic infrastructure of eternal war firmly in place.

Enter The Donald.

For all his half-baked tweets, insults and boasts, as well as his refusal to read anything of substance on issues of war and peace, some of candidate Trump's foreign policy ideas seemed far saner than those of just about any other politician around or the previous two presidents. I mean, the Iraq War *was* dumb, and maybe it wasn't the craziest idea for America's allies to start thinking about defending themselves, and maybe Washington ought to put some time and diplomatic effort into avoiding a possibly catastrophic clash or set of clashes with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Unfortunately, the White House version of all this proved oh-so-familiar. President Trump's decision, for instance, to double down on a losing bet in Afghanistan in spite of his 'instincts' (and on similar bets in Somalia, Syria and elsewhere) and his recently published National Defense Strategy (NDS) leave little doubt that he's surrendered to Secretary of Defense James Mattis and National Security Advisor H R McMaster, the mainstream interventionists in his administration.

In truth, no one should be surprised. A hyper-interventionist, highly militarised foreign policy has defined Washington since at least the days of President Harry Truman – the first in a long line of hawks to take the White House. In this context, an ever-expanding national security state has always put special effort into meeting the imagined needs (or rather desires) of its various component parts. The result: bloated budgets for which exaggerated threats, if not actual war, remain a necessity.

Without the threat of communism in the previous century and terrorism (as well as once again ascendant great powers) in this one, such bloated budgets would be hard to explain. And then, how would the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines get all the weaponised toys they desired? How would Congressional representatives in a post-industrial economy get all those attractive 'defence' jobs for their districts and how would the weapons makers get the government cash they crave?

The 2-2-1 threat picture

With that in mind, let's take a look at the newly released National Defense Strategy document. It offers a striking sense of how, magically enough, the Pentagon's vision of future global policy manages to provide something for each of its services and their corporate backers.

Start with this: the NDS is to government documents what *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is to family films; it's meant, that is, to scare the hell out of the casual reader. It makes the claim, for instance, that the global 'security environment' has become 'more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory'. In other words, be afraid, very afraid. But is it true? Is the world really more volatile now than it was when two nuclear superpowers with enough missiles to destroy the planet several times over faced off in a not-so-Cold War?

Admittedly, the NDS does list and elaborate some awesome threats – and I think I know just where that list came from, too. When I went through the document, I realised that I had heard it all before. Back in 2015, when I taught history at West Point military academy, a prominent departmental alumnus – a lieutenant general by the name of H R McMaster who, today, just happens to be President Trump's national security advisor – used to drop by occasionally. Back then, he commanded the Army Capabilities Integration Center, which was basically a future-planning outfit that, in its own words, 'develops concepts, learns, and integrates capabilities to improve our Army'.

In 2015, McMaster gave us history instructors a memorable, impromptu sermon about the threats we'd face when we returned to the regular Army. He referred, if memory serves, to what he labelled the two big threats, two medium threats and one persistent threat that will continue to haunt our all-American world. In translation: that's China and Russia, Iran and North Korea, and last but not necessarily least, Islamist terrorism. And honestly, if that isn't a lineup that could get you anything you ever dreamed of in the way of weapons systems and the like, what is?

So can we be surprised that, in the age of McMaster and Mattis, the new NDS just happens to lay out the very same lineup of perils?

The two bigs: 'revisionist powers'

The document kicks off with a pivot of sorts: forget (but not forever!) the ongoing war on terror. The US military is on to even more fearsome things. 'Inter-state strategic competition [which, in Pentagonese, means China and Russia], not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security,' the document insists. Those two countries are – the Pentagon's most recent phrase of eternal damnation – 'revisionist powers' that 'want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model'. In other words, they have the staggering audacity to actually want to assert global influence (the very definition of evil in any power other than you-know-who).

This section of the NDS reads like a piece of grim nostalgia, a plunge back into the pugnacious language of the long-gone Cold War. It's meant to be scary reading. It's not that Russian irredentism or Chinese bellicosity in the South China Sea aren't matters for concern – they are – but do they really add up to a new Cold War?

Let's begin, as the document does, with China, an East Asian menace 'pursuing' that most terrifying of all goals, 'military modernisation' (as, of course, are we), and seeking as well 'Indo-Pacific Regional hegemony' (as, of course, has ... well, you know which other country).

The National Defense Strategy isn't, however, keen on nuance. It prefers to style China unambiguously as a 10-foot-tall military behemoth. After all, countering a resurgent China in the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea ensures a prominent role for the Navy and its own air force of carrier-based naval aviators. In fact, the military's latest 'AirSea Battle' doctrine hinges on a potential conflict in a place that bears a suspicious similarity to the Taiwan Straits (and thanks to the catchy name, the Air Force gets in on the action as well). Consider all of this a formula for more blue-water ships, more advanced fighter planes, and maybe even some extra amphibious Marine Corps brigades.

But what about the poor Army? Well, that's where that other revisionist power, Russia, comes in. After all, Putin's government is now seeking to 'shatter' the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). No point, naturally, in reminding anyone that Washington was the country that expanded what was, by definition, an anti-Russian military alliance right up to Russia's borders, despite promises made as the Soviet Union was collapsing. But this is no time to split hairs, so bottom line: the Russian threat ensures that the Army must send more combat troops to Europe. It may even have to dust off all those old Abrams tanks in order to 'deter' Vladimir Putin's Russia. Ka-ching! (Consider this, by the way, a form of collusion with Russia that Robert Mueller isn't investigating.)

If you look at the Pentagon's 11 'defence objectives' included in the National Defense Strategy document, you get a sense of just how expansive the one great non-revisionist power on the planet actually is. Yes, the first of those sounds reasonable enough: 'defending the homeland from attack'. Skip down to number five, though – 'Maintaining favourable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and the Western Hemisphere' – and you're offered a vision of what an expansionist attitude really is. Although the NDS claims this country is threatened by the rise of Russia or China in just two of these areas (the Indo-Pacific and Europe), it asserts the need for favourable 'balances of power' just about everywhere!

By definition, that's an urge for hegemony, not defence! Imagine if China or Russia staked out such claims. An unbiased look at that set of objectives should make anyone (other than a general or an admiral) wonder which is really the 'rogue regime' on this planet.

The two mediums: 'rogue states'

Now, on to the next group of threats, Uncle Sam's favourite bad boys, North Korea and Iran. North Korea, we're told, is a land of 'outlaw actions' and 'reckless rhetoric' (never to be compared to the statesmanlike 'fire and fury' comments of President Donald Trump). And indeed, Kim Jong-un's brutal regime and the nuclear weapons programme that goes with it are cause for concern – but they also turn out to be deeply useful if you want to provide plenty of incentive for the funding of the Air Force's and the Navy's trillion-dollar nuclear 'modernisation' effort (that already looks like it may actually cost more like $1.7 trillion). In other words, more nuclear submarines, heavy bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles, not to speak of the immense cost of recent investments in such missile defence systems as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD).

In this way, 'rogue states' couldn't be more helpful. Take Iran, which, according to the NDS, 'remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability'. Hmmm. It's hard not to wonder why ISIS, Bashar al-Assad's rump Syria, Saudi terror bombing in Yemen, even old-fashioned al-Qaeda (and its new-fashioned affiliates) don't give Iran at least a run for its money when it comes to being the clearest-and-presentest danger to the region and to the United States. (And that's assuming that, in the Middle East, the US hasn't been the greatest danger to itself. Exhibit One: the decision to invade Iraq in 2003.)

No matter. Anti-Iranian hysteria sells fabulously in Washington, so who wouldn't want to run with it? In fact, the alleged Iranian threat to us is the gift that just keeps on giving inside the Washington Beltway. Iran's nuclear threat – though there's no evidence that the Iranians have cheated on the nuclear deal President Obama signed with them in 2015 and that President Trump is so eager to abrogate – guarantees yet another windfall for all the services. The Army's air defence programmes, for example, should get a long-needed shot in the arm; the Navy will clamour for more Aegis cruisers (with anti-ballistic systems on board); and the Air Force will certainly need yet more bombers for the potential preemptive strike against the nuclear threat that isn't there. Everyone wins! (Except perhaps the Iranian people.)

One 'persistent condition': terrorism

And then, of course, there's terrorism or, to be more exact, Islamist terrorism, that surefire funder of the 21st century. It may no longer officially be the military's top priority, but the National Defense Strategy assures us that it 'remains a persistent condition' as long as terrorists 'continue to murder the innocent'. The proper question, though, is: How big of a threat is it? As it turns out, not very big, not for Americans anyway. Any of us are so much more likely to choke to death or die in a bicycle or car accident than lose our lives at the hands of a foreign-born terrorist.

And here's another relevant question: Is the US military actually the correct tool with which to combat persistent terrorism? The answer, it seems, is no. Though US Special Operations forces deployed to 75% of the world's countries in 2017, the number of Islamist threat groups has only risen in certain areas like Africa thickest with those special operators. It turns out that all the advising and assisting, all the training and coaching, has only made matters worse. As for those overstretched forces, relentless deployments are evidently breaking them down as reports indicate that rates of mental distress and suicide are again on the rise among them.

