Climate change talks end with Doha Climate Gateway

Title
The latest round of climate change talks closed this Saturday in Doha, Qatar. After two weeks of intense and frustrating negotiations governments reached agreement on a compromise text which yet again falls far short of what is needed to keep the world on a pathway of limiting global average temperature rises to less than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The lack of urgency is extremely disappointing.

Amidst impassioned words from many developing countries including the Philippines, hit by the 'Bopha' cyclone, rising sea levels in the Pacific islands states, just a few weeks after Sandy hit the Caribbean and US, and UNEP released its *Emissions Gap Report 2012* – economics and politics yet again win the day. 'There was an opportunity to reach fair, ambitious outcomes, but this is not it,' said Melanie Heath, Head of Policy, BirdLife International.'The lack of ambition against a backdrop of increased climate change impacts across the world is intensely disappointing'.

One key development was the future of the Kyoto Protocol which Parties agreed to extend for another eight years to 2020 with this second commitment period starting in January 2013. This is the only legally binding component of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Within the Protocol developed countries set emission reduction targets. Several key countries have recently dropped out of the mechanisms (notably Canada, Japan, New Zealand and Russia) and those that remain represent just 15% of global emissions. However this is a substantive decision and sends a signal that at least some developed countries are committed to reduce their carbon emissions. Also countries agreed in Doha that in 2014 Kyoto Protocol countries would review their emissions reduction targets in line with the 25-40% range by 2014 at the latest. While it could have been stronger, the decision reinforces a clear moral obligation for countries to increase their emission reduction targets prior to 2020 and provides opportunities for them to do so. What is shameful is that countries can carry over their emission allowances from before 2012 into the next eight years. These loopholes essentially create 'hot air' and weaken carbon market mechanisms, with countries such as Poland who have not emitted as much as they expected in the previous period, being allowed to trade these permits in the future.

Markedly Australia, EU, Japan, Lichtenstein, Monaco, Norway and Switzerland provided political declarations (essentially promises) that they would not purchase these emission allowance carry overs (so called AAUs). But to move forward not only more ambitious emission reduction targets are needed but also finance. At the climate negotiations in

Copenhagen in 2009 countries pledged to mobilise $100 billion by 2020 to mitigate and adapt to climate change. For the 2010-2012 period approximately $30 billion has been found. The Doha decision asks for submissions from governments on long term finance pathways, calls for public funds for adaptation but does not mention a figure, and encourages developed countries to maintain funding at existing levels dependent on their economies. It does not provide any pre-2020 targets that could have served to instill heightened ambition.

This was always going to be a difficult meeting. Five years of negotiating time has been dedicated to the work stream on long-term cooperative action, which outlines a balanced package of work across mitigation, adaptation, capacity building, technology transfer and finance, and this needed to be closed to allow discussions to be focused on a new fair, ambitious and legally binding agreement to be developed by 2015 for operation in 2020. Views differed as to how these items should be considered in the future. In the end most of the decisions at the COP were procedural – punting nearly all activities into new work programmes or subsuming them within other negotiating and technical tracks of the Convention. Fearful that precious time is being wasted, John Lanchbery, Chief Climate Change Officer at RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) said "these talks have succeeded in sorting out some outstanding technical business but what's dreadful is that it hasn't done anything to reduce emissions now'. On climate change adaptation, an important outcome emerged on ‘ loss and damage’. We saw increased political space on this issue as countries hotly debated how to deal with the damage in developing countries from extreme events and slow onset events caused by climate change that could not be abated by adaptation or mitigation efforts. “We are seeing that the costs of failing to reduce climate risk being internalised in the negotiations” said Robert Munroe, BirdLife’s Climate Change Officer. “In Doha, the work programme on loss and damage has been given new tasks to inform the establishment of an institutional arrangement, such as an international mechanism, in order to give this urgent issue the political recognition that it deserves – the impacts are happening now. Rather than further delay like we saw in Doha, this must happen at COP19, a year from now”.

On efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation, a mechanism known as REDD+, decisions on how to measure, report and verify emissions reductions, set baselines against which to measure actions and how to finance results-based actions, were pushed to next year. However, countries did agree to discuss next year the role that forests play in providing benefits beyond carbon reduction, including forest biodiversity, which is essential for the conservation of natural forests. So the outcome is a gateway. All countries need now to move speedily and wholeheartedly through this gateway; to go beyond talking about doing the right thing to enacting it - to be ambitious in setting their targets, committing finance to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change impacts, and to work to conclude an agreement which includes all countries by 2015. The international wheels turn very slowly but still in the right direction - in the words of the Philippines negotiator the world must find the courage to take responsibility for the future we want. ‘If not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?’ We must all return home with these words ringing in our ears and do all we can to act individually, locally, nationally, regionally and globally to secure the future we want and the world needs.