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CLIMATE CHANGE: Insubstantial Shadows

Analysis by Keya Acharya



TOKYO, Jul 29 (IPS) - Amidst the cacophony of discussions and negotiations within the international climate change caucus, one particular group, the G8, had held out hope for effective implementation -- more than the United Nations Kyoto Protocol (KP), which remains bogged down in various degrees of non-compliance.

Currently there is, along with United States' outright rejection of the KP, acrimonious debate on the 'common but differentiated' principle which sets differing emission-reduction targets on countries based on their history of emissions, with richer nations requiring higher cuts.

Moreover, some countries, like Canada, a G8 member, have not even kept their initial commitments on cutting emissions as per the KP.

There is also active discussion to agree on what policy should be adopted after 2012 and whether prominent developing nations like India and China should be bound to emission-reduction targets after 2012.

Meanwhile, the G8 nations of Germany, France, Britain, U.S., Canada, Italy, Russia and Japan, the latter holding its current presidency, account for two-thirds of global social product, half the world's trade and three-quarters of global development aid. It includes four members of the EU and four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. It also has informal representation at all its meetings from the EU and is currently the world's most important and informal forum of heads of state.

In the cantankerous climate change scenario of today, an influential and powerful G8, with its invitee '+5' emerging nations of Brazil, China, India, South Africa and Mexico did hold out more hope than the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s system of negotiated agreement.

Indeed, the G8 had declared climate change as one of its agendas in 2005 at the Gleneagles where there was agreement agreed to cut emissions, undertake energy efficiency, fund research in cleaner technology and engage with international donor agencies for clean technology in developing nations.

Pledges were made to pay attention to climate change in Africa, develop and implement 'best practice' guidelines, and work out a 'new paradigm for international co-operation' with the '+5' nations.

Working with this Gleneagles declaration was an influential group of parliamentarians, supported by the Britain, Germany, the EU Commissioner for Environment, the National People's Congress of China and others who launched the G8+5 Climate Change dialogue a few months prior to the Gleneagles summit.

The organisation, called GLOBE (acronym for global legislators for a balanced environment) is now a group of 100 parliamentarians from 13 countries including the '+5' and key international agencies that have been "shadowing the Gleneagles process" as it put it, up to the recent G8 summit at Hokkaido, to put forward a formula for a post-2012 climate change agreement when the KP expires.

Globe's 'key asset', it says, is its ability to bring together influential personages from nations with conflicting stances on climate change action to work towards a common political consensus, in particular with the current Japanese presidency of the G8.

Indeed, Globe has an important mix of Japanese delegates who showcased their country's proactive environmental policies at a pre-G8 Globe session in Tokyo, just days ahead of the G8 Summit at Hokkaido in early July 2008.

The group then said they had reached a 'historic' agreement between all participants at their session in Tokyo, thereafter presented to Japanese premier Yasuo Fukuda to take to the G8 at Hokkaido.

Lord Michael Jay, Britain's lead negotiator on climate change at the Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005 and leader of the Globe dialogue, said he was 'enormously grateful' to all the parliamentarians for their spirit of co-operation that led to their consensus 3-page recommendations.

The Globe agreement emphasised the urgency of action necessary, including developing financial mechanisms to help poor countries adapt to climate change, transfer of technology and the need for flexibility in accommodating different national strategies and circumstances.

The agreement backed the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, recognising current, historical and per capita emissions of greenhouse gases.

Japanese MP of the opposition Democratic Party and Globe vice president, Wakako Hironaka was optimistic that the agreement would be taken up by the G8 leaders.

"I don't think this agreement is very far away from what the G8 is planning," she said at the Globe meeting, "though it does depend on how the USA reacts".

Today, after vast sums of money have been expended on negotiations of all types and titles, and after the hoopla and hype of the Globe agreement, there is the possibility of failure yet again, with the G8 meeting at Hokkaido splitting apart noisily over the issue of emission-percentages.

All that the G8 has come up with was a watery admittance of reducing emissions by 50 percent by 2050, with no specifications on 'how', or 'how much' by 2020.

Nothing within Globe's recommendations found a footing within the G8 at Hokkaido.

Globe is now defensive about its achievements so far.

"The document agreed by GLOBE was by parliamentarians from the G8 and +5 countries, NOT governments.

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Therefore it is not binding," wrote Terry Townshend, director of policy development at Globe in response to IPS's e-mail query on the matter.

"The document was intended to put pressure on G8 leaders to be more ambitious and to show them that there was support in their parliaments for more ambitious action. Whether they acted on that was not in GLOBE's hands," continued Townshend.

Nor, it appears, is the matter in the hands of the U.N.'s prolific Conferences of Parties on Climate Change (COP). If anything, the next impending COP meeting at Copenhagen in November 2009 stands further weakened, after the G8's haziness on the matter.

Meanwhile, the climate change bandwagon continues to grow in myriad private ventures, including e-mail lists and talk-shows, helped by the vast amounts of money being circulated in 'climate change projects' around the world.

One could argue that both the U.N. and the G8 meetings have helped push the world to understanding global warming and the urgency for measures to check it, and that without this awareness, not much would have moved forward anyway.

But that may sound like too little, too late. Globe now says its parliamentarians will be taking its recommendations to their constituencies.

(END/2008)

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