

## Categorized | Features

**The question about addressing climate change is becoming increasingly warped as the gap between what should be done and what countries actually are doing grows.** This was vividly demonstrated at the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Talks**, which ended last Friday in Bonn, Germany.

The level of awareness on this topic is growing throughout the world, as is the perception of its connection to the increasing number and magnitude of extreme climate events<sup>1</sup>.

These perceptions are specifically supported by an accumulation of scientific evidence<sup>2</sup>, including the confirmed rise of CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere. Only a few days ago, the International Energy Agency (IEA) published its official data related to 2011 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuel combustion: it recorded a new high, exceeding the 2010 level by 3,2%. **In 2011, the global emission of CO<sub>2</sub> from fossil fuel was 31,6 Gt (billion tons), 1 Gt more than in 2010.** In order to have even a 50% chance of limiting the increase of the average global temperature to 2°C, which is the "450 Scenario" of the IEA's World Energy Outlook 2011, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would have to peak at 32,6 Gt before 2017. Considering the increase recorded between 2010 and 2011, it is likely that this threshold will already be reached next year.



**There is a sliver of hope despite the dire outlook: with proper action, the world could still achieve the CO<sub>2</sub> emission level recommended by scientists.**

At the UN General Assembly in New York last February, Felix Finkbeiner, a 13-year-old boy, shared his personal qualms about climate change with the international audience: "The adults know exactly what challenges we face and they know the solutions to these challenges, but we don't understand why there is so little action." Everyone applauded the young man's statement, but nobody had a satisfactory reply to it.

**Only recently, another report, "Bridging the Emission Gap," published by UNEP,** indicated that a short-term CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction, needed to keep the increase in global temperatures below 2°C, is still achievable. Achim Steiner, the UNEP Executive Director, declared that the necessary emissions reduction would be "possible by 2020, even without any significant technical or financial breakthroughs." But this would require strong and rapid action, propelled by unified international political will.

**And what was the outcome of the latest UNFCCC Climate Talks just concluded in Bonn?**

After two weeks of negotiations among delegates from every part of the world on the new ADP (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action), they only managed to agree on the work agenda, and this not until the very last day, following heated debates that people outside the conference would have trouble understanding.

Obviously, the issue is not straightforward, as it concerns the interests and roles of developed countries and major emerging economies on the path to CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. Still, it would be difficult to explain to little Felix the applause at the end of the Bonn Conference, when in reality, instead of addressing substantial concerns, conference attendees whittled away the time discussing terminology and protocol.

**Artur Runge Metzger, the Director of International and Climate Strategy of the European Commission, conceded that** "we spent too much time on procedures," and he pointed to a small group of countries that were hindering the process. He didn't refer directly to any specific nation, but a senior delegate mentioned the US as part of this group, in particular Washington's attempt to consistently block discussion on certain issues, for example, the request to organize a workshop on research, proposed by **CfRN (Coalition for Rainforest Nations)**. But during a press conference, Jonathan Pershing, the USA Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change, deflected the blame, declaring that he was "disappointed and frustrated that the discussion of this meeting focused largely on procedural issues."

**The UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Christiana Figueres, also conceded that the weeks of negotiating had been "boring."** PlanetNext pointed out to her the lack of progress in the ongoing process, only 6 months away from the conclusion of the present **Kyoto Protocol (KP)** commitment period and the expiration of LCA (the ad hoc working group including countries not part of the KP).

**After 6 years of negotiations on the KP,** it has still not been decided if the second commitment period will be 5 or 8 years. The KP was never underwritten by the US, and Canada left it just last year. Now it looks probable that other important countries such as Japan and Russia will follow suit, meaning that after 2012 the KP will consist of countries collectively responsible for only 15% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The voluntary commitment so far expressed by countries at the Copenhagen Accord and later covers around 50% of scientists' CO<sub>2</sub> reduction request by 2020. After 20 years of negotiations, rich countries have committed to economically help developing countries, but the money is not yet on the table.

**Following the debacle in Bonn**, is it even reasonable to expect the next COP in Doha to achieve positive results or to awaken the necessary political will? Figueres was not fazed by the lack of ambition of the process and simply stated that Doha will be an important COP.

**But Bali was “an important COP” too, as were Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban.** The question is not whether a COP is deemed to be important or not, but rather whether this negotiation process is actually able to produce results at the level required by science—or admit that it has failed.

At the moment, it is not known if an additional conference will be held in Bangkok next September, to better prepare for Doha, due to a lack of funding which, according to Christiana Figueres, runs at around 4,8 million €. Word has it that developed countries (such as the EU) would offer the necessary financial support, on the condition that developing countries accepted the policy of reaching an agreement on the election of the ADP chairs by consensus, as has been the case in the past, in order to avoid a vote by majority, which is very unusual for this process. But the real concern is that the next meeting in September could again become stuck on secondary issues, failing to address and solve the most critical and important items.

**Wael Hmaidan, Director of CAN, the international umbrella of NGOs on climate change, blames the** problem world-wide on a political class unwilling to address the real interests of its citizens, who are however directly affected by climate change. According to Hmaidan, politicians take a short-term view in order to protect their own interests and maintain the political consensus needed to guarantee re-election.

**Looking at what the international climate change negotiations have produced until now, it is difficult to refute Hmaidan’s argument.** The UNFCCC process urgently needs to shift gears and to show that it is capable of producing concrete results. Maybe, then, the international political establishment will prove Hmaidan wrong.

**In the meantime the level of CO2 is continuously rising in the atmosphere**, while the time for effective action is drastically shrinking. Christiana Figueres is completely right when she says that Doha will be an important COP. In particular if it can show a change in the participants’ attitudes.

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-