

Tck Tck Tck - Hundred days to Copenhagen

by Asoka Abeygunawardana

2009 is a crucial year in the international effort to address climate change. A series of United National Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings are taking place throughout the year, designed to culminate in an ambitious and effective international response to climate change, to be agreed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 15) in Copenhagen, 7-18 December.

The first round of negotiations this year took place in Bonn, 29 March-8 April. A further meeting took place in Bonn, 1-12 June, **followed by** informal consultations in August. Two further sessions will be held prior to Copenhagen: Bangkok, 28th September – 9th October; and Barcelona, 2nd- 6th November.

Climate change negotiations started in 1990 with the completion of the first assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The United National Framework Convention on Climate Change which came into force on 21 March 1994 sets an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. It recognized that the climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The Convention enjoys near universal membership, with 192 countries having ratified.

Under the Convention, governments gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and best practices; launch national strategies for addressing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to expected impacts, including the provision of financial and technological support to developing countries; and cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

The Parties to the Convention met regularly at the Conference of Parties (COP). The Kyoto Protocol is the international agreement made at the COP-3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1997. The Kyoto Protocol set binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These amounted to an average of five per cent against 1990 levels over the five-year period 2008-2012.

The major distinction between the Protocol and the Convention was that while the Convention encouraged industrialized countries to stabilize GHG emissions, the Protocol committed them to doing so.

Recognizing that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, the Protocol placed a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” The unfortunate fact is that the industrialized countries in 1997 agreed only to reduce carbon emissions in another 10 years time.

Since then, humankind has continued to burn fossil Carbon, increasing the Carbon concentrations in the atmosphere thus, a rise in global temperatures by 2 degrees centigrade has become inevitable. We are already late. We are now not discussing reducing emissions by 5% against 1990 levels but by 80%. Both the developed world and the developing world have failed to realize one major fact: human civilization

has reached the end of the fossil fuel era. A low carbon society should be established immediately. The tug of war between North and South will lead the whole world only towards a climate catastrophe.

Briefing the media on the August round of informal consultations in Bonn, UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer has said that while selective progress had been made to consolidate the huge texts on the table, "at this rate, we will not make it." Mr. de Boer stressed that "a climate deal in Copenhagen this year is an unequivocal requirement to stop climate change from slipping out of control."

Amidst all this chaos the "Tck Tck Tck" campaign for 100-day countdown to the United Nations Copenhagen Climate Summit kicked-off last week. The governments have to agree to a fair, binding and ambitious deal at the summit.

"The developed nations have so far committed up to 16 percent reduction in greenhouse gases compared to the levels in 1990. This will not halt the rise in temperature above 4 degree Celsius, which will have serious consequences for the earth," said Sanjay Vashist of Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs) at a campaign rally in Delhi last week. Another action group argues that the global CO₂ concentration has already reached 389.42 ppm and that it is essential to reduce it to 350 ppm to reach the safe mode.

The onus lies not only with the developed world, developing countries led by India and China should also be establishing a truly low-carbon sustainable development model. Negotiations need to move much faster to deliver strong outcomes on areas such as adaptation, technology and building skills in developing nations. Governments need to buckle down and concretely identify how to achieve this.

The Civil Society Organization in Sri Lanka will be meeting on 17th September in Colombo to discuss its role at the Climate Catastrophe negotiations. The challenge today is much broader than just emission reductions; it is a challenge of meeting development objectives within the constraint of climate change.

Sri Lanka is unfortunately in a hopeless position at the negotiating table as its CO₂ emissions have increased by 230% since the reference year 1990: the world's third highest rate. At the negotiating table the developing world may need to commit to reduce their emission levels by 30% against 1990 level. The Ceylon Electricity Board Base Case Plan is to establish 3370 MW of coal power plants in Sri Lanka to meet the increasing power demand by 2020. If this is the case, Sri Lanka's power sector alone will be responsible for an 820% increase in CO₂ emissions by 2020, relative to 1990 levels.

The Civil Society Organization in Sri Lanka, as the first step towards contributing to the international negotiations, should lobby the government to revisit the existing power generation plan, taking in to account the developments at the climate catastrophe negotiations table. The need of the hour is strong action against climate change where everyone comes together as time is ticking away. Those countries leading the way in terms of low carbon emissions will come out on top; why should Sri Lanka step back and push other countries into the forefront, allowing them to dominate the new era?