

Weak outcome on addressing pre-2020 ambition gaps due to strong resistance by North

18 Dec, Madrid (TWN) – At the closing plenary of the climate talks in Madrid that went overtime till Sunday, Dec 15, Parties adopted overarching or cover decisions, following intense wrangling behind closed doors, that revealed opposition from developed countries in having a strong outcome on addressing their pre-2020 implementation and ambition gaps.

While mouthing the need for higher ambition in closing the emissions gap to limit temperature rise by 1.5 – 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels, developed countries refused to acknowledge their responsibility in having low ambition levels in the pre-2020 period despite having agreed to revisit and raise their emissions reduction ambition under the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol in 2012, despite strong calls to do so by developing countries.

Several developing country groupings called for a two-year work programme to identify and address the gaps of developed countries in the pre-2020 timeframe, but there was much opposition from developed countries, with some saying that there is need to be “forward-looking” and not “backward looking”, implying that the focus should be on the post-2020 timeframe of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement and for all Parties to address the gaps, and to not take a differentiated approach between developed and developing countries in the pre-2020 period under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol.

In the final decision adopted, the outcome was very weak with “a round table among Parties and non-Party stakeholders on pre-2020 implementation and ambition” to be held at COP 26.

The overarching decisions were adopted under the final plenaries of the 25th session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (known as COP 25), the 15th session of the Kyoto Protocol Parties (CMP 15) and the 2nd session of the Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 2).

The overarching or cover decisions presented to the final plenary for adoption (referred to as the number 1 decisions viz. 1/CP.25, 1/CMA.2 and 1/CMP.15) were reached after several intense rounds of informal consultations, including through ministerial-led consultations.

1/CP.25 – ‘Chile Madrid Time for Action’

Decision 1/CP.25, which was adopted under the COP was titled “Chile Madrid Time for Action”. Key issues of disagreement included whether to reflect pre-2020 issues in the decision; continuation of Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action; contribution of nature; and reference to ocean and land issues in the decision.

‘Pre-2020 implementation and ambition’

In relation to pre-2020 issues, during the negotiations, the **Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)**, **BASIC (Brazil, India,**

South Africa, China), ABU (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay), Africa Group and the **Arab Group** had jointly submitted a proposal mandating a “two-year work programme under the SBI (Subsidiary Body for Implementation) on ‘Pre-2020 Implementation and Ambition’, “to identify the progress and gaps on mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity building of the pre-2020 commitments by developed countries, and to make arrangement on closing the gap”.

In relation to the pre-2020 mitigation targets of the developed countries, the joint submission said that the, “The Doha Amendment (of the Kyoto Protocol) requires the Annex I Parties (referring to developed countries) to cut their GHG emissions at least by 18% relative to 1990 levels during the second commitment period (2013-2020); and to cut their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) emissions by at least 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020; and to revisit their 2020 targets no later than 2014. However, Annex I Parties have not accomplished these commitments. No Annex I developed country have revisited their 2020 targets up to now.”

The submission stated further that the “European Union (EU) committed in their NDC to reduce GHG emissions by 40% by 2030 on the level of 1990, i.e. resulting in a 10-year lag in implementation compared to what it should be achieving by 2020.... Canada committed to reduce GHG emissions by 30% by 2030 on the level of 2005, resulting in a 10-year lag in implementation relative to 2020, and constitutes a 25-year delay relative to the baseline year. Although the United States has already officially started the withdrawal process from the Paris Agreement, its NDC thereunder as communicated during the Obama Administration in 2016 was to reduce GHG emissions by 36-28% below 2005 levels by 2025, a target that constitutes a 5-year delay relative to 2020, and a 20-year delay relative to the baseline year”.

During discussions, however, according to several developing country delegates, the developed countries were not interested to

discuss the issue of their pre-2020 implementation of commitments and ambition.

It seems the **EU** was of the view that many of the pre-2020 elements were covered under existing processes and decisions and that there was no reason to duplicate them. **Canada** apparently said that Parties were gathered to discuss enhancement of NDCs (which take effect from 2021 under the Paris Agreement), and was “at a loss” to see the idea of a work programme and did not see any value in this. **Australia** it seems also expressed views along the same lines and it did not see it “helpful” to establish a work programme since Parties needed to be “forward focused”. Apparently, **Norway** too was against the proposal as well.

The **United States (US)** it seems asked Parties to use “pragmatism” as regards the decisions, saying that Parties may see some as priority issues, but others did not view them as such, and added that there was no point duplicating pre-2020 discussions in the COP decision. It apparently said that it was concerned with the use of the term “gaps” and added that Parties could find a better way to discuss “urgency and enhanced ambition”, while adding that it did not support the work programme.