Still, here's the positive part of the NDS's continuing emphasis on 'degrading' terrorist groups and 'countering extremism': it ensures a financial and manpower bonanza for US Special Operations Command (SOCOM). In the Obama years, that 'elite' set of forces already experienced a leap in numbers to almost 70,000. (By the way, at what point in the escalation game do such troops stop being so 'special'?) Since SOCOM, a joint command that's home to personnel from all the services, hadn't yet been dealt into this NDS version of largesse, it's lucky that terrorism and the war on it isn't going anywhere anytime soon, which means that SOCOM will never want for funds or stop growing.

Guns versus butter

In 1953, Republican President Dwight Eisenhower, a West Point graduate and retired five-star general, gave a speech that couldn't have been more unexpected from a career military man. He reminded Americans that defence and social spending were always in conflict and that the 'guns' versus 'butter' tradeoff couldn't be a more perilous one. Speaking of the growth of the defence budget in that tense Cold War moment, he asserted: 'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.'

Those words still seem salient today. As Americans experience acute income inequality, the rising cost of a college education, and ongoing deindustrialisation in the heartland, the country's runaway spending continues to rise precipitously. The planned 2019 Pentagon budget is now expected to hit a staggering $716 billion – more than much of the rest of the world's defence spending combined.

The battle between 'guns and butter' is still raging in the United States and, if the new NDS is any indicator, the guns are winning. ◆

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Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author, expressed in an unofficial capacity, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Department of the Army, the Department of Defense or the US government.

A rare glimpse into the inner workings of the American empire in the Middle East

The US foreign policy elite still wants the Middle East for its oil and its strategic location.

Edward Hunt

US soldiers on patrol in Diyala province, Iraq, in December 2010. A former US diplomat criticised the Obama administration for withdrawing US forces from Iraq in 2011 rather than go through with a secret deal to maintain a secret network of military bases in the country.

IN recent testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, four former US diplomats provided remarkably candid commentary on recent US involvement in the Middle East, revealing a number of the most closely guarded secrets of US diplomacy.

The ex-diplomats emphasised the importance of the region's oil, spoke critically about the weaknesses of US strategy, made a number of crude comments about US partners, displayed little concern about ongoing violence, and called for more 'discipline' throughout the region.

One of the former diplomats, James Jeffrey, criticised the Obama administration for withdrawing US forces from Iraq in 2011 rather than going through with a secret deal to maintain a secret network of military bases in the country. Even today, Jeffrey said, officials in Washington must not 'melt down' and retrench when US forces get killed. Officials must accept that there could always be 'new Benghazis and new Nigers', he said, referring to incidents in which US agents have been killed.

The four former diplomats also lambasted US partners in the region. They criticised many of their closest allies for poor governance, a lack of democracy, and an inability to coordinate on shared strategic objectives.

Jeffrey made some of the strongest criticisms, charging Kurdish leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan with making their region into 'another basket case' in the Middle East. He also complained that US officials had to deal with 'a lot of bitching' from the Turkish government over US support for the Kurdish fighters confronting the Islamic State (IS) in Syria.

In addition to Jeffrey, who once held high-level positions in the George W Bush administration, the group of former diplomats included Ryan Crocker, Eric Edelman and Stuart Jones. Crocker has been the US ambassador to six different countries in the Middle East. Edelman and Jones, who have both been diplomats in the Middle East, have held senior positions in numerous administrations.

Over the past few decades, all four men have played significant roles in crafting and implementing US policies in the region. They were 'giants' who had 'walked the earth', according to Edelman.

Together, these four former diplomats called on the Trump administration to play a more assertive role in the Middle East. Although they largely agreed that IS has been significantly weakened over the last two-and-a-half years, removing a significant challenge to US power, they saw ongoing challenges from Iran and Russia and growing problems between the US and its allies. They wanted to ensure that the United States remained well positioned to call the shots in the region and maintain a US-led system of regional order.

'Clarity on US plans and goals and particularly success against Iran will help mobilise allies, but the US must discipline the system and overwatch partners constantly,' Jeffrey said.

The strategic concerns

Some of the more astounding revelations concern the basic reason why US officials remain so focused on the Middle East. Although US officials typically emphasise the problems of terrorism and security, a number of the former diplomats indicated that the major concerns have always been the region's oil, location and function in the global economy.

Edelman made the clearest statement on the matter, explaining in his prepared statement that geostrategic calculations have been central factors in US policy since the end of World War II. 'US policymakers have considered access to the region's energy resources vital for US allies in Europe, and ultimately for the United States itself,' he wrote. 'Moreover, the region's strategic location – linking Europe and Asia – made it particularly important from a geopolitical point of view.'

Edelman went on to suggest that US actions in the region have been consistently based on these geostrategic factors. He cited the Carter Doctrine of 1980, which identified the Persian Gulf as a region so vital to US interests that the US would militarily intervene in the region to expel outside forces. He also cited the first Gulf War against Iraq, in which the US militarily intervened to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

'The geostrategic and economic factors that made the Middle East so important to our national security in the past are just as potent today,' Edelman said. Even with recent increases in US energy production as a result of the fracking revolution, 'real or even potential disruptions to the flow of oil anywhere would have serious negative effects on our economy'.

With his remarks, Edelman made it clear that US officials continue to value the Middle East for its oil. The region 'contains half of global proven oil reserves, accounts for one-third of oil production and exports, and is home to three of the world's four biggest oil transit chokepoints', he explained.

Ex-diplomat Eric Edelman: 'US policymakers have considered access to [the Middle East's] energy resources vital for US allies in Europe, and ultimately for the United States itself.'

When Edelman raised these points during the hearing, nobody disagreed with him. Neither his colleagues nor the committee members challenged his observations about why the region was so important. His remarks were considered so uncontroversial that they never came up for debate.

Instead, the current and former officials focused their discussion on what they thought were the main challenges to US access to the area. Their primary concern was that Russia and Iran were working together to challenge the US-led system of regional order with the hopes of creating some alternative system.

'In reality, both Russia and Iran want to roll back US influence even further in the region, and each depends on the other to help it do so,' Edelman warned in his prepared statement.

During the hearing, Jeffrey made a similar point, saying that 'Russia and Iran and, to some degree, Syria want to change the mix of the Middle East'. The US and its allies, he continued, must maintain the current system and 'at the end of the day we just have to push back'.

In these ways, the former diplomats provided some remarkable insights into the most basic reasons behind US actions in the Middle East. They revealed that basic US policy was to maintain a US-led system of regional order so that the US government could influence how all parts of the world gained access to the region's oil.

Frictions

Throughout the hearing, the four former diplomats also made a number of unusually blunt criticisms of US strategy. They felt that their superiors in Washington and their many partners throughout the region kept taking steps that were creating more problems in the area.

Jeffrey was especially critical of the Obama administration, which he blamed for failures in the second Gulf War against Iraq. Jeffrey, who was the Obama administration's ambassador to Iraq during the period when US forces withdrew from the country in 2011, said that the administration should have accepted a secret plan to keep US forces in the country. Jeffrey explained that administration officials had arranged a secret plan with then Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki 'to cheat, with Maliki's acknowledgement', on the final agreement to withdraw US forces from the country. 'We had Black SOF, White SOF,' he said, seemingly referring to different kinds of Special Operations Forces. 'We had drones, we had all kinds of things,' he added.

Jeffrey was reluctant to provide more details, but he insisted that the secret plan could have worked if his superiors in the Obama administration had tried it. He did not express any concern about the fact that an estimated 100,000 people had already died in the war.

'It was a very big package, including a $14 billion FMS programme,' Jeffrey said, referring to a programme of military sales. 'We had bases all over the country that were disguised bases that the US military was running.'

Although the other former diplomats on the panel largely agreed that the Obama administration should not have withdrawn US forces from Iraq in 2011, they were convinced that US partners shared much of the blame for ongoing violence in the area. The former diplomats accused many of their closest partners and allies of acting in ways that were creating problems.

James Jeffrey: '[T]he US must discipline the system and overwatch partners constantly.'

Sometimes, 'they will do things in a way that we think makes things worse rather than better', Edelman said.

Jeffrey agreed with his colleagues, saying it was simply the price of operating in the Middle East. To maintain access to the region, he explained, 'we have to rely on five countries – Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt'. Each of them, he said, came with significant problems, all of which made it difficult to operate in the area. 'We wouldn't pick these allies if we were coming up with a different Middle East, but we have to deal with the Middle East we have,' he said.

Jeffrey was especially critical of Turkey, a NATO ally. He said that 'the things they do are toxic'.

Since a putsch attempt against the Turkish government in July 2016, Turkish leaders have accused the US government of involvement. As part of the government's subsequent crackdown on its domestic opponents, an estimated 150,000 Turks have been fired from their jobs, 60,000 have been arrested, 1,500 civil society organisations have been disbanded, and more than 100 media outlets have been closed.

The crackdown came amid a period of growing tensions between the US and Turkish governments. Differences over how to deal with the war in Syria and relations with Russia have added to the tensions in the relationship.

