

NEGOTIATIONS: A near-consensus decision keeps U.N. climate process alive and moving ahead *(Monday, December 13, 2010)*

Lisa Friedman, E&E reporter

CANCUN, Mexico -- World leaders this weekend hailed an agreement on climate change that commits all major economies to greenhouse gas emission cuts and launches a fund to help vulnerable countries while sidestepping political land mines like the future of the Kyoto Protocol.

The Cancun Agreements, as the two documents are being dubbed, effectively put meat on the bones of the 12-paragraph Copenhagen Accord that world leaders crafted in Denmark last year. The deal was finished by bleary-eyed diplomats from 193 countries with the exception of Bolivia at 3:15 a.m. Saturday amid a standing ovation. It does not ensure the emission cuts scientists say are needed to avert catastrophic global warming.

But ministers and activists alike said the agreements restored much-needed confidence in the multilateral system and laid the groundwork for serious technology developments to help poorer countries deploy low-carbon energy. For the first time in an official U.N. agreement, countries agreed to keep temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and acknowledged that the emission cut pledges America, China and others made in Copenhagen should be just a beginning.

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Todd Stern, U.S. special envoy for climate change.

"The last 24 hours, what we have seen is no less than a miracle," said Maldivian Minister of Environment Mohamed Aslam, whose country of low-lying atolls in the Indian Ocean has led the moral charge for climate

action.

"It's a good one," Aslam said of the agreement. "It has all of the elements we have been wanting. Not in as strong language as we would have liked, but it leaves room for strengthening things next year," he said.

As diplomats in the plenary room above made final, pre-dawn tweaks to text, exhausted ministers awaited the final gavel in the lobby of the luxurious Moon Palace hotel. Chinese Minister Xie Zhenhua, his chin to his chest, caught a few minutes of sleep as other members of his delegation dozed and chatted. Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh chatted with a group of Indian journalists who, he said, were accusing him of "caving in to the United States." Brazilian Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira sat with staff, glasses perched on her nose, reading reports.

"Of course we have a decision that is not perfect, but I think we have a balanced package here. We have good results," Teixeira said.

Jubilation and relief

Throughout the halls, the mood was a mixture of jubilation and relief. Few cast the Cancun Agreements as major step forward, but most said it did repair the damage done to the U.N. climate negotiations by the chaotic and contentious meeting last year in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"We've definitely exorcised the ghost of Copenhagen," said Alden Meyer, director of policy and strategy for the Union of Concerned Scientists, as he hopped back on crutches from the Moon Palace after the initial vote.

"The emotion is a little ahead of the substance, but that's OK. It's a good night," Meyer said. Angela Anderson, director of the Climate Action Network, called it a Copenhagen "do-over."

With U.S. congressional attention barely focused on international climate talks, it remains unclear what impact, if any, the deal will have domestically.

"Nobody knows what the shape of the new Congress is going to be, but it's a positive thing to see a worldwide agreement," said U.S. envoy Todd Stern, calling the agreements a "generally helpful development."

Indeed, analysts say, after what Stern called a "challenging, tiring week of consultations," the Obama administration emerged from Cancun with just about everything it wanted.

The overriding goal for the United States, Stern said, was to ensure that the Copenhagen Accord agreement that Obama and leaders of China, India, Brazil and South Africa crafted last year survived and took definitive shape. That agreement recorded the promises of major emitting countries to cut carbon and develop a monitoring system to track success or failure. Industrialized countries, meanwhile, would deliver \$30 billion in near-term climate aid while raising \$100 billion annually by 2020 for vulnerable nations.

But arriving in the resort town of Cancun last month, negotiators for the United States and China remained at loggerheads over what kind of monitoring system China would accept to verify its emission cut claims. The final agreement closely mirrors a proposal by Indian Environment Minister Ramesh of international consultations and analysis.

"I couldn't say exactly the point where the Chinese came to see this as quite a positive thing. The Chinese are always extremely tough negotiators. They're very tough and very good. I absolutely commend the Chinese for the steps they took on this issue," Stern said.

In return, the United States signed off on the creation of a global green fund and the creation of an adaptation framework, and agreed to help establish a Climate Technology center and a series of hubs to pump up investment in clean technology and strengthen the abilities of developing countries

to deploy it.

'Very good' from U.S. point of view

"This is very good from our point of view," Stern said. "This was the U.S. strategic vision and plan we had in 2010 when we returned from Copenhagen."

