

Scripting Climate History: The Copenhagen Talks So Far

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At the opening of the Climate Change conference in Copenhagen, assembled delegates were told to write the 'right' kind of history. Short films portraying gloomy scenarios were shown as an incentive, one featuring a girl's plea to avoid the pathway to a climatically ravaged earth: 'Please, help the world.'

The hectic scripting is not quite going according to plan, but this can hardly be surprising given the format of this crammed, busy talk fest. For one thing, the Danish hosts were caught by surprise when their own version of a draft text was leaked to the *Guardian* newspaper. That particular text signaled a significant departure from the Kyoto Protocol, which enshrined the principle that rich nations would be compelled and bound to reduce emissions, while poorer nations would not. Matters of finance would be vested in the World Bank, which would be the chief conduit to nations hoping to change their carbon emission regimes. The draft effectively sidelined the UN in the process, demonstrating, as leader of the WWF's climate delegation Kim Carstensen claimed, 'an elitist, selective and non-transparent approach to the negotiations' (*Guardian*, Dec 9).

The latest draft text, labeled the 'long-term action plan text' states that global emissions must be halved by 2050, with the larger portion to be borne by the richer nations. The seven-page draft will constitute the bricks and mortar for discussions between the ministers this week. The Kyoto Protocol would continue operating till the new legal treaty was signed.

The latest draft text has not mollified the fears of some states. An African group of seven countries, including Nigeria, South Africa and Algeria, have made their presence felt at the Bella Centre in the city, arguing that the richer countries were still intent on sabotaging the Kyoto framework. Over the weekend, Japan and Australia were making the point that a single, working document had to be presented to the leaders to sign. An unnamed spokesman of the Nigerian special climate change unit has gone so far as to say that killing the Kyoto Protocol 'will mean the killing of Africa'.

The core areas that still remain contested are by far the most important ones: financing for the developing world to minimize their carbon footprint, compliance regimes and the emission targets themselves. Verification is bound to be a sticking point. The Chinese are suspicious about any inspection regime that will lead to external interference. There are still some countries that feel that the developing world will also have to pull their weight in seeking cuts.

Divisions have come to the fore between the Alliance of Small Island States and the Group of 77. The apocalyptic scenario is simply more relevant to some countries than others. Some

money has been promised, with the European Union pledging \$10.5 billion over the next three years. The UN has made it clear that the fund should amount to \$30 billion. The figures pale in comparison to what poorer countries actually want: \$100 billion annually by 2020.

Some room for the optimists at this conference may still be found. The major powers seem to have either made or are near making pledges in attaining various emission goals. The thousands of activists have emitted much air in reaching this stage: two documents to consider, instead of one. It now remains to be seen to what extent the politicians, many of whom have brought their schedules forward, will digest or ignore the material placed before them.

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