



Combating Climate Change: From Kyoto to Bali

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Summary

The most extensive international treaty on the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the Kyoto Protocol, will expire in 2012. The international negotiations efforts for a post-Kyoto-treaty are mainly conducted within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, 3-14 December 2007, in Bali, Indonesia, this Fact Sheet summarizes the agreements already achieved as well as the key issues to be resolved.

UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol

The UNFCCC, negotiated and adopted in the context of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, set the goal of reducing the world's emissions of GHGs to combat global warming and its consequences. But only with the so-called Kyoto Protocol¹, which was negotiated in 1997 and went into force in 2005, did the signatory states move up from the legally non-binding arrangement in Rio. The signatories to the Kyoto Protocol are divided into two general categories. First, the so-called Annex I states includes the developed countries.² These states have accepted mandatory reductions of their GHG emissions of 6 to 8 percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. Second, the so-called Non-Annex I countries are composed of developing countries, which have no legally binding obligations to reduce GHG emission. However, two potential Annex I countries, the United States as the world's greatest emitter of GHGs³, and Australia, did not sign the Protocol. Furthermore, other countries with large GHG emissions such as

China and India⁴ have ratified the protocol but are classified as Non-Annex I countries and are therefore not required to reduce emissions.

Steps Towards Bali

The next important step in the international discussion on a successor to the expiring Kyoto Protocol will be the United Nations Climate Change Conference, 3-14 December 2007, in Bali, Indonesia. In preparation for this Conference the UN's Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, convened a one-day High-Level meeting on climate change with more than 80 heads of state and other top officials from more than 150 countries at the UN headquarters on 24 September 2007. It was the largest meeting of world leaders ever on the issue of climate change. Three days later, U.S. President George W. Bush, who was not present at the UN meeting, hosted high-level government talks in Washington about climate change and potential strategies to combat its consequences. The 16 participating countries⁵ are responsible for about 74 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions⁶ and more than 80 percent of the world's overall GHG emissions. During both conferences areas of consensus as well as the lines of conflict for a potential Post-Kyoto-Arrangement emerged.

Consensus and Disagreements

Firstly, today, all states including the United States and other actors such as the UN acknowledge the existence as well as the partial anthropogenic causation of climate change. There is a general

¹ See: http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

² For a list of the so-called Annex I countries see the text of the UNFCCC
<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

³ In 2004 the U.S. emitted 7067.57 million tonnes of GHGs. See:
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/ENVIRONMENT/air_greenhouse_emissions.htm

⁴ In 1994, the last year for which data is available for these countries, China emitted 4057.31 and India 1214.25 million tonnes of GHGs. See:

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/ENVIRONMENT/air_greenhouse_emissions.htm

⁵ Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, The United States, and United Kingdom.

⁶ See:
<http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/indicators/204.html>

agreement about the necessity of political action to adjust to the already inevitable consequences of climate change as well as to mitigate its further effects. Secondly, it is commonly agreed that economic growth and climate protection are not mutually exclusive. Thirdly, actors concur with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility”⁷. This implies that all countries are obliged to protect the world’s environment, but countries at different development stages have different obligations.

Such agreement notwithstanding, there remain a number of contentious issues to be resolved within a potential successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Firstly, states disagree about their future commitments to reduce emissions. On the one hand there are member states that call for long-term goals as well as legally binding targets. For instance, at the UN High-Level event Portugal’s Prime Minister José Sócrates claimed on behalf of the EU that global emissions have to be reduced to at least 50 percent below 1990 levels by mid-century and to agree on binding emission reduction targets for developed countries.⁸ Furthermore, the EU insisted that climate change transcends national borders as well as sectors of society and therefore requires a global framework. This framework, as the UN Secretary-General put it, depends on contributions “from all countries and all sectors of society, from civil society and business, to regional and local governments”⁹.

Conversely, to tackle global warming countries like the United States and members of the developing countries’ Group of 77 (G 77) emphasize long-term targets, flexible, country-specific measures, as well as the strengthening of environmentally friendly technologies. At the Washington conference President Bush argued that “each nation will design its own separate strategies for making progress toward achieving this long-term goal. These strategies will reflect each country’s different energy resources, different stages of development, and different economic needs.”¹⁰

Another issue for disagreement is the United States’ insistence that multilateral agreements on GHG emission reductions “must involve all the world’s largest producers of GHG emissions, including

developed and developing nations.”¹¹ Only then will the United States participate in debates on an international agreement.¹² By contrast, developing countries emphasize the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities.” It is reflected for instance, by India’s statement at the UN’s High-Level event that “India’s per-capita GHG emissions would at no stage exceed the per capita GHG emissions of developed countries.”¹³ At the same event, the Chinese government proposed that developed countries “should meet their emission reduction targets set in the Kyoto Protocol, help developing countries build capacity in tackling climate change and continue to take the lead in reducing emissions after 2012.”¹⁴ Moreover, China feels the need to increase financial assistance and technology transfer to developing countries, but warns of over-emphasizing the role of market mechanisms.¹⁵

Challenges Ahead

The Bali conference will only be the next step towards a Post-Kyoto-Agreement. A number of challenging issues stand out:

- G77: The G 77 encompasses also the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)¹⁶, which objects progressive climate protection policies. As the G77 makes decisions in unanimity, the smallest common denominator may turn out being a non-progressive position towards a Kyoto successor.
- A successful outcome in Bali would map out an ambitious agenda, the procedural, and the benchmarks for negotiations over the next two years.
- By contrast, a failure in Bali would leave the international community without a road map for comprehensive multilateral negotiations, in which case progress towards a binding successor to the Kyoto Protocol will be difficult to achieve. At the same time such an outcome may lead to non-binding treaties or bilateral agreements (e.g. between the United States and China).

⁷ See: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

⁸ See: <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/portugal-eng.pdf>

⁹ See: <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/sq.pdf>

¹⁰ See: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070928-2.html>

¹¹ See: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070928-2.html>

¹² See: <http://www.germanwatch.org/klima/klichi07.pdf>

¹³ See: <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/india-eng.pdf>

¹⁴ See: <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/china-eng.pdf>

¹⁵ See: <http://www.un.org/webcast/climatechange/highlevel/2007/pdfs/china-eng.pdf>

¹⁶ The member states of the OPEC are Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Qatar, Indonesia, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Nigeria, Ecuador, Gabon, and Angola. See: <http://www.opec.org/aboutus/>