Cancún climate negotiations end without agreement on emissions reductions

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United Nations-sponsored climate change negotiations in Cancún, Mexico concluded last Saturday without any agreement between the more than 190 national government delegations on binding carbon emissions reduction targets.

The outcome came as no surprise. Key participants in the two-week discussions stated from the outset that no such deal would be reached. Twelve months ago, intractable divisions between the world's major powers led to the collapse of the previous major climate summit in Copenhagen, Denmark without agreement.

The divisions have not gone away. A telling indication was the failure of the vast majority of world leaders to attend the Cancún talks, unlike Copenhagen, where heads of state and government met. In Mexico, lower level government ministers and officials from the advanced capitalist countries were effectively assigned two tasks: firstly, to develop implementation mechanisms for the limited initiatives agreed in the "Copenhagen Accord", including on deforestation and financial assistance to impoverished countries; and secondly, to ensure that the negotiating process did not collapse ahead of the 16th meeting, to be convened by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, November-December 2011 in Durban, South Africa.

The Durban talks will be the last opportunity to reach agreement on an international treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol before the latter expires in 2012. Japan and Russia have declared they will not agree to extend Kyoto, which Washington has never ratified and which does not involve emission reductions for China and India.

The limited ambitions for the negotiations in Mexico were reflected in the so-called Cancún Agreements, signed by every delegation, except the Bolivian, at the very end. World leaders were effusive in their reaction. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that they "represent a balanced and significant step forward". European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso championed them as "an important step [which] shows that the multilateral process can deliver". UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon insisted that "the success of the UN conference on climate change in Cancún has set the world on the path to a safer, more prosperous, and sustainable world for all".

None of these statements has any basis in reality. What was decided in Mexico has done nothing to alleviate the climate change crisis.

The Cancún Agreements noted that "deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions", aimed at limiting global average temperature increases below 2 degrees Celsius, were required. Delegates also agreed to consider the latest scientific evidence in the future, with a view to "strengthening the long-term global goal on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge, including in relation to a global average temperature rise of 1.5 C". These were not legally binding commitments and, moreover, bear no relationship to the greenhouse gas reduction targets announced by governments internationally.

Scientists with the UN Environment Program recently assessed the difference between a temperature rise target of 2°C and the promised cuts in emissions. They found that in the extremely unlikely best case scenario, if every carbon emissions reduction pledge made by each national government were to be implemented by 2020, there would still be around 5 gigatonnes of excess carbon dioxide equivalent. This amount is equal to the emissions of all

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the world's cars, buses and trucks in 2005. In the worst case scenario, "where countries follow their lowest ambitions and accounting rules set by negotiators are lax rather than strict", carbon emissions in 2020 will be only slightly lower than "business as usual", that is, if nothing at all were done.

The Environment Program analysis points to the impossibility of resolving the climate change crisis within the framework of an economic and social order that rests on both the division of the world into rival nation states and production organised on the basis of profit. While climate change poses an enormous threat to the world's population, and cutting greenhouse gas emissions is becoming ever more urgent—the NASA Goddard Institute of Space Studies published data this week showing that 2010 had the highest average international temperatures since record-keeping began in the nineteenth century—the preoccupation of each government is to try to gain an advantage over rival powers and thus boost its own corporate and financial interests.

In Washington's case, as diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks demonstrate, this involves behind the scenes meddling in the UN climate negotiating process itself.

The Cancún Agreements marked a slight shift by the Chinese and Indian governments, which agreed to text that included reference to the need for all major economies to commit to emissions cuts in the future. At Copenhagen they opposed such a provision, provoking an angry response from the Obama administration. In Mexico, the two countries also agreed to more rigorous monitoring of their national emissions. Unlike what was being proposed at Copenhagen, however, these commitments are not binding. Last week's discussions gave no indication as to when the larger "developing" economies will be obliged to begin reducing emissions, and by how much.

The Cancún Agreements also included reference to the $100 billion "Green Climate Fund" for underdeveloped economies, promised in Copenhagen. The money is to go to mitigation strategies, forest conservation, and the provision of climate-related technologies. But it still remains unclear where this money will come from. According to the *Guardian*, "US officials said at the weekend that most of this would come from the private sector".

The fund was supposed to have been "fast tracked" after Copenhagen. But India's environment minister Jairam Ramesh said it was yet to materialise. "We need to sit down and have an honest accounting," he told the *Guardian*. "Where is it coming from? How is it being used? I would like transparency. How much is new and additional money? Nobody knows. How much of it is aid money recycled as fast money? Nobody knows."

The Cancún Agreements also extended the so-called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries project (REDD) that involves advanced economies paying to prevent logging and land clearance. REDD financing is slated to come initially from governments, but the scheme is designed with a view to encouraging private investors and hedge funds to generate carbon credits for the world market. In this way, the poorest countries will be further integrated into the vast global carbon trading racket that has been erected during the last decade.

In the course of the Cancún negotiations, World Bank President Robert Zoellick announced a new $100 million fund to help countries set up their own carbon trading schemes. China, India, Chile and Mexico are among those that had expressed interest in accessing the fund, he told the Associated Press.

There is no "market" solution to the climate change crisis, however, because it has been caused by the capitalist market itself. Only the development of a politically conscious and unified movement of the global working class, aimed at nothing less than the abolition of the profit system and establishment of a democratically planned world socialist economy, will create the rational reorganisation of productive methods necessary to implement the required greenhouse gas cuts, and at the same time raise the living standards of working people internationally.

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