Despite the widely hailed agreement, though, environmental activists and several developing country negotiators said the United States may have gotten its way but won few friends at this round of talks. With no road map for meeting its promises of cutting greenhouse gas emissions 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and with a Republican Congress gunning to strip foreign aid and largely skeptical of climate science altogether, American negotiators remained insistent that countries give in on a range of issues.

In addition to winning concessions on transparency from China, the United States avoided having to be equally transparent about how it will meet its own emission pledge. It also established the World Bank as the interim trustee of the Green Fund, over the objections of many developing nations, and a board half composed of donor countries.

But the biggest sticking point for the United States was getting an agreement from China on transparency.

Ailun Yang, director of climate policy for Greenpeace China, said that at several points, America threatened to shut down hours of grueling progress on finance, technology and other issues because it wasn't seeing what it wanted from China.

"It would have been good if the U.S. had also agreed to improve the transparency of their actions," Yang said.

Negotiators said there wasn't a single moment when the talks seemed to turn. Rather, they said, it was the Mexican host government's insistence on cloistering diplomats for long stretches of time and deftly creating small working groups while throwing open the door to any country that wanted to step in and be heard.

The result, analysts said, was that developing nations -- and in particular, the left-leaning Latin American group known as ALBA countries that helped block the Copenhagen Accord after being shut out of talks -- felt included.

"The Mexican approach wore 'em down," said Ned Helme, president of the Center for Clean Air Policy.

Horse-trading played a part, too, of course, said India's Ramesh -- though he declined to provide specifics.

"The confidence level in the outcome was at rock bottom at lunch, because there was nothing

coming out," he told *ClimateWire*. "This wouldn't have happened without backroom dealing and cajoling."

U.N. process 'lives to fight another day'

Ramesh called the agreement "a small step for the fight against climate change," but added, "the multilateral process lives to fight another day."

Not that the agreement is without naysayers. In a series of lengthy filibustering speeches -- the U.N. equivalent to reading the phone book on the Senate floor -- Bolivian negotiator Pablo Solon railed against the pact as "totally inadequate."

A 2-degree rise in temperatures above pre-industrial levels, he said, is "not acceptable," and he called unsuccessfully for more meetings to set in stone levels of emission cuts expected by industrialized countries.

But in a deft procedural move, Mexican Environment Minister Patricia Espinosa, serving as president of the conference, noted Bolivia's objection but insisted that the consensus of 193 other nations allowed her to gavel the deal.

It was a marked contrast from Copenhagen, as well as the U.N. climate conference in Bali, Indonesia, three years ago, when U.S. objections brought all movement to a standstill and nations begged the United States to at least just abstain. That conference ended with the United States bowing to pressure after one delegate told America to "lead or get out of the way."

U.N. leaders early Saturday morning insisted that rules demanding "consensus" were followed. "I don't know when this happened that consensus became unanimity," said Christiana Figueres, head of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. But analysts said the realpolitik of diplomacy reigned.

"In Bali, the chair decided having the cooperation of the United States was essential," while the same assessment was not made about Bolivia this year, said Michael Levi, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations.

"It's a political judgment. It's a political decision in the best sense of the word," he said.

Meanwhile, the agreement finessed the largest problem looming over the talks: Will the Kyoto Protocol live or die?

Japan dropped a bomb on the climate talks on the opening day when it announced it would not take targets under a second commitment period of the treaty that begins in 2011. The agreement reached Saturday does not force it to.

Japanese Ambassador Shinsuke Sugiyama told *ClimateWire* that Japan didn't compromise its position. "I don't think Japan's position is in any way undermined or is forced to be altered," he said.

"We are able to keep our position untouched."

But that also means the fight will remain a major issue throughout the year. With the first commitment period expiring in 2012, this is the last year that negotiators will be able to punt on what future lies ahead for Kyoto.

South Africa's Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, told *ClimateWire* that is "the most important issue" that negotiators will face when they meet in her country next year.

But while much work needs to be done between now and the Durban conference, she said the "building blocks are now on the table" for ever-stronger climate agreements.

"The bar has been raised, and we have to work hard to deliver," Molewa said. "We are very optimistic. This process must never, ever go down again. The bar must keep going up and up and up."

Click [here](#) and [here](#) for the Cancun Agreements.

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122 C St., Ste. 722, NW, Wash., D.C. 20001.
Phone: 202-628-6500. Fax: 202-737-5299.
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