

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

December 7, 2012 at 1:20pm

As Doha climate talks enter extra time, global leaders lack ?ambition, leadership?

by Brian Roewe

Eco Catholic

On the final scheduled day of international climate negotiations, the reports out of Doha, Qatar, signaled little progress in advancing action on climate change beyond vague pledges and toward the tangible, in the form of concrete strategies and commitments.

According to Reuters, hold-ups at the United Nations Conference to the Parties 13 (COP 13) include:

- a lack of a significant commitment by developed nations to a second period of the Kyoto Protocol ? countries on board with re-upping their carbon-cutting targets represent less than 15 percent of global emissions;
- a refusal among rich nations to increase financial and technological aid to developing countries to cope and curb the effects of climate change;
- and an overall lack of ambition among developed nations.

As what happened last year in Durban, South Africa, the talks are expected to extend into extra time. Some reports suggest representatives will continue debating into Saturday.

The frustration with a laggard, uninspired process extends beyond activists and observers, as delegates from developing countries have joined their voices to the chorus calling for action.

When a European representative requested a break from a plenary session to allow countries to reconcile difference in smaller groups, Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiah, president of the Qatari U.N. talks, responded ?I can sit here all year. You decide when to leave," the BBC reported.

Earlier in the week, *NCR* spoke with a professor attending the Doha talks, who foresaw such impasses, and expressed stifled expectations for any serious outcomes.

Doreen Stabinsky is a professor of global environmental politics at College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, and an agriculture and climate change consultant for multiple non-governmental organizations, including CARE International, Third World Network and the World Wildlife Fund.

NCR: Before the conference, U.N. secretary Christiana Figueres outlined three goals -- extending Kyoto; working toward a universal agreement; and speeding up technical/financial support for developing nations. Are these goals attainable? What are your expectations for the negotiations?

Stabinsky: Developed countries have consistently failed to meet commitments -- on emission reductions, on technical and financial support. This lack of leadership has clear impact on the ambition that developing countries will put forward. There is not universal agreement on a universal agreement -- and we can clearly blame this on the lack of action over the last two decades by developed countries who made a legal commitment in 1992 under the Convention to take the lead.

Kyoto will be extended, with an empty shell of a second commitment period, few members, and relatively insignificant in impact on the challenge before us. Many NGOs are advocating a rejection of the second commitment period under the terms that have been set out by the developed countries.

There is still little to no finance on the table.

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From your perspective, what is the most important outcome the conference could meet? What is the importance of renewing and extending commitments to the Kyoto Protocol?

Ambition and equity are the two pillars of action on climate moving forward. A Kyoto empty shell will not address either. Without developed country ambition and leadership on emission reductions, finance and technology transfer, we will not see the progress we need.

Equity is important in terms of who takes action -- developed countries have a historical responsibility for the problem and a legal responsibility to lead in addressing it.

And there will be no equity without action. Those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are those least responsible for the problem. Climate impacts are already affecting lives and livelihoods, as we can clearly see from the impacts of the recent typhoon in the Philippines, or hurricane Sandy in Cuba, Haiti.

Can any meaningful climate action occur without the U.S. or nations like China, Brazil, India agreeing to binding emissions levels, or other concrete commitments?

China, Brazil, India are all moving faster than the United States. There is a clear position articulated by the US that our way of life, living standards, are not up for negotiation. We don't take responsibility for our past actions, we don't admit to taking up significantly more than our share of atmospheric space, and the position in the negotiations seems to be about defending our right to continue to pollute.

The issue here is certainly about the legal nature of the regime as it moves forward. But before those rules

are in place, we have to measure voluntary actions. In this respect, China, India, Brazil are all moving forward at a pace far greater than that of the US.

What would leaving Doha without a firm Kyoto recommencement signify?

As I said before, it's more important for the climate to assess whether the Kyoto commitment is real or an empty shell. A recommencement without real emission reductions as part of the agreement is not desirable for people or the planet.

This COP, I'm afraid, continues in the long line of COPs filled with words, but no actions.

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