



Climate: Elements of an ambitious agreement in Copenhagen

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In Bali the world decided to embark on an unprecedented road – negotiate an immensely complex and vital issue to the economy and the planet – in just two years, during which the United States, Russia, Germany, India and many other key countries will have national elections.

While at first sight this might seem naïve or a bit crazy, it is clear that there is no choice. The science of climate change is telling us that the urgency of the problem requires an unprecedented, ambitious and rapid response.

Gone are the days when a new IPCC report would be released without any attention. Almost all Heads of State now have a basic understanding that without climate security they will be unable to meet economic or development goals. This makes climate change an issue of national security interest, one that moves up the list from a “nice to do environmental agreement” to an “essential to our national interests agreement.”

In the end the agreements struck in Copenhagen must reflect a fundamental shift in the politics of climate change, both domestically and internationally. This shift should be represented in an agreement which says to investors that pouring funds into conventional coal in developed countries must end very soon and in developing countries not too long thereafter.

It should be an agreement that says to politicians that they must now get their domestic houses in order to be able to implement such an agreement and manage carbon across the economy. It is an agreement that will say to the public that it is different this time – that they can rest assured for their kids and grandkids, that the politicians and CEOs really get it now, but also that they must remain diligent and ensure the changes occur in practice.

This is a high bar for success, but it is one that climate scientists would back up. If global emissions have to peak and decline in the next ten to fifteen years to avoid some quite catastrophic impacts, Copenhagen must not only include the mechanisms to do so such as technology cooperation. It must also be a vehicle that moves countries into a cooperative space on climate change, one that truly responds to our shared dilemma.

It is clear that at the core of the agreement is a continuation of many of the elements and commitments of the Kyoto Protocol. The linchpin is ambitious absolute mandatory caps on emissions for developed countries that ensure that these emissions are 25 to 40% below 1990 by 2020. Without this agreement, it will be immensely difficult to get developing countries to sign up to ambitious commitments.

If Europe and others do not show it can be done, why should China agree to something that no one has ever done before – rapid economic development while decarbonising the economy? In order for developed country commitments to such a range to be taken seriously they must be backed up by concrete laws and measures at home that demonstrate that the transition to a low carbon economy has begun.

Nowhere is this more important than in Europe, which has to live up to its promise to do just this. During the time of the international negotiations, the EU will be debating its own “low carbon plan”. By the end of 2009 it must be clear to the world that Europe will not build any more conventional coal fired power plants, that any emissions trading system will have auctioning at its core, with some of that revenue going towards adaptation and technology transfer, and that renewables are mainstream, backed up by tremendous efficiency to reduce demand.

In parallel, Europe should be encouraging the production and trade of low carbon goods. Next year the Commission should decide to remove the high tariffs on Chinese compact fluorescent lightbulbs so that European consumers

can purchase cheap low carbon goods, and Chinese producers can see the benefit of producing such goods. This again moves to shifting the domestic politics in Europe from one of competition to one of collaboration.

All eyes of the world will of course be on the new President of the United States as s/he takes office in January 2009. How the United States reengages with the world on climate change will have a defining impact on the level of success of the Copenhagen Summit. On the one hand the signs are good. All three candidates have fundamentally different positions than the Bush Administration. They support mandatory caps on US emissions, national regulations for renewables and efficiency, and recognize that the approach taken by this Administration has been “fundamentally flawed”.

On the other hand, the U.S. is going into a recession (if it is not there already), has to decide the future of its engagement in Iraq, and is terribly troubled about loss of jobs and competitiveness – especially in regards to countries like China.

Hence, work must be done now to engage the Presidential campaigns to make the point that time is not on our side, that we need a new shadow US delegation at the next major climate meeting in Poznan in November this year, and that climate change must be handled quickly.

More fundamentally, however, the new President of the United States needs to understand that a strong multilateral position and engagement on climate change will begin to re-establish the U.S. as a credible multilateral actor on the global stage on an issue of great importance to most major economies around the world. Without this level of attention, we risk climate change being one of many other issues that will likely not get addressed in the first 100 days of the new Administration. Europe needs to understand this and engage now.

Finally, with the support of an innovative and robust technology cooperation and finance package for adaptation and mitigation, large developing countries must also commit to ambitious actions on climate change. Ensuring that these commitments are ambitious will perhaps be the most difficult challenge in Copenhagen. Much will rest on the level of confidence built in the coming year and a half. We have to demonstrate that a transition to a low carbon economy will bring more benefits than costs and is in the national interest of the rapidly growing economies of the world.