

Roadmap to a new global agreement ? what did Durban deliver for our climate?

Title

The UN climate change talks in Durban, South Africa concluded in the early hours of Sunday morning. The talks dragged into a second extra day as negotiators worked hard to reach agreement. In the end they took one step closer to a legally binding deal, agreeing to establish the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action to negotiate a new global agreement by 2015. This new global agreement would have legal force and require all countries, developed and developing (particularly fast-growing major emitters such as China) to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. This agreement will not however not come into effect or start to be implemented until 2020. Parties also agreed to extend the Kyoto Protocol, thus preserving the only current legally binding instrument with emission reduction targets and timetables for developed countries. A new progressive alliance of over one hundred vulnerable countries, backed by the European Union lobbied hard and created positive momentum for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Period which will commence on 1 January 2013. However, these decisions leave a major gap in the emissions reductions currently pledged and what the science tells us is needed. Recent research shows that to keep global temperature rise below 2°C, global emissions must peak around 2016 and reduce by 3% annually thereafter.

Although a step in the right direction, the bottom line is that there remains a profound mismatch between the level of action demanded by our best scientific knowledge and the current level of ambition of the world's governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Melanie Heath, BirdLife's Head of Policy, explained. "We are currently on a path towards 3°C to 5°C of climate change in this century, with likely disastrous consequences for many of the world's inhabitants and ecosystems". Importantly, the Durban package includes the launch of the Green Climate Fund. It is clear that this is urgently needed to support developing countries climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. This fund has the potential to make a real difference but cannot be an empty shell and must be populated with new and additional finance that flows quickly to those countries that need it. Durban has kept alive and opened the political space to negotiate a fair, ambitious and binding deal but much still needs to be worked out. Parties must approach the negotiations from 2012 with a renewed sense of urgency, increasing their ambition in terms of emission reductions, and putting these pledges firmly on the table. The Durban Platform text itself "notes with grave concern" the significant gap between pledges and what is needed to limit dangerous climate change "this concern must be translated into binding targets and concrete action, and drive a robust workplan on enhancing mitigation ambition in 2012."