

Delegates Agree to Groundbreaking 'Katowice Loss & Damage Roadmap'

Sunday, December 14, 2018

KATOWICE – Building on the Paris Agreement optimism from December 2015, delegates headed into the Conference of Parties talks (COP24-CMP14) in Katowice, Poland facing the daunting challenge of agreeing to the details of a 'Loss and Damage Roadmap'. Talks in the Polish city centered on further building upon Article 8 of the Paris Agreement, developing a timetable along with a set of monetary commitments over the next five years (2019-2024).

As the clock expired on the last day of negotiations, the 'Katowice Loss and Damage Road Map' was an ambitious package of commitments of US\$190.4 billion per year for five years, coming on line in January of 2019. These commitments were agreed to be subject to regular review and contributions are to be determined through consultation with the Subsidiary Body for Implementation. It was also agreed that funds will not be re-allocations of other already-existing contributions like foreign aid and additional to the Green Climate Fund commitment made in the Cancun talks in 2010.

Amidst turmoil in the European Union resulting from the ongoing 'Brexit', Prime Minister Theresa May (Natalie Buchholtz) offered scrumptious home-made biscuits that kept negotiations on track. While member nations moved from productive yet somewhat vague promises and proposals in the opening round of talks, they then dug into an impressively ambitious set of commitments in the final round of talks. As such, negotiations continued with the enthusiasm where the Paris round of talks left off three years previous (in 2015).

Discussions in the first negotiating session began in earnest, with various voting blocs expressing their interests and possible commitments to a loss and damage (L&D) roadmap. Yet, in these early discussions, empty rhetoric outpaced tangible, substantive commitments from member nations. Leading into the final day of negotiations, UN Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa – with the assistance of previous host (and Fiji President) Frank Bainimarama – pushed negotiators to find common ground by way of specific L&D contributions. This proved to be a spark, where compromise took precedence over self-interest. This was illustrated by the generous commitments introduced by the Eastern Europe voting bloc represented chiefly by meeting host Mateusz Morawiecki (Ryan Humphrey) of Poland and Vladimir Putin (Brandon Deering) of the Russian Federation, who promised US\$61 billion/year to the L&D fund. Swept up in commitments like these, overlooked was the lack of commitments ultimately made by Jacinda Ardern (Casey Marsh) and Malcolm Turnbull (Australia) who committed a combined US\$400 million/year to the fund. Yet, to the credit of negotiators, clear proposals displaced non-specific platitudes and hollow exhortations for change overall.

During negotiations, the most strenuous contentions centered on language and definitions of 'liability and compensation' itself. Bolivian and Venezuelan representatives (Kalia Thomas and Mary Cherna) – representing the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (ALBA) – argued that it was the "moral and legal responsibility of

developed nations of the Global North to pay for reparations". This garnered some support among the Alliance of Small Island States – namely the Marshall Islands (Gabe Antonelli) and the Maldives (Jacob Appel) – as well as from the Bangladesh negotiating team led by Abdul Hamid (Brian Scribner). The African Group – 54 countries represented by Egypt and Ethiopia (Basil Mansur and Sol Shepherd) also put forward strong cases for US\$40 billion/year of support for their voting bloc.

However, inclusion of this language was initially a non-starter for lead delegates Donald J. Trump (Hayley Sundstrom of United States). Yet, in part through the strong brokering by lead British, German and French envoys – Theresa May (Natalie Buchholz), Angela Merkel (Maria Lemmond) and Emmanuel Macron (Paul Lewis), the US commitment to the L&D fund was strengthened to US\$15 billion/year. The EU 'walked the walk' through their own US\$82 billion/year commitment as well.

Also during the negotiations, envoys to the negotiations from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Sam Kosloske and Alex Sarnow) successfully expanded the definition of L&D to include costs associated with work to decarbonize the fourteen OPEC member nations in an effort to address climate challenges. They also successfully claimed US\$40 billion/year of support for their voting bloc. Chinese and Indian lead delegates Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi (Anne Bennett and Tayler Robertson) stressed the importance of the 1995 'Berlin Mandate' of common but differentiated responsibilities, as the talks reached the eleventh hour. Nonetheless, these lead envoys showed a willingness for good-spirited and productive dialogue as they pursued a workable loss and damage agreement.



A representation of what ENVS-GEOG 3022 COP24 negotiations might have looked like in Katowice, Poland.

While happy with their accomplishments, celebrations by the delegations remained muted. Delegates seemed to understand that the scale of the response in Katowice, while promising, remained small relative to the scale of the global challenge. Of note though was that commitments during this initial five-year period exceeded the claims of nations from the Global South to those funds. With this recognition (and the upcoming 2018 mid-term elections in the United States of America), delegates looked ahead resolutely to 2019 talks. - MB