

# THE CANCUN AGREEMENTS: AN ACCLAIMED FAILURE

The average global temperature in the last 12 continuous months (2009-2010) has been the highest since instrumental measurements exist, and is the warmest period of the millennium according to indirect measurements. Global warming progresses unrelentingly. The international instance that should face the problem is the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), recently convened in Cancun, Mexico (COP-16). Previous negotiations predicted that it would not be successful, and during the meeting no agreements appeared to emerge. However, in the final session a package of agreements was proposed; it was approved and euphorically acclaimed by the assistants (<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>). The truth is that there were no significant advances, only negotiations in progress, whose controversial aspects remained pending for the next meeting (COP-17), in South Africa.

The continuation of the Kyoto Protocol (KP), an icon for developing countries, was questioned by Japan, Russia and Canada, who notified that they would not sign for a second period. The KP, to end in 2012, is the only legal document binding the industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gases (GHG). It was argued that the 37 countries having responsibilities in the KP only emit 27% of GHG and want a new binding treaty, which would compel the USA, China, and other big emitters to reduce their emissions. The Cancun Agreement only states that the Parties accept to continue negotiations that insure continuity of obligations. A diplomatic way to put off the issues.

There were no improvements concerning the GHG emissions reduction proposed in the Copenhagen Agreement (COP-15). The progress is that they are now officially within the UNFCCC. The proposed (not binding) reductions are totally insufficient and allow the prediction of a warming of at least 3°C in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (*Interciencia* 35: 624-631, 2010). The novelty is that Cancun, as a requirement of the industrialized nations, established a registry of relief actions in developing countries, to be submitted every two years, including monitoring, report and verification (MRV) of emissions.

The Agreement formalized reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). Social and environmental aspects are covered, but the crucial issue of funding remained unsolved, the final decision being postponed until South Africa. The options are carbon market vs governmental and/or multilateral funds. Several countries

oppose REDD as a new form of certified carbon emission reductions (CERs), which allow industrialized countries fulfill their relief obligations by buying CERs from developing ones (*Interciencia* 35: 797, 2010). According to analysts, a market mechanism must be adopted in order to collect the many billions of dollars needed. Politically, industrialized countries, unable to reduce their own emissions, would be ready to finance the relatively cheaper REDD. Paradoxically, due to REDD problems, groups that defend forests are the biggest opponents of the program, and it hardly will be formally adopted by a UN agreement. National and/or bilateral initiatives appear to be more promissory.

The Cancun package reiterates the promise of industrialized countries in Copenhagen, of 30 billion USD in quick funds for 2010-2012, and 100 billion annually starting in 2020. It was established to design a Green Climate Fund under the Conference of the Parties. It took a year to find a name for the fund and decide who will be responsible for it, but the source of the money remains uncertain. Other agreements, whose details were also postponed, include a Cancun Adaptation Framework and a Climate Technology Network.

The Agreements reveal that developing countries made concessions, while industrialized ones managed to reduce their obligations. It would seem that the latter try to free themselves from binding commitments of KP and change them for a voluntary reduction system, such as Copenhagen. Also, the clean development mechanism, strengthened in Cancun (carbon capture and sequestering would be incorporated to the system), would allow them to use ever more CERs to cover obligations. It is clear that the actions of developing countries, which emit ~50% of GHG, are crucial for the relief of the climate change, but the main responsibility, reducing emissions and funding poorest countries, undoubtedly corresponds to the industrialized ones.

The negotiations at the UNFCCC have been slow and scarcely successful, including the KP. Cancun failure, disguised as success, is extremely dangerous: it distorts reality and raises false expectations. The excuse that "faith in the multilateral process was restored" is questionable. Time is running out, as in order to avoid a disastrous warming, an early and strong start of mitigation is unavoidable. As well as temperature increases, diplomatic negotiations will continue in the UNFCCC, but the risk exists that agreements and measures arrive at a feverish world. Perhaps the chaotic climate should be treated by more flexible instances?

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