'It's unpleasant, it's transactional, it's ugly,' Jeffrey said.

Edelman, who believed that the US bore 'a little bit of the blame here for this deterioration in relations', still called for a tougher approach. 'I don't think we can tolerate some of the behaviour that our Turkish allies are showing,' he said.

Crocker reminded the Senate committee members that the US still relied on Turkey to maintain access to the region. He said that it would be necessary to continue working with the country's repressive leadership, despite its troubling behaviour.

'They are a NATO partner in a region where we don't have a choice between democracy and autocracy,' Crocker said. 'That's not on the table.'

Jeffrey provided one of the most telling comments on the situation when he acknowledged that the Turkish government continued to tolerate US support for the Kurdish fighters who were fighting IS in Syria. The Kurdish fighters, he explained, were an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group that both the US and Turkish governments consider to be a terrorist organisation.

'The Turks are allowing us to support the PKK offshoot Kurds in Syria every day – reluctantly, with a lot of bitching, but they do it,' Jeffrey said.

The US decision to support the Kurdish fighters created additional controversy because of Kurdish aspirations to create their own state. The governments of countries with significant Kurdish populations, including Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, all opposed the idea.

When Iraqi Kurds living in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan voted last September to explore the possibility of independence, they faced a significant backlash. Weeks after the vote, the Iraqi government sent its military forces into the region, reclaiming the oil-rich area of Kirkuk while weakening the independence movement.

The former diplomats signalled their support for the Iraqi government's military operations, despite the fact that the Iraqi Kurds were playing a significant role in the war against IS.

Jeffrey argued that Iraq must hold together because of its potential to produce so much oil. He said that Iraq could eventually enter 'into the Saudi Arabia category', meaning that it could become a major player in the global oil market. 'That's a very important trump card, so to speak, in the Middle East, and we don't want to just break it up,' he said.

Jeffrey was especially critical of the Iraqi Kurds for pursuing independence, saying that 'they have gone in three months from one of the best good-news stories in the region to another basket case'.

If they keep crossing 'red lines', Crocker said, 'we're probably not going to be around to back them up when the going gets rough'.

'It's the same as, sadly, with the Christian communities,' Crocker added, referring to Iraqi Christians who were facing their own challenges.

In these ways, the former diplomats made it clear that they were willing to ignore the plight of their partners and other marginalised groups if they could not find any strategic reasons to support them. The challenges facing the Kurds and Christians, they indicated, were minor factors compared with the strategic factors at play.

Testimony before a US Senate committee brought out that US officials continue to value the Middle East for its oil.

Taken together, their comments indicated that geostrategic calculations remained paramount. The four former diplomats may not have liked all of their partners, but they all believed that they had to accept these trade-offs if they were going to achieve their plans for the region.

'We can't be going at each other, scratching each other because of these secondary sins when the real sinning in the region is done by Islamic terrorists and Iran,' Jeffrey said. 'So we have to get a better hold of our allies.'

The final outlook

In spite of the rather complex strategic landscape, the four former diplomats still acknowledged that the US maintained tremendous influence throughout the Middle East. They largely agreed that the US remained the dominant power in the region with no comparable rival.

In his prepared statement, Edelman acknowledged that US naval and air power in the Persian Gulf 'outmatches Iran's'.

Jeffrey agreed, explaining that the US maintained 'significant assets' throughout the Middle East. 'Most of the states in the region are our security partners, with a huge conventional superiority, along with CENTCOM, over Iran, even with Russian support,' Jeffrey explained.

CENTCOM, short for US Central Command, hosts about 80,000 US military forces at numerous bases and offshore sites throughout the region. Over the past two-and-a-half years, CENTCOM has put its power on display in the war against IS. Since August 2014, coalition forces have conducted nearly 25,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. As of April 2017, they had killed as many as 70,000 IS fighters, according to their own estimates.

As part of the campaign, US forces have gained a major new foothold in Syria. 'We have a lot of assets in Syria even though it doesn't look that way,' Jeffrey said. 'We and the Turks between us hold about a third of the country and have a lot of local allies.'

US forces have also re-established a powerful military presence in Iraq, now basing more than 5,000 US forces in the country.

Currently, all signs indicate the US is increasing its hold over the Middle East.

The only problem, according to the former diplomats, is that the US continues to face significant resistance. Although the US has constructed a kind of informal American empire, they believe that US actions and polices are creating blowback that is bringing more conflict and violence to the region.

'Anything we do to contain Iran, to push back, will bring with it great risks to us and to people in the region,' Jeffrey said. These were the lessons of history, he explained, citing 'the chaos we deliberately created' to confront past challengers in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

Moving forward, Jeffrey believed, it would be better to conduct what he called 'economy-of-force, light-footprint operations with our allies'. He suggested that these types of operations would be more effective, even if they resulted in additional violence.

'That will produce new Benghazis and new Nigers,' Jeffrey said. But 'we have to be able to move on and not melt down when these things happen because this is the right way to approach it'.

Indeed, Jeffrey insisted that it would be necessary to accept more death and violence if the US was going to achieve its strategic objectives. This kind of trade-off, he believed, was simply how things worked in the area. Citing recent retaliatory actions by the Israeli and Saudi governments against missile attacks, Jeffrey said that the high civilian death tolls that resulted from such operations had simply become one of the costs of military engagement in the region.

'Ten thousand more dead civilians in the Middle East, in a region that's seen 1 million in the last 30 years, by my count … are not going to deter the Saudis and the Israelis from acting against this threat,' he said. ◆

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WORLD AFFAIRS

Inside the Trump administration's war on UNRWA and Palestinian refugees

Max Blumenthal analyses the forces behind the US decision to defund the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) on which some 5 million Palestinian refugees depend for aid.

THE Trump administration's decision to drastically slash American contributions to the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) has sent shockwaves through the organisation and left millions of Palestinian refugees wondering if the basic ingredients for their survival will soon disappear. 'This is the worst financial crisis in UNRWA's history,' agency spokesperson Chris Gunness told the Electronic Intifada's Ali Abunimah.

UNRWA was established in 1950 to care for the 750,000 Palestinians who were driven from their homes and land by the Israeli military two years before. Today, the agency provides free education, healthcare and basic foodstuffs to the five million Palestinians spread across the Middle East who inherited refugee status. In the Gaza Strip, UNRWA is the second-largest employer and responsible for providing services to over 70% of the population. Indeed, the agency is a lifeline for most residents of the besieged coastal enclave, and its collapse would likely trigger a society-wide catastrophe.

UNRWA food aid being readied for distribution. UNRWA provides free education, healthcare and basic foodstuffs to five million Palestinians across the Middle East with refugee status.

Policy break

With its bid to defund UNRWA, the Trump administration has broken with decades of American policy. The administration had initially intended to cut off funding to UNRWA altogether, but an intervention by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson secured an American pledge of $60 million for the year – only half of what the US had been obliged to donate.

A diplomat with knowledge of the Trump administration's discussions about funding UNRWA told me that Tillerson finessed the funding to demonstrate his authority over colleagues he saw as intruding on his turf. The diplomat described presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner and US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley as Tillerson's rivals, and as the key forces behind the assault on UNRWA.

Kushner is a pro-Israel ideologue whose family has donated heavily to illegal Israeli settlements and nurtured a long friendship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Tasked by the president with achieving the 'ultimate deal' between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Kushner has put forward a one-sided plan that promises to relegate a Palestinian state to a few cantons in the West Bank and a little neighbourhood on the edge of East Jerusalem, consolidating Israel's settlement enterprise while leaving millions of Palestinians legally excluded from their own national project.

By starving UNRWA, Kushner hopes to force Palestinians to relinquish their refugee status and eliminate the right of return granted to them by UN Resolution 194. He would thereby remove one of the few cards the Palestinians have left to play at the negotiating table. Since he is unable to shatter the agency in a single blow, his strategy is aimed at disruption.

Haley has joined forces with Kushner to destroy UNRWA, but for other reasons. According to the diplomat, Haley has been fuming since the entire UN General Assembly voted in December to condemn Trump's pledge to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. 'We will be taking names,' Haley warned ahead of the vote, vowing to punish the UN for

Presidential adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner *(left)* with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Kushner's family has donated heavily to illegal Israeli settlements and nurtured a long friendship with Netanyahu.

defying Trump.

Besides settling her vendetta against virtually the entire world, Haley is exploiting her platform at the UN to curry favour with the pro-Israel oligarchs who could propel her presidential ambitions. Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire Netanyahu confidant who donated $5 million to Trump's inauguration, has been the second-largest donor to Haley's 527 political organisation, with a $250,000 donation in 2016. (Last year, Adelson dumped $10 million of his personal fortune into the Israeli-American Council, instantly transforming the group into a pro-Likud competitor to AIPAC, the main arm of the Israel lobby in Washington.)

