

UN talks harbor new promise in climate fight

The UN climate league departed the African port city of Durban on Sunday with some high pledges, albeit heading toward an unknown destination. The future of a legal framework that would make all countries committed to a global pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent climate change is secured alongside the extension of the Kyoto Protocol, but the forum has yet to determine how countries can submit to the new legal regime.



Finally agreed: Ministers gather in a huddle where agreement was reached to extend the Kyoto Protocol during a plenary session at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP17) in Durban on Sunday. According to the agreement, all the biggest polluters to take action on climate change.
Reuters/Agnieszka Flak

Exhausted by the ongoing haggling over the past 48 hours, and pressed for time, delegates representing the 194 nations at the agreed to begin a second commitment period for the Kyoto treaty in 2013 and to start negotiation on the legal framework for this next year. However, it has not been decided yet whether the Kyoto treaty will expire within five or eight years after the extension period begins, and no new emissions reduction targets were made. UN Framework for Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) secretary-general Christiana Figueres said the Durban conference had achieved a breakthrough in that countries which had earlier refused to participate in the Kyoto Protocol were now ready to commit to a new legal regime that will be regulated under the Durban Platform.

“All the countries in the world are now within the broader framework, but of course with differentiated [responsibilities]. They will now engage in the next few years in a very constructive conversation about how the responsibility that lies on every single shