

Developing countries concerned by shift of focus from UNFCCC to Paris Agreement

Penang, 3 July (Evelyn Teh) - At the joint closing plenary of the 50th meetings of the UNFCCC's Subsidiary Bodies on 27 June 2019, in Bonn (Germany), which marked the end of the two-week intersession climate talks, developing countries, led by the **G77 and China**, expressed concerns over the stance of developed countries to "leave behind" the Convention and shift their focus on the Paris Agreement (PA).

There also expressed unhappiness over references to a "new regime" having been established under the PA, which several developing country groupings were quick to counter, especially the **Like-minded Developing Countries (LMDC)**.

The meetings of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) that began work on 17 June, concluded on 27 June with the adoption of conclusions on various agenda items across the two bodies.

The final joint closing plenary session was convened by SBI Chair **Emmanuel Dlamini (Eswatini)** and the SBSTA Chair, **Paul Watkinson (France)** and saw the delivery of statements by groupings of Parties.

Among the key issues that were referred to in the statements included matters relating to Article 6 of the PA on market/non-market approaches, the terms of reference for the review of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage associated with climate change impacts, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Special Report on 1.5 °C (SR 1.5).

Palestine, speaking for the **G77 and China Palestine**, highlighted several challenges experienced at this session which it hoped will not be repeated at the 25th meeting of the UNFCCC's Conference of Parties (COP25) and the next session of the SBs in Santiago, Chile to be held in Dec. this year.

Palestine said that the positions of developed countries on many of the agenda items seemed to indicate a distinct willingness to focus on the PA and to leave the Convention behind. This, it stressed, was "not consistent with the letter and the spirit of the PA and the foundation of the Convention," adding that "the Convention and the Agreement are intrinsically linked and are both important in fostering ambitious action that ensures that we do not cross irreversible climate thresholds before it is too late."

The G77 also expressed concerns over issues of "transparency and inclusivity" in the process. A key element, it said, was that on many of the negotiating sessions on the various agenda items, there were conflicts in the schedule of meetings on agenda items which were related. It said that "much more needs to be done by the Chairs and the Secretariat to avoid such scheduling conflicts." The Group further stressed the importance of "balance" in the process, that "applies to both procedure and substance" and expects "balanced treatment from the Chairs and the Secretariat when it comes to working with Parties" as well as "when it comes to the prioritization of issues or agenda items so that the issues of interest to the Group are also given priority."

Iran, speaking for the **Like-minded Developing Countries (LMDC)** emphasised that the Convention remains the foundation of the multilateral climate regime and that therefore, it was essential that the activities mandated under the Convention are given effect and with the same importance as that of the PA. "This is the only way in which those Parties who have not joined, or might leave the PA but remain Parties to the Convention, will remain bound with and accountable to the rest of us for their climate actions," added the group further. It also reminded Parties that the regime under the PA was therefore not "new" but rather "is an enhanced continuation of the current regime under the Convention."

The LMDC said that it had pushed hard at this session “on issues relating to the provision of climate finance and technology to developing countries, as well as measurement, reporting and verification arrangements under the Convention, ...through calling for a balanced 2020-2021 budget that gives equal play to adaptation and means of implementation, or in the negotiations on the transparency modalities for support, or in the negotiation to ensure that Parties to the Convention but not Parties to the PA continue to fulfill their reporting obligation under the Convention.” It also said that it had continued to insist “on the importance of flexibility, as a reflection of CBDR (the principle of common but differentiated responsibility between developed and developing countries) and as agreed at Katowice (in Poland last year) and in the PA, to be made operational for developing countries in the transparency modalities.”

The LMDC also stressed that it had “pushed back, together with the rest of the G77 and China, against attempts from developed country Parties to do away with the second periodic review – a key process under the Convention that allows for a holistic, integrated and systemic review of the impact of our actions under the Convention.”

(Developing countries, wanted a review of the overall progress and implementation of actions of Parties in the pre-2020 period under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, covering mitigation and adaptation actions as well as the provision of support to developing countries and to address the implementation gaps. Developed countries on the other hand opposed the need for a review, as they said that a mechanism was already in place under the global stocktake [GST] of the PA, which will take place in 2023. The GST will focus on the collective progress of Parties in implementing the PA in the post-2020 timeframe. With no agreement on the scope of the periodic review, Parties agreed to procedural conclusions to consider the issue further at its next session to be held in Dec. this year).

Referring to the pre-2020 stocktake session to be held at COP 25, the LMDC said that developed countries must act expeditiously and responsibly to close the pre-2020 implementation gaps so that there is no transfer of burden to developing countries in the post-2020 period.

Egypt speaking for the **Africa Group** stressed the importance of adaptation and finance matters to the group and called for the scaling up of climate action and support. It reminded Parties not to forget the pre-2020 commitments, especially on the finance goal (of mobilising USD 100 billion per year by 2020) and also

expressed concerns about efforts to diminish the role of the Convention. On the review of the WIM, it hoped for the mechanism to be enhanced to address the impacts of loss and damage. It also acknowledged that while Parties worked hard to finalise the appointment of the Adaptation Fund Board, there were efforts to change the composition of the Board members, which it regretted. Egypt also hoped that the COP in Chile will highlight the centrality of the 25-year climate regime under the Convention.

(On the issue of the Adaptation Fund Board, no conclusion was reached on the matter, given the divergent views of Parties and this issue will continue to be considered at COP 25).

Belize for the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** expressed satisfaction over the terms of reference for the review of the WIM and wanted substantive work to be under taken at COP 25 in this regard. While it was satisfied that the conclusions on the programme budget for the Secretariat for the biennium 2020–2021, it was concerned that the core budget did not cover all the mandated activities and that critical activities were contingent on voluntary funding. In relation to Article 6 of the PA on the market/non-market mechanisms, Belize said that markets can play an important role but it must not be at the expense of environmental integrity and not undermine what the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) deliver on the aggregate.

In relation to the IPCC SR 1.5, Belize lamented that “disregarding or disqualifying the best available science is tantamount to climate denialism” and stressed that Parties “must not permit even a whiff of denialism in this multilateral process.” It said that the SR must be used to operationalise the PA.

Bhutan for the **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)** was hopeful that the terms of reference for the review of the WIM provided clear guidance for enhancing the mechanism. In reference to the SR 1.5, it said that the actions of Parties need to be based on the best available science, which was non-negotiable. “For the LDCs, questioning the science and negotiating the SR was negotiating on our survival,” added Bhutan further. On the biennium budget, it said that the important work of the constituted bodies should not be impacted.

Costa Rica, for the **Independent Alliance of the Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)** said that Parties have shifted from negotiations to actions in the implementation of the PA. It added that the UNFCCC was created in response to the warning from science and as work progressed, it was important to keep abreast with the latest scientific information,

adding that Parties had an enhanced understanding of the SR 1.5 and that the language of temperature overshoot must play a key role in their plans and strategies.

Saudi Arabia on behalf of the **Arab Group** stressed the importance of respecting the principles of UNFCCC, namely the principle of equity and CBDR. The group hoped to see a balanced and fair process at COP 25 that includes all the issues from the PA. It also expressed deep concerns that no agreement was reached in relation to the work of the forum on the impact of the implementation on response measures, which, it said, would lead to hampering the work of the forum and the Katowice Expert Committee. The Arab Group also stated the importance of finance, technology transfer and capacity building from the developed countries to developing countries, to enable the latter to achieve their NDCs, cautioning that refraining from providing such a support will have negative impacts on developing countries, who are dealing with climate change impacts, sustainable development and combating poverty.

Argentina for **Brazil, Argentina** and **Uruguay (ABU)** said that the SR 1.5 has enhanced our knowledge on global warming. However, the group also stated that it was also important to note the gaps identified in the scientific knowledge which may hamper the ability to inform decision-making at national, regional and international levels. It hoped that the scientific and systematic observation community will take these gaps into consideration, especially in terms of the support for developing countries, as well as in addressing the barriers to access technologies.

Brazil, speaking for the **BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China)** stressed the importance of ensuring funds for the Financial Mechanism of the UNFCCC, including the replenishment of the Green Climate Fund. It also called for the establishment of a more ambitious long-term finance goal as a crucial signal that must be given to investors, both public and private in order to match the urgency of climate change. It also said that developing countries require means of implementation to empower them to contribute their best efforts, and expected developed countries to take the lead.

The **European Union (EU)** said that it was encouraged by the overall progress at the Bonn talks and on the key issues. It said that on Article 6 of the PA, the discussions were challenging on substance but noted that Parties have taken forward a decision to

advance further work. On the WIM, it acknowledged success on the terms of reference that allowed Parties to undertake an effective review of the mechanism. The EU also expressed disappointment on the lack of agreement on response measures. On the budget, it said that the EU will agree on significant increases to the budget of the Secretariat. It also expressed full support that “science is not negotiable” and that the IPCC had given the UNFCCC a 1.5C SR that was highly relevant and which has already been used by many Parties. It added that 2019 was a critical year to increase domestic commitments in climate action in line with the PA.

Australia for the **Umbrella Group** said that negotiations under Article 6 of the PA on markets and non-market approaches saw “solid progress” and that there were also “some good outcomes including on the terms of reference for the WIM. As regards the work done on Article 6, it said the draft decision texts reflects the full range of views of Parties and looked forward to finalising the decisions in this regard at COP 25. It also appreciated the SR 1.5 and noted the “importance of science.” It also looked forward to the UN-Secretary General’s Climate Summit initiative (in Sept. 2019 to be held in New York) “to build and maintain momentum” on climate actions.

Mexico for the **Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)** expressed deep concerns over the discussions on the SR 1.5 and the “unnecessary debate to accept scientific evidence”, adding that “science is not negotiable” and gave strong support for the dedicated work of the IPCC. It was also glad over the agreement on the terms of review of the WIM.

In his closing remarks, the SBSTA Chair, **Paul Watkinson** once again had the Keeling Curve flashed on the big screen before the plenary closure (as he had done on the first day when the talks began) and reiterated that “we must listen to science – that is the message that I extract from your statements this evening”.

(According to Wikipedia, ‘the Keeling Curve is a graph of the accumulation of CO₂ in the Earth’s atmosphere based on continuous measurements taken at the Mauna Loa Observatory on the island of Hawaii from 1958 to the present day’).

Edited by Meena Raman.