Haley's most influential adviser at the UN is not any foreign policy expert, but a veteran Republican consultant from South Carolina named Jon Lerner. A former adviser to the neoconservative darling Senator Marco Rubio, Lerner has identified his mentor as Arthur Finkelstein, the notoriously ruthless Republican operative who advised Netanyahu's 1996 run for prime minister and helped broker the merger between Netanyahu's Likud Party and Avigdor Lieberman's far-right Yisrael Beiteinu in 2013.

Haley's pro-Israel messaging appears to reflect Lerner's plan to position her as a presidential contender.

Trump National Security Adviser H R McMaster and Defence Secretary James Mattis have been credited in some reports with helping Tillerson secure the compromise on UNRWA funding, but according to the diplomat, they were willing to fight for the funding.

For his part, Trump has proven rudderless, shifting positions from moment to moment depending on which adviser has his ear. The diplomatic source said the president took Tillerson's side during a lunch in early January, then suddenly pivoted to back Haley after she lobbied him a few days later. Congressional Democrats, meanwhile, have done next to nothing to push back against the attack on UNRWA.

The defunding of UNRWA would immediately result in the shuttering of 700 schools that provide 525,000 young people with first-rate, secular-oriented educations that emphasise gender equality and human rights. Basic food supplies would dry up for millions in some of the poorest regions of the Middle East. And as recent history has shown, refugee camps can be easily instrumentalised by radical elements from abroad.

The case of Naher al-Bared, when jihadists infiltrated a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in 2007 and triggered a brutal invasion by the Lebanese Army that resulted in the camp's complete destruction, should serve as a frightening lesson in how quickly things can fall apart. But within the Trump administration, personal ambitions and pro-Israel ideology have overwhelmed any concern about further destabilising a region that is already teetering on the brink. ◆

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US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley 'is exploiting her platform at the UN to curry favour with the pro-Israel oligarchs who could propel her presidential ambitions'.

Dirty elections in Honduras, with Washington's blessing

US support for the corrupt election in Honduras continues its history of obstructing the country's democracy.

Alexander Main

Opposition supporters affected by tear gas during a protest outside the offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal on 30 November 2017.

SOLDIERS marching in the middle of the road, bullets whizzing through the air, protesters running for cover through thick clouds of tear gas. Unfortunate tourists venturing the streets of Tegucigalpa in December last year might well have wondered whether they'd stumbled onto a military coup, like the one that rocked Honduras in June 2009 when left-leaning president Manuel Zelaya was kidnapped by troops and bundled onto a plane to Costa Rica.

The source of these latest scenes of chaos was an election gone wrong. On 26 November, voters went to the polls in a tense climate, with many convinced that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), dominated by the ruling National Party, would stop at nothing to ensure the victory of the increasingly authoritarian incumbent, President Juan Orlando Hernández.

After a long, unexplained delay, the TSE announced that Salvador Nasralla – candidate of the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship – was in the lead by five points with 57% of votes counted. But then the electronic vote count was delayed for more than 30 hours. Over the following days, additional 'technical failures' occurred. When the count resumed, Nasralla's lead gradually evaporated and by late in the day on 30 November, Hernández was ahead by 1.5 percentage points.

Tens of thousands of outraged Hondurans took to the streets. The government responded by declaring a curfew and deploying military and police who assailed protesters with an intense barrage of tear gas and live ammunition. At least 30 demonstrators were killed over the following month.

But on the afternoon of 9 December, as an angry crowd roared outside, tranquility and good cheer reigned inside the TSE's downtown headquarters. Standing next to TSE president David Matamoros, US chargé d'affaires Heide Fulton took the microphone and called on Hondurans to respect the results of the electoral process. With this tacit endorsement, there could be little doubt that the official results would stand, regardless of the enormous irregularities that had taken place. Hernández appeared guaranteed to remain in power for at least another four years, free to continue implementing his agenda of hardcore neoliberalism accompanied by a sweeping militarisation of the country.

A history of interference

It's hard to say exactly when it was that Hondurans began half-jokingly referring to the US ambassador as 'the proconsul'. The term appears to have surged in popularity in the early 1980s, when the US embassy accompanied – many would say 'directed' – Honduras's tenuous political transition from military rule to a militarised limited democracy. John Negroponte, the US ambassador during many of those years, had a straightforward mission: establishing Honduras as the launching pad for the Reagan administration's war on left movements and governments in Central America. This involved, on the one hand, securing a permanent and expanded US military presence in the country, and on the other, ensuring a preeminent US role in Honduras's internal politics with the goal of maintaining the political status quo.

Following elections in 1982, the Honduran government was nominally in civilian hands. In practice, the National and Liberal parties – which have alternated in power for decades – would often have to defer to the Honduran military and the US embassy on key strategic matters. When the Liberal government of Roberto Suazo Córdova sought a policy of nonintervention with the left-wing Sandinista government of neighbouring Nicaragua, it was reportedly overruled by Negroponte and the US-trained army chief Gustavo Álvarez Martinez. Shortly afterward, Honduras became the main staging ground for military attacks on Nicaragua by the CIA-backed Contra insurgency.

Under Negroponte, US troops expanded their presence at the Soto Cano air base, often referred to as a 'US base' by Hondurans. US military assistance to Honduras jumped from $4 million to $77.4 million a year from 1981 to 1985, despite the CIA acknowledging internally that the Honduran military perpetrated 'hundreds of human rights abuses … many of which were politically motivated and officially sanctioned'. CIA-backed military death squads, like Battalion 3-16, killed or disappeared dozens of left-wing trade unionists, academics, peasant leaders and students. The US embassy was in close contact with death squad leaders, and declassified documents show that Negroponte actively discouraged any reporting on these horrifying state-sponsored crimes so as not 'to create human rights problems for Honduras'.

By the end of the decade, death squad activity receded and the military became less overtly involved in government, but, in many ways, the status quo didn't budge. The elite-controlled Liberal and National parties remained the only viable political contenders. Unlike in neighbouring Nicaragua and El Salvador, the Left was entirely marginalised. The US military presence in Soto Cano – which became the US's most important and strategic base in Central America and the Caribbean – became an unquestioned fixture.

But in the late 2000s, the political edifice that Negroponte had helped erect began to shudder. Mel Zelaya, a wealthy Liberal landowner elected president in 2006, unexpectedly veered to the left. He railed against the power of the country's entrenched 'oligarchy' and angered business leaders by raising the minimum wage by 60%. While previous presidents had been staunchly pro-US, Zelaya strengthened relations with US bugbear Hugo Chávez,

Supreme Electoral Tribunal president David Matamoros and US chargé d'affaires Heide Fulton at a 9 December news conference held amid protests over what was seen as a dubious vote-counting process.

bringing Honduras into Venezuela's Petrocaribe regional energy cooperation scheme and into the anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA).

Perhaps most significantly, Zelaya began dialogue with Honduran left-wing social movements that opposed the US military presence and called for a *constituyente*, an elected constituent assembly tasked with producing a new, progressive charter to replace the conservative 1982 constitution, drafted under US tutelage during the final days of military rule.

Zelaya's decision to hold a non-binding poll asking Hondurans whether or not the question of the *constituyente* should be put to a vote in elections later that year served as the flimsy pretext for the coup on 28 June 2009. Alleging, without any evidence, that Zelaya was seeking to change the constitution in order to remain in power indefinitely, the majority of Liberal and National leaders rallied behind the military's removal of Zelaya from the country.

Though the Obama administration, after some hesitation, joined the rest of the region in condemning the Honduran coup, it actively sought to keep Zelaya from returning to Honduras. Later the US State Department announced its support for elections under the coup government without the prior restoration of Zelaya, infuriating other governments in the region and removing any incentive for the coup supporters to allow Zelaya to finish his mandate. Declassified documents reveal that Honduran military officers travelled to Washington to lobby in favour of the coup, and appear to have received support and guidance from US military officials.

The years since the coup have been eerily reminiscent of the 1980s. Honduras has once again become heavily militarised. The military was deployed nationwide following Zelaya's ouster, and it violently repressed the near-daily protests led by a broad-based movement of resistance to the coup.

The National Party governments that came to power following the elections in late 2009 – considered illegitimate by much of the region – and elections rife with irregularities in 2013 institutionalised the military's role in policing. While president of the Congress, Juan Orlando Hernández pushed through legislation creating a military police of public order (PMOP) and, soon after becoming president of Honduras, created the TIGRES militarised police units, which receive US training and whose members have been publicly implicated in corruption.

The remilitarisation of Honduras has accompanied a free-for-all for Honduras's wealthiest families and for international investors, under the

Juan Orlando Hernández *(left)*, **accompanied by his wife Ana Garcia de Hernández, being sworn in as president at an inauguration ceremony on 27 January.**

slogan 'Honduras Is Open for Business'. State security forces have been deployed in areas with 'social conflicts' linked to mining, agro-industrial, hydroelectric and tourism enterprises which displace or negatively impact communities, and which are often illegally carried out without prior consultation of local indigenous groups, as required under Honduran law. As human rights advocates have reported, they often act in tandem with private security agents to terrorise communities into submission through targeted killings and attacks.