Following further discussions, and heavy resistance from the developed countries, in relation to pre-2020 climate action, the decision adopted acknowledged the stocktakes convened in 2018 and 2019 and decided to convene, in COP 26, “a round table among Parties and non-Party stakeholders on pre-2020 implementation and ambition”. Parties and non-Party stakeholders were invited to submit inputs by September 2020 to inform the roundtable, and the Secretariat was requested “to prepare a summary report by September 2021 on the basis of the outcomes of the round tables...to serve as an input for the second periodic review”.

Apparently, according to some developing country delegates, developed countries led especially by the US, did not want to have a

“bifurcated” approach in the decision, for the developed country ambition gaps to be explicitly addressed.

The decision also re-emphasized “with serious concern the urgent need to address the significant gap between the aggregate effect of Parties’ mitigation efforts in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.”

Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action

In relation to the continuation of Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, several developing countries led by **LMDC** and the **Africa Group** questioned the budgetary implications of extending the work of the ‘high-level champions’. However, with unsatisfactory responses on the budgetary implications, the text did not change much from earlier drafts in this regard.

The approved decision welcomed “the continuation of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action” and decided “to continue to appoint high-level champions, for 2021–2025, and to continue convening annually a high-level event together with the UNFCCC’s Executive Secretary and the incumbent and incoming Presidents of the COP”.

(The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action [adopted in 2016] supports the implementation of the Paris Agreement by enabling collaboration between governments and the cities, regions, businesses and investors that must act on climate change).

Contribution of nature

Another paragraph that several developing countries sought clarity on was in relation to the ‘contribution of nature’ to address climate change in the draft decision text. Some developing countries who spoke to TWN expressed their concerns on the use of such a

term, as this could introduce “false solutions” such as bioenergy carbon capture and storage. A negotiator said that there was no clear response on what the formulation actually means.

The decision adopted underlined “the essential contribution of nature to addressing climate change and its impacts and the need to address biodiversity loss and climate change in an integrated manner”.

Dialogues on ocean, land and climate change

With the Chilean Presidency projecting COP 25 as the ‘blue COP’, earlier drafts of decision 1/CP.25 had formulations on the ‘oceans and climate change’ link.

Developing countries led by the **Arab Group** made it clear that similar treatment should be accorded to issues of land as well. The scope of the discussions on ocean and land in relation to climate change was discussed in closed informal consultations.

While Brazil was against including any reference to land (as they were concerned about emissions from deforestation and agriculture), it said that land was being discussed in different negotiating tracks, and relented in the closing plenary when the decision was tabled for adoption and withdrew its objections to the proposed paragraph. (Argentina and Uruguay had also initially raised objections in relation to having any references to ‘land and climate change’, but later went along with the text proposed by the COP 25 Presidency).

The decision adopted commended the COP Presidency’s efforts to highlight the importance of oceans in the context of climate change, and requested the Chair of SBSTA to convene in June 2020 “a dialogue on the ocean and climate change to consider how to strengthen mitigation and adaptation action in this context.

The COP also requested the SBSTA Chair to convene, also in June 2020, a dialogue on the “relationship between land and climate change adaptation related matters, not intervening in

other processes under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, including those carried out under the SBSTA”. Parties and non-Party stakeholders were invited to submit inputs on these by March 2020.

Other aspects

Besides the contentious issues, in the COP 25 decision adopted, Parties recognized “the role of multilateralism and the Convention, including its principles and processes, in addressing climate change and its impacts”; “the important advances made through the UNFCCC multilateral process over the past 25 years”; and “the role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in providing scientific input to inform Parties”.

The decision also recalled “that the current need for adaptation is significant and that greater levels of mitigation can reduce the need for additional adaptation efforts, and that greater adaptation needs can involve greater adaptation costs” and stressed the “urgency of enhanced ambition in order to ensure the highest possible mitigation and adaptation efforts by all Parties”.

The decision also recalled the financial commitments of developed countries under the Convention, spoke to developing countries’ challenges in accessing finance and recognized the “urgent need to enhance the provision of support to developing country Parties for strengthening their national adaptation and mitigation efforts”. The decision also called on “international entities, including financial institutions, to continue supporting the development and implementation of measures to avert, minimize and address the adverse impacts of climate change”.

The COP also expressed its gratitude to IPCC for producing the two special reports on land and oceans and cryosphere and invited Parties to make use of the information in the reports in their future deliberations.

1/CMA.2

Decision 1/CMA.2, which was also titled “Chile Madrid Time for Action” saw an intense political discussion over language on increased ambition.

Earlier drafts of the possible elements for the draft decision included calls for ambitious updating of the NDCs in 2020. This found support among the developed countries led by the EU, the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**, the **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**, and the **Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)**.

