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Climate change conference begins in Mexico

Rich Heffern | Dec. 1, 2010 Eco Catholic

The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancún, Mexico, kicked off Monday with calls for commitment and compromise.

In his opening speech, Mexican President Felipe Calderón cited last year?s hurricane in Mexico, this year?s floods in Pakistan and fires in Russia as examples of increasing incidences of natural disasters brought about by climate change and already affecting the poorest and most vulnerable.

Calling on negotiators in Cancún to make progress in the interest of their children and grandchildren, he said that the .eyes of the world.were focused on the meeting.

Climate change is an issue that affects life on a planetary scale, he said. ?What this means is that you will not be here alone negotiating in Cancún. By your side, there will be billions of human beings, expecting you to work for all of humanity,? he said.

The two-week meeting is the sixteenth Conference of the 194 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the sixth meeting of the 192 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol.

Mexican Foreign Minister and newly elected President of the Conference, Patricia Espinosa said: ?It is time to make a concerted effort before it is too late. We can only achieve the results if we commit to making progress.?

According to COP President Espinosa, governments meeting in Mexico can reach a deal to launch action on adaptation, technology transfer and forests; along with creating a new fund for long-term climate finance.

UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres said in her opening address that governments had revealed a growing convergence that a balanced set of decisions under both the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol could be an achievable outcome in Cancún. At the same time, a number of politically charged issues need to be resolved in order to reach such an outcome.

Chief among these is how to take mitigation actions forward. In the course of 2010, all 37 industrialised nations and 42 developing countries, including the largest emerging economies, submitted targets and voluntary actions to reduce or limit greenhouse gas emissions. These mitigation promises need to be formalised as a matter of urgency.

Additionally, under the Kyoto Protocol, politically charged issues include the need to avoid a gap after the first commitment period and the importance of having clarity on the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol, along with the continuation of engaging the private sector through the Kyoto Protocol.s market mechanisms beyond 2012.

Under the Convention, the unresolved issues include the accountability for implementation of mitigation targets and actions; the mobilization of long-term finance, the creation of a new fund for this and the accompanying accountability of its delivery, along with the understanding of fairness that will guide long-term mitigation efforts.

"When the stakes are high and issues are challenging, compromise is an act of wisdom that can unite different positions in creative ways. I am convinced that governments can compromise to find their way to a concrete outcome," the UN.s top climate change official Ms. Figueres said. "That outcome needs to be both firm and dependable and have a dedicated follow-on process for future work," she added.

Following up from the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Ms. Figueres said that developed countries had in the course of 2010 revealed a commitment to live up to the fast start finance pledged in 2009. Developed countries have announced pledges totaling USD 28 billion and many of them are now making information available on the disbursement of these funds.

Close to 15,000 participants, including government delegates from the 194 Parties to the UNFCCC and representatives from business and industry, environmental organizations and research institutions, are attending the two-week gathering in Cancún.

With 194 Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol has been ratified by 192 of the UNFCCC Parties. Under the Protocol, 37 States, consisting of highly industrialized countries and countries undergoing the process of transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction commitments. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system

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