Security forces have also been implicated in the murder of dozens of political activists, journalists, lawyers, LGBT movement leaders and land rights advocates. The most notorious of these killings was the 2016 assassination of Berta Cáceres, a world-renowned social leader who campaigned for the environment and indigenous rights and who had been a leader of the movement of resistance to the coup. Under unusual international pressure, the Honduran government carried out an investigation into Cáceres's murder that led to the indictment of eight individuals, including three current or former members of the military. A separate, independent investigation, using evidence in the possession of authorities, revealed that a vast criminal structure involving state agents, company executives and one of Honduras's most powerful families had planned the killing for months.

Despite the opposition of key Democratic members of the US Congress, the US government has invested heavily in Honduras's security forces, increasing funding for the country's military and police by at least 250% between 2010 and 2016. Tens of millions of dollars of additional security assistance have been funnelled to Honduras under the umbrella of the Central American Regional Security Initiative – a US-sponsored security plan for Central America – though the exact sum is unknown due to the plan's opacity.

Similar to the 1980s, US officials have consistently failed to denounce human rights abuses perpetrated by Honduran security agents and have instead heaped praise on the Hernández administration as a reliable partner in the war on drugs. General John F Kelly, chief of staff to President Donald Trump and former head of the US military's Latin America subsidiary, recently called Hernández a 'great guy' and a 'good friend'. Nevermind that both Hernández's brother and his minister of security have been implicated in drug trafficking, according to the testimony of a US Drug Enforcement Administration informant.

But the militarised and corrupt political edifice behind which the US has thrown its support has remained on shaky ground. A new political party that sprang from the movement of resistance to the coup – Liberty and Refoundation (Libre) – has posed a major challenge to the bipartisan status quo. In Honduras's 2013 elections, Libre obtained the second-most seats in Congress despite serious electoral irregularities and a massive campaign of intimidation that included the killing of at least 18 Libre candidates, organisers and activists.

The National Party governments have also been rocked by allegations of high-level corruption and involvement in drug trafficking, embroiling Hernández's brother and former president Porfirio Lobo, among others. In 2015, massive protests erupted when it was discovered that funds linked to a major corruption scheme had ended up in Hernández's 2013 campaign account. The US State Department and the Organisation of American States (OAS) jumped into the fray and mediated a political solution that excluded major opposition groups and helped Hernández dodge the fate of Guatemalan president Otto Pérez Molina, who today sits in jail.

The legitimacy of the government was further undermined when the Supreme Court – a body illegally stacked with National Party cronies – ruled in 2016 that the constitution's ban on reelection could be ignored in the name of 'human rights'. The irony of this move – coming seven years after a president was ousted for allegedly considering reelection – was not lost on Hondurans, who took to the streets in droves.

For the 2017 elections, Libre joined two small parties in creating the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship. With the objective of winning over as many moderate voters as possible, the Alliance endorsed the centrist presidential candidacy of popular television and radio host and anti-corruption advocate Salvador Nasralla. Libre militants made up the bulk of the campaign's foot soldiers, and the Alliance's vice-presidential candidate was Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, wife of the ousted president.

Taking a side

On the day of the elections, the

Supporters of the Libre party which joined two small parties in creating the Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship for the 2017 elections.

TSE announced that it would be able to deliver preliminary results in the early evening. But 8:00 p.m. and then midnight passed without news from the electoral authority. Finally, some 10 hours after polls had closed, the TSE announced that, with 57% of the votes counted, Nasralla had a five-point lead. Both Hernández and Nasralla declared victory. A dissident member of the TSE, Marco Ramiro Lobo, later told the press that, shortly after voting centres closed, the organisation's technical staff had informed him and his colleagues that, with 70% of votes counted, the voting trend favoured Nasralla and was irreversible. For hours, the head of the TSE, David Matamoros, a former National Party congressman, refused to announce these preliminary results but eventually, under pressure from international observers and Lobo, he did so, though he never mentioned that the trend was irreversible.

Then the vote count – which appeared electronically on the TSE webpage – came to a halt for some 30 hours. According to Lobo, Matamoros had inexplicably ordered the electronic tallying process to be stopped. When it started up again, at a turtle's pace, Nasralla's five-point lead began to slowly erode. Protests sprung up throughout the country and were met with violent state repression.

Ten days later, under pressure from international electoral observers and intensifying street protests, Matamoros agreed to a partial recount of votes, though political party representatives wouldn't be present. On 9 December, with US chargé Heide Fulton at his side, he stated that 'what we found in the ballot boxes confirms what we had counted on the day of the election'. Then, on the evening of 17 December, Matamoros held an impromptu press conference and announced that 'the reelected president for the 2018-2022 period is the citizen Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado'. The elections, he said, had attained a level of transparency 'never seen in Honduras'.

To the surprise of many, the OAS electoral observation mission – which had failed to denounce significant irregularities in the 2013 elections – refused to endorse the election results. A few hours after Matamoros's announcement, the mission released a devastating report identifying numerous irregularities at every stage of the electoral process and concluding that there could be no certainty that the official results were accurate. OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro, who has generally had warm relations with right-wing governments and been a leading critic of several left governments, had little choice but to support his institution's electoral observation team, which he has promoted for years. In a press release published that same evening, he stated that 'the only possible way for the victor to be the people of Honduras is a new call for general elections'.

Once the shock of this unexpected news was absorbed, all eyes turned towards Washington. If the OAS – a trusted instrument of US regional hegemony if there ever was one – was prepared to question the results of these elections, then anything seemed possible, perhaps even a reversal of longstanding US policy towards Honduras.

Twenty-four hours went by without any reaction from the US government. Finally, on the evening of 18 December, the State Department issued a short statement taking note of the TSE announcement and reminding political parties that, under Honduran law, they had five days to file complaints with the relevant authorities, i.e., the courts controlled by the National Party. No mention was made of the OAS report.

Right-wing Latin American governments began to congratulate Hernández. First Guatemala, then Colombia, and then Mexico, only hours after Reuters reported that the US government had been working behind the scenes to get the Mexican government to formally recognise the elections, according to sources in the country's foreign ministry. With no apparent hint of irony, a US State Department official told the media that 'the Mexican statement would have a strong influence' on the US position towards the Honduran elections. Three days passed, four more protesters were killed by Honduran security forces. Finally, on 22 December came the US State Department release that surprised no one: 'We congratulate President Juan Orlando Hernandez on his victory in the November 26 presidential elections, as declared by the Honduran Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).' ◆

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Justice and/or development: The Rif protest movement and the neoliberal promise

In Morocco protests erupted in October 2016 in the long-marginalised Rif region after a fishmonger was crushed to death in a rubbish truck as he tried to retrieve swordfish confiscated for being caught out of season. Demands for justice later snowballed into a wider social movement calling for jobs, development and an end to graft. *Emilio Spadola* explains the situation.

'Ash al sha'ab! 'Ash! 'Ash! [Long Live the People!] *'Ash! 'Ash! Maghariba mashi 'awbash'!* [We Moroccans are not 'trash'!]

Ra's al-mal?! [Where's our capital?!]

– Hirak protest chants in Fez, June 2017

A Hirak al-Rif demonstration in Imouzren, Morocco, in June 2017.

WHAT began in late October 2016 with protests over the horrific death of Mohcine Fikri, a fish seller in the northern city of Al Hoceima, escalated in 2017 into a broad social protest movement with participants in all of Morocco's major cities. The Hirak al-Rif movement, so named for Al Hoceima's mountainous and coastal Rif province, draws symbolism and strength from the region's painful history of state violence, deprivation and insult. Yet the problems the Hirak identifies – pervasive feelings of indignity and injustice, rampant corruption and security abuses – also resonate nationally.

The Hirak movement thus builds on Morocco's February 20th movement, which organised major nationwide protests during the 2011 Arab uprisings. Yet while that movement dissipated in the wake of the state's tactical reforms, the Hirak has maintained its momentum. The state's predictable response, including imprisoning and defaming its leaders, has both failed to quell protests and drawn nationwide criticism.

The movement's strength, if not its outright success, has, in columnist Taoufik Bouachrine's words, 'laid bare our faults' (*`ara `awratna*).[1] That is, the Hirak has publicly exposed Morocco's failures to enact promised reforms that were to mark King Mohammed VI's signature departure from his father's era of political repression: to supplant the security state with representative institutions on the one hand, and to secure socio-economic development for Morocco's youth and poor, on the other.

The palace has taken note, with the king publicly firing a handful of ministers for their failure to enact a promised high-profile economic development project in the Rif region, and ordering disciplinary action against numerous regional and local authorities for failing to properly manage Morocco's Regional Investment Centres. This criticism of a failed economic development project, along with quieter criticisms of Morocco's development model as a whole, is welcome, but it also holds dangers for the Hirak and its allies, whose own demands include economic investment. It remains to be seen whether such tactics by ruling powers will satisfy the Hirak's call not only for economic opportunity but for social justice. At present, however, in substituting development for justice, the state's public casting of economic blame appears less a criticism of neoliberalism than an effort to perfect it.