However, developing countries led by the **LMDC**, the **Arab Group** and the **Africa Group** called for more nuance in making such calls. They were of the view that ambition was not just mitigation, and they called for an integrated approach to say that calls for mitigation ambition should be in sync with calls for increased support for means of implementation. They also expressed their disappointment that there was nothing on adaptation and means of implementation in the proposed elements and that it was heavily mitigation-centric.

They recalled Article 3 of the Paris Agreement, which establishes that NDCs are not mitigation-centric and asserted that all aspects of ambition must be included. They were of the view that while nothing stopped countries from submitting ambitious NDCs, the mandates from the Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21 must be respected, which requests Parties “to communicate or update by 2020” their NDCs.

The groups were also of the view that even though they were undertaking ambitious climate action in their countries, despite challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication, forcing ambition on developing countries was unfair especially since the developed countries had not done their bit in terms of raising their ambition level on mitigation and in providing adequate and predictable support to developing countries.

Malaysia for the **LMDC**, stressed that the basic principle is that any framing around ambition must respect previous mandates, and that Parties must not go beyond those. It also stated that the issues of adaptation, loss and damage and means of implementation need to find reflection in the draft text.

According to developing country delegates **China** welcomed the issue of ambition, but also wanted the focus on implementation. On the issue of the communication and updating of NDCs, China said that these were already been mandated by previous decisions; so the issue was a matter of implementing past decisions and did not want “the changing of the Paris Agreement goalposts.

India it seems said there was no bar for a country to change its NDCs, but the Paris decision was clear that countries with NDCs of a 10-year timeframe would communicate or update it in 2020. It also said that the framing of ambition must be proper, in that, equity and common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) must be the frame, along with action and support.

It was concerned that there was no raising of ambition in the pre-2020 period, and asked what will happen to the gaps? India apparently said that while the world is looking for an ambitious outcome, ambition stems from implementation and said there was no zeal to address this. It also stressed the importance of talking about the historical gaps and shortfalls that have brought Parties to this situation and did not want a repeat of history. It also recalled that the Convention started in 1992, and what followed was the first commitment period of Kyoto Protocol, the second commitment period of Kyoto Protocol, and then the Paris Agreement, with the latter’s implementation beginning in 2021. It also said the world was staring at an imploding problem of disconnect and three lost decades, with the real issue being one of implementation.

India it seems lamented that countries have not been on target to meet the Kyoto Protocol commitments and that there are attempts to

block items linked to finance and had expressed that this was a great source of discomfort. India emphasized that there were unmet promises of the past and in looking forward, Parties must not forget the bedrock principles of equity and CBDR, adding that the problem that is being faced is in the shirking of responsibilities by developed countries.

Brazil agreed that main problem with the proposed CMA formulation was it was exclusively mitigation-oriented and wanted a rebalance in the text by including robust bullets on the issue of means of implementation, in particular financing and technology transfer.

Following several rounds of discussions, the CMA decision adopted re-emphasized “with serious concern the urgent need to address the significant gap between the aggregate effect of Parties’ mitigation efforts in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels”.

The decision adopted also recalled “the request to Parties contained in decision 1/CP.21 paras 23 and 24 (adopted in Paris on the communication or updating of NDCs), and urges Parties to consider the gap..., with a view to reflecting their highest possible ambition when responding to this request.”

The decision also recalls that “each Party’s successive NDC will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current NDC and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its CBDR and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances”.

On adaptation, the decision “calls on Parties to engage in adaptation planning processes and the implementation of actions, including the development or enhancement of relevant plans, policies and/or contributions in accordance with Article 7.8 of the Paris Agreement, with a view to continue making progress towards the global goal on adaptation

of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change”.

The decision also requests the “Adaptation Committee to consider approaches to reviewing the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation and to reflect the outcome of this consideration in its 2021 annual report”.

In relation to means of implementation, the CMA decision adopted “underlines the importance of implementing commitments under the Paris Agreement related to finance, technology transfer and capacity-building to address the mitigation and adaptation needs and priorities of developing countries”.

The decision adopted also “urges developed country Parties to provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation, in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention, and encourages other Parties to provide or continue to provide such support voluntarily”.

The decision also “recalls that the provision of scaled-up financial resources should aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation, taking into account country-driven strategies, and the priorities and needs of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and have significant capacity constraints, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States, considering the need for public and grant-based resources for adaptation.”

1/CMP.15

In relation to 1/CMP.15, Parties stressed the “urgency of delivering on the pre-2020 commitments under the Kyoto Protocol” and underscored “the urgent need for the entry into force of the Doha Amendment and strongly urges Parties to the Kyoto Protocol that have yet to ratify the Doha Amendment to deposit an instrument of acceptance with the Depositary as soon as possible”.