Regional protests, Moroccan demands

The Hirak started and spread quickly following Fikri's death at the hands of local government officials and police in the coastal city of Al Hoceima. According to witnesses, after police confiscated Fikri and other fishermen's daily haul of swordfish and dumped it into a garbage truck, the men jumped in to retrieve it. With Fikri still inside, a policeman gave the order to turn on the compacter – and 'grind the motherf–' (*t'han mu*).

Video of Fikri's ghastly death, accompanied by the panicked screams of witnesses, circulated widely on social media, bearing visceral witness to Moroccans' own intimate suffering within the sadistic machinery of the state. The first outraged protests prompted the central government to take quick and highly visible action on Fikri's case, with the palace promising swift justice for the deceased and his family. Morocco's interior minister at the time, Mohamed Hassad, used a televised meeting with Fikri's family to express Mohammed VI's condolences. Shortly after, 11 men were arrested and charged in association with Fikri's death, including two local police officers and two functionaries from Morocco's fishing industry. While Fikri's father publicly acknowledged these efforts, and expressed faith in Morocco's judicial process, protesters understood the state's actions to be mere scapegoating, in no way addressing the larger social ills and historical wounds that coalesced in Fikri's death.

In ensuing months, as the Hirak National Support Committee and Hirak Branches organised protests in Morocco's major cities, the state's security response was muted. Indeed, there seemed to be no response at all, as neither the palace nor parliament, lacking a coalition government under the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), addressed the Hirak's published demands. By June 2017, however, the tide had shifted: The newly formed governing coalition charged the Hirak with a separatist agenda, vitriolic social media posts described the Hirak as an effort by foreign agents to destabilise Morocco, and state television ran a false story and footage of a supposed Hirak-led riot.

The security apparatus acted as well. After Hirak leader Nasser Zifzafi interrupted a Friday sermon condemning the movement, police arrested him along with 20 other activists on charges including acceptance of foreign money.[2] A cascade of arrests followed, protests were banned, and those which did take place, including one held on the Eid al-Fitr holiday, were met with severe police repression. The death in early August of 22-year-old Imad El Attabi was followed in mid-August by what movement activists reported to be the security-related death of a second protester, Abdelhafid El Haddad. By October 2017, the number of activists and citizen journalists arrested passed 400, with more than 30 undertaking episodic hunger strikes.[3] More than a year after Mohcine Fikri's death, major protests continued not only in his name, but on behalf of the Hirak detainees and 'martyrs'.

Al Hoceima: neoliberal beacon?

Hirak leaders have repeatedly denied any separatist aims, even as they demand recognition for the Rif's cultural specificity and economic marginalisation, as well as historical episodes of violent political suppression. The common visual markers of the protests include photographs and drawings of Mohcine Fikri and Berber nationalist flags (including one decorating the hood of Fikri's hearse), as well as colonial-era photographs of Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, an Islamic judge and leader of the Rif Republic (1921-26), which was ultimately quelled only by coordinated French and Spanish aerial bombardment. The Hirak's formal statement of demands references Hassan II (then Crown Prince Moulay Hassan)'s brutal suppression of the Rif's post-independence uprising of 1958-59, and calls for lifting the region's subsequent de facto martial law. Protest chants recall the state's contempt for Rifi people as well: Fikri's death by lethal insult, *T'han Mu*, resonates with Hassan II's famous 1984 dismissal of the Rifians as mere trash (*awbash*).

Far from articulating separatist aims, such historical references call precisely for the opposite, that is, for state recognition of the Rifi people's dignity, as well as an equitable share of the country's wealth. A list of demands posted in the name of the movement calls not for less but rather for better administration: a state judicial inquiry into Fikri's murder; funding for elementary schools, a university, jobs and hospitals.[4] These demands are shared by the vast majority of young lower- and middle-class Moroccans. They seek integration into the state apparatus and an end to the state's contempt for those impertinent enough to make demands. The Hirak's major march on Rabat in June 2017 unfurled under the apt banner 'One People, One Nation, One Hogra'.

While the radical autonomy of the 1921-26 Rif Republic offers a stirring image of dignity and strength, a better analogy for the current Hirak movement is the 1958-59 Rif uprising, whose leaders called not for freedom from central administration but rather for greater incorporation into the new postcolonial state, government programmes to end unemployment, more public schools and greater Rifi political representation.[5] The difference today, however, is that the Hirak demands access to public services and forms of social solidarity that Morocco's neoliberal development model increasingly assigns to the private sector.

In this sense, the rage in the Rif and throughout Morocco must be understood as responding not only to a historical legacy of state violence, but also to promises accompanying Morocco's economic liberalisation begun under Hassan II and intensified under Mohammed VI. The latter's reign began with promises of political change, including a 'new concept of authority' to be adopted by the country's administrative apparatus – one that placed the state in the service of the people.[6] Well-documented efforts followed to lay to rest the violence of the Years of Lead, for the nation as a whole and the Rif in particular. Mohammed VI's rule offered a change in the relationship of the state to the Rif, as he emphasised not the divisive legacy of his father, but rather the unifying memory of his grandfather, the nationalist icon Mohammed V. Following a 1999 visit to the region, Mohammed VI promised to remedy the state's history of cultural repression in the Rif. Similarly, as part of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, known in Arabic as Hay'at al-Insaf wa al-Musalaha, and in French as the Instance Equité et Reconciliation (IER), the state established a truth commission dedicated to mending the Rif's particular history of state abuse.[7]

These political gestures were insufficient for many in the region. Rifis, among others, protested the IER rule prohibiting victims of abuse from naming the perpetrators. More to the point, while these reforms were launched in the name of political liberalisation, the state's aims were more fundamentally economic. Mohammed VI's full embrace of neoliberalism meant that judicial reform and governmental transparency and even calls for social 'inclusion' and 'solidarity' did not serve the Moroccan citizenry so much as the global market – the key goals being to encourage foreign investment and, via development programmes like the World Bank-funded National Initiative for Human Development and the Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity, to imbue the citizenry with entrepreneurial drive.

The state's neoliberal engineering, in other words, privileged economic development over social and political reform. In a telling irony, the Rif Truth Commission's fact-finding visit to Al Hoceima and Nador in late April 2005 came shortly after a security crackdown against Rif protesters demanding greater state assistance in recovering from a deadly 2004 earthquake. Under Mohammed VI, the state's equating of social justice with economic development and investment has justified the very administrative indignities and security abuses liberalisation was meant to erase.[8] As Miriyam Aouragh notes, writing of Fikri's death and the state's local application of international fishing regulations in the Rif, 'Fish and fishery, the coast and the sea are part of the social fabric. All the new rules and regulations, to the point of violent prevention of personal retail, are experienced by residents and fishers as aberrations to normal life.'[9]

At present, the ruling powers' response to the Hirak al-Rif has similarly privileged economic liberalisation over political reform. The danger for the movement is that this response might be deemed sufficient by fellow citizens, and indeed that the Hirak's demands for regional investment – a university, a cancer treatment centre, a state-of-the-art sports stadium – might outweigh its calls for social justice, including the release of its leadership. The most high-profile responses in favour of the movement have all emphasised its roots in economic marginalisation, and thus proposed an economic solution.

The most recent public discussions of the Hirak emanating from the palace and parliament have concerned neither the putative separatism of the movement nor the international demands to release movement leaders from prison, but rather the uncertain status of a major foreign investment scheme called Al Hoceima, Manarat al-Moutawassit (Beacon of the Mediterranean), touted as the answer to the Rif's marginalisation. Announced by the king in October 2015 and initially slated for completion in 2019 at a cost of $667 million, the Manarat al-Moutawassit project is meant to boost the coastal tourism industry, but also to comprise major social investments in health, education and the environment. Officials' potentially criminal mismanagement of the project is the subject of open debate.

In an annual speech to parliament in October 2017, Mohammed VI condemned the delays and announced a new governmental body to monitor development projects. Later in the month, the king charged the head of the court of auditors, Driss Jettou, with compiling a progress report on the Manarat al-Moutawassit project (a task for which he subsequently requested, and received, an extension). The court's final report laid blame not with the political system as a whole, but rather with a handful of ministers from past and present governments, and while it acknowledged mismanagement, it stopped short of accusing anyone of embezzlement. In the following days Mohammed VI provoked what the national press deemed a 'political earthquake' by publicly dismissing high-ranking functionaries, though only for incompetence rather than corruption. Subsequent reports from the court have resulted in disciplinary proceedings against more than 180 officials.[10] Yet these dismissals do not concern the security apparatus and its quotidian abuses, of which Mohcine Fikri's treatment was exemplary. Nor has any such report been ordered.

Conclusions

The roots of the Hirak al-Rif lie in the region's historical and contemporary experience of abuse and indignity, as well as marginalisation, but also in the vast majority of Moroccans' capacity to identify with that experience. With the movement surviving state television and social media smears, security abuses and arbitrary arrests, political discussion of the movement has turned to the question of marginalisation, grasped primarily as economic rather than political or cultural. This turn, consistent with the Mohammed VI era of neoliberal development projects, certainly fits with some demands of the movement. Indeed, among the repeated chants in a July 2017 Hirak protest in Fez was the wholly un-ironic demand, '*Ra's al-mal?!*' [Where's our capital?!].

Such an emphasis holds risks. In the long term, the most debilitating state response to the movement may be neither the imprisonment of leadership nor propaganda, but the state's diversion of attention from social justice to development, that is, from the profound violence of the security state to the easily discussable and putatively separable matter of economic investment. Far from questioning neoliberalism's empty promise, the state's developmentalist approach calls rather for its more perfect application. ◆

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Notes

1. Taoufik Bouachrine, 'Hirak al-Rif has laid bare our faults', Alyaoum24, 17 June 2017. [Arabic]
2. Lmaghrib TV, 'In the mosque: Nasser Zifzafi loses temper after facing Imam's accusations', 26 May 2017. [Arabic]
3. Yassine Benargane, 'Hirak: Sentences ranging from 1 to 20 years in prison for 9 detainees',

Yabiladi.com, 30 August 2017. [French]
4. 'Dossier of Demands', www.zafzafi.com, 29 March 2017. [Arabic]
5. What is often described as a Rifi tribal rebellion in 1958 included, to the contrary, the 'major Rifian complaint [of] under-administration and neglect of their region' (David Hart, 'Rural and tribal uprisings in postcolonial Morocco, 1957-60: an overview and a reappraisal', *The Journal of North African Studies* 4.2: 84-102, 92-93). See also Ernest Gellner, 'Patterns of rural rebellion in Morocco: tribes as minorities', *European Journal of Sociology* 3.2: 297-311, 299. The theme of the region's integration was also foregrounded in 1957 with Istiqlal leader Mehdi Ben Barka's organisation of volunteer work crews (with the symbolic participation of the king and crown prince) to build the Unity Highway (Tariq al-Wahda or Route de l'Unité) between Taounate and Ketama, as an infrastructural and symbolic step towards Morocco's territorial and spiritual unity.
6. Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Culture and Communication, 'Royal Discourse to region, governorate, prefecture, province administrators and representatives of the citizenry', [al-Khitab al malikiyya] 12 October 1999. See http://www.maroc.ma.
7. See Susan Slyomovics, 'Morocco's Justice and Reconciliation Commission', Middle East Report Online, 4 April 2005. Human Rights Watch, 'Morocco's Truth Commission: Honoring Past Victims during an Uncertain Present', *Human Rights Watch* 17, 11 November 2005.
8. The thematic linking of 'social justice' with 'development' and 'investment' is a repeated motif in Mohammed VI's Throne Discourses from 1999-2017, an annual national platform for articulating the palace's major policy directives. See Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Culture and Communication, 'Royal Discourses [al-Khitab al malikiyya]'.
9. Miriyam Aouragh, 'Fishy neoliberalism in Morocco', *Historical Materialism*. n.d.
10. 'Des mesures disciplinaires prévues contre 186 agents d'autorités et plusieurs dysfonctionnements relevés au niveau des CRI,' *Le Matin*, 11 December 2017.

There's a massive humanitarian crisis unfolding in Asia: The plight of the Rohingya

The Myanmarese authorities are using the West's 'war on terror' to justify their policy of ethnic cleansing against one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, says *Vijay Prashad*.

Rohingya refugees at a camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, await distribution of humanitarian aid.

RELIEF workers for international agencies sit with me in Dhaka (Bangladesh). They are talking about the difficulties faced by the Rohingya people who have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh over the past several months. Over 650,000 people from the Rohingya community came into Bangladesh since 25 August of last year.

This is a torrent of desperate people, a community threatened with extinction for the past seven decades. The refugee camps near Cox's Bazar are overcrowded and dangerously unhygienic. Already there is an outbreak of diphtheria, with indications of severe health challenges to come. According to the World Health Organisation, half of the refugees are malnourished and anaemic, while a quarter of the children suffer from acute malnutrition. A logistical worker for a relief agency tells me that in his three decades in this work he has never seen anything like this.

Matters are even worse in Thailand, where an unknown number of Rohingya refugees have been sold into slavery (estimates suggest that 500,000 slaves work in various industries in Thailand). Many of those sold into slavery work on fishing boats, particularly in the prawn-fishing industry. It is said that the price of the enslaved person now is a mere 5% of what it was in the 19th century. Indeed, the slavery does not begin only when the refugees leave Myanmar. UN officials report that in the encampments where the Rohingya have gathered in Sittwe, the port city capital of Rakhine State inside Myanmar, 'people smugglers are very active'.

Stunningly, it is now said that a quarter of the Rohingya people have been ejected from Myanmar, with large numbers internally displaced in what amount to concentration camps. Marixie Mercado of UNICEF visited some of these camps, even the ones that are hard to reach such as Pautaw township. 'The first thing you notice when you reach the camps is the stomach-churning stench,' Mercado recalls. 'Parts of the camps are literally cesspools. Shelters teeter on stilts above garbage and excrement. Children walk barefoot through the muck. One camp manager reported four deaths among children ages 3 to 10 within the first 18 days of December.' There are about 60,000 children in these camps, totally isolated and with 'high levels of toxic fear', said Mercado.

Why this is happening

On 19 September of last year, Myanmar's civilian leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi broke her silence about the atrocities against the Rohingya people. But her speech was filled with evasions of all kinds. She did not say the name Rohingya, afraid that its utterance would somehow give legitimacy to this community's claim to being part of Myanmar's social fabric. She said, oddly, that her government did not know exactly what was going on in Myanmar, that she would need to 'find out why this is happening'.

But what is happening has been clear to Myanmar's military and its civilian authorities for seven decades. There has been a careful campaign to ensure that the Rohingya, who live in northern Rakhine (previously Arakan) State, are firstly denied citizenship and then denied the ability to make a living. Massacres have been punctual, with the intensity having escalated since the 2012 pogrom. Aung San Suu Kyi would perhaps be best informed of the character of the violence if she visited the village of Yan Thei, where on 23 October 2012, the police and Rakhine extremists colluded to destroy the village. In the melee, the extremists and the police took the lives of 28 children, 13 under the age of five, most of them hacked to death.

It is not enough to blame the extremist Buddhist monks and the Rakhine militants for this violence. The Myanmar state has been complicit in this violence from its inception. It has, for reasons of bigotry and religion, targeted the one minority group (the Rohingya) that had not armed itself to fight for its right as a minority group (unlike the Karen and Shan peoples). The military and the civilian elite, including Aung San Suu Kyi, have used the defencelessness of the Rohingya as a way to define their nationalism. They have recently used the West's 'war on terror' rhetoric to target this Muslim community.

The party of Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD), has closely collaborated with the extremist groups from Rakhine State since the 1980s. While the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi positioned themselves internationally as beacons of democracy and human rights, the party and its leader developed close ties with the extremist Rakhine political factions (Arakan League for Democracy, then the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party and the Arakan National Party). Aung San Suu Kyi has relied on people such as Aye The Aung and Aye Maung, both extreme Rakhine nationalists. These are men who deny the existence of the Rohingya, calling them Bengalis and demanding their expulsion to Bangladesh.

A UN report from 2010 shows that the poverty rate across Myanmar is at least 26%, with poverty most acute in rural areas (84% of the poor live in the Burmese countryside). Rakhine State, where the Rohingya live, is one of the poorest parts of Myanmar, with every second child suffering from acute malnutrition. The poverty rate in Rakhine State is a startling 78%. Both the Rohingya and the Rakhine peoples – the latter being used by the state as cannon fodder against the former – survive with meagre resources.

A house on fire in a village in Maungdaw township in Myanmar's Rakhine State. There has been a sustained campaign of violence against the Rohingya in Rakhine Sttate.

Rather than address this problem, the military and the civilian leaders have made it a habit of pointing their fingers at the extremely poor Rohingya. It is as if these landless agricultural workers and small farmers are the cause of poverty in Myanmar and not its victims.

War on terror

For the past two decades, the government in Myanmar has used the 'war on terror' rhetoric adopted from the West to define the Rohingya. They are painted as Muslim extremists, although what truly defines them is their defenceless poverty. It was helpful to the generals of Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi that a Rohingya extremist born in Karachi (Pakistan) and raised in Mecca (Saudi Arabia) – Ata Ullah – formed the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and began armed operations against the state and the Rakhine population. This group has almost no roots in the Rohingya population but it is a convenient foil for Myanmar's state and for its Buddhist extremists. They point to it as evidence of al-Qaeda and use it to continue the ethnic cleansing operations ongoing in Rakhine State.

The wave of refugees waits for May to July, when the Andaman Sea is relatively calm. It is then that they will try to get to Bangladesh and Thailand. More people will leave Myanmar this year. 'We fear we will be wiped out,' said Tun Khin, speaking for his Rohingya community.

I am sitting with the Bangladeshi photographer and writer Shahidul Alam in central Dhaka. He has given me the Drik calendar for 2018 (it is called 'When Buddha Looks Away'). It has pictures by Alam of the Rohingya community from the camps in Bangladesh. The text with the pictures bristles. Alam writes, 'If the world indeed has a conscience then the time is now to demonstrate that we, as a people, cannot, will not, stand by while one of the greatest injustices of modern times continues to take place on our watch. Even if we fail to make ourselves accountable, our children and our children's children will ask us how we could have let it happen and we will never have an answer. It is a question that will haunt us all our lives.'

It is already haunting the Rohingya people. And the aid workers.◆

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Rights of rural women have seen uneven progress in Latin America

Access to quality education, productive resources, technical training and participation remain challenges shared by rural Latin American women to close the persistent gaps in gender equality and realise their full potential under equal conditions.

Mariela Jara

IN a remote village in the Peruvian Andes, Bonificia Huamán managed to overcome adverse weather conditions with a small greenhouse, where she grows vegetables at 3,533 metres above sea level. This has improved her family's diet, which she is very proud of.

The downside is that Alina, her second-oldest daughter, aged 17, left high school to help her with the enormous workload that, as head of household, she assumes every day on her farm and caring for her family. She supports her three daughters and son, as well as her oldest daughter's son.

'School costs a lot of money, uniforms, school supplies, I can't afford it,' Huamán, 47, told Inter Press Service (IPS) sadly during a meeting with her and other women farmers in Llullucha, home to some 80 Quechua families, within the rural municipality of Ocongate in the southeast department of Cuzco.

'This is a reality for rural women in Latin America, in the face of which governments should act with greater emphasis in order to move towards sustainable development, which is a commitment undertaken by the countries of the region,' United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) representative in Peru, María Elena Rojas, told IPS.

Access to quality education, productive resources, technical training and participation remain challenges shared by rural Latin American women to close the persistent gaps in gender equality and realise their full potential under equal conditions.

Mariela Jara/IPS

Bonificia Huamán *(second left)* **carries out a communal task with other women in Llullucha, a Quechua community where 80 families practise subsistence agriculture, overcoming the challenges of the climate in the Andean region of Cuzco, Peru.**

It is estimated that in this region of just over 640 million people, 48% of the rural population is female, amounting to 60.5 million women.

Of these women, 40% live in poverty, a problem that has been aggravated by the effects of climate change on agriculture, which impact on their health, well-being and security, according to FAO studies.

In spite of their work – on their farms and raising children, securing food, and caring for the sick – they receive no pay and lack incomes of their own, the studies point out.

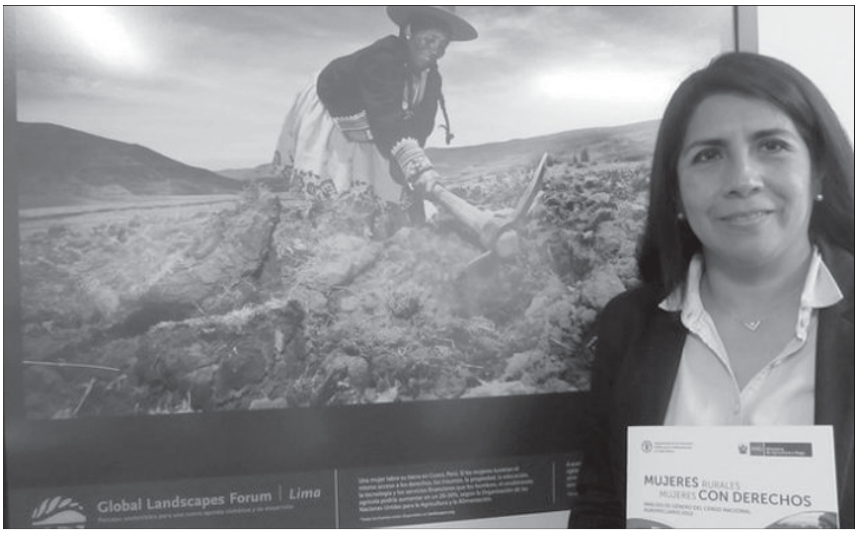
Bolivia, where 1.6 million women live in rural areas, according to the National Institute of Statistics, is one of the Latin American countries which have seen a growing feminisation of agriculture.

'These women produce about half of the food we consume in the country,' said Wilfredo Valle, head of the planning area at the Bolivian non-governmental Training and Service Centre for Women's Integration (Cecasem).

Speaking with IPS from La Paz, he added that despite being pillars of production in the countryside, they do not receive remuneration. And when they do generate an income, they have no say in the family budget, which is still controlled by men. This situation is an obstacle to breaking the circle of poverty.

Added to this problem is the unequal access of women to land ownership and use. The region's statistics show that the lands they manage are smaller, of poor productivity and legally insecure.

The Third National Agricultural Census of Ecuador records that 45.4% of farms are headed by women, and 62.8% of these are less than two hectares in size.



Mariela Jara/IPS

FAO representative in Peru María Elena Rojas at her office in Lima, holding a document titled 'Rural women, women with rights.'

This inequitable trend in access to and control of productive resources is also evident in Peru, where, according to official figures, rural women are in charge of lands of 1.8 hectares in size on average, while the average size of the farms managed by men is three hectares.

How can progress be made along the path of addressing the complex web of discrimination faced by rural women? For Ketty Marcelo, from the Amazonian Asháninka people and president of the National Organisation of Indigenous Andean and Amazonian Women of Peru, they must first be recognised as subjects entitled to rights.

'The countries in the region must acknowledge our existence as rural indigenous women and take measures to ensure that our rights are respected … And in order for that to happen, we must break down the barriers of patriarchy,' said Marcelo, an activist from the community of Pucharini in Peru's central rainforest.

In her view, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets included within them for achieving gender equality, is a mandate for the countries, but is also a double challenge for rural women in the region.

'We are invisibilised and a great deal of advocacy will be necessary in order for our problems to come to light; the SDGs are an opportunity to place our agendas into national policies,' she said.

In this vein, Wilfredo Valle underlined three challenges for governments in the context of achieving the SDGs. These are: 'improving literacy rates among rural women, because with a higher level of education, there is less discrimination; guaranteeing their access to land and to title deed; and ensuring a life free of violence.'

Latin America and the Caribbean, considered the most unequal region in the world, has the Regional Gender Agenda for 2030, established in 2016 by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

It constitutes a roadmap, according to ECLAC, for countries to protect the human rights of women 'regardless of their age, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, where they live, their migratory status, ethnicity and race, and their physical and mental capacity.'

It is also in agreement with the SDGs and, through the fulfilment of its 10 core targets, puts gender equality at the centre of sustainable development.

Although there is an international normative framework in the region that has given rise to national plans and policies aimed at achieving precisely the SDGs on gender equality, actions to make this human right of rural women a reality are urgently needed, experts agreed.

'The 2030 Agenda gives countries the opportunity to empower girls and women, eradicate illiteracy, secure them title deeds and loans, to develop their potential, rise out of poverty and fully exercise each of their rights,' said FAO's Rojas.

'We know the gaps exist, but we need public policies to visibilise them,' she said. To that end, 'it is necessary to work on statistics with a gender perspective so that state measures really contribute to improving the reality of rural women.'

A mixture of political will and strengthening of institutional capacities that would transform the lives of rural women in the region, such as Bonificia Huamán and her daughter Alina, is needed so that the enjoyment of their rights becomes a daily exercise. – *IPS* ◆

A literacy class in Bolivia. 'With a higher level of education, there is less discrimination' against rural women.

Homelessness has become a global problem, and the following poem by the Thai poet *Angkarn Chanthathip* (1926-2012) highlights the plight of the homeless.

In the home of the homeless

Angkarn Chanthathip

1.

One window among many
reflects events   mirrors rubbish
a broken roof lashed to its frame
collapsing and crumbling as it struggles on

the crowded world of the homeless
the community of the world could offer
the edge appears   missing a family nearly recovered
the house stays cold   alien   hardship returns

to have your roots yanked out from under your family tree
to wander through different times and places
strength ebbs away   destitution   charity
impressions blur   hardship approaches

one essence in submission   those people
one essence   many differences
fallen   absconded   overgrown   neglected   just 'a case'
the times shift and change   on the move

'refugees' through circumstance
pressure wears you down   constricts you
until aborted hope collides with strength
grit marks fade   never entirely

grimy windows in the heart of the city
exist   go   are   strange   lonely   distorted image
portrait   identity   'ghost'   living
twisted shadow   blamed

the house you can't find   can't return to
the hope that sustains   the dream that warms
under the flyover   pavement   have mercy
image fuses   eroding love

possessions gone   roads closed   promises broken
can't go forward   can't go back   trapped
public place packed with the poor
the centre cordoned off

'refugees' through circumstance
melt into disarray
Sanam Luang Park* trespassed   altered
expands into every corner of the city

2.

look around aimlessly   against the world
instinctively connected   release
rubbish mounts   cast offs   abandoned
destitute   deprived   humiliated

looks unsettled like an unfinished house
dream no further than a home
a road   an alley   a side street   like a sign
nothing is what is seen

Translated by Tracey Martin and the Poetry Translation Workshop
Source: Poetry Translation Centre

* Sanam Luang is a large public park in the centre of Bangkok that became 'home' to a large number of homeless people who were then 'cleansed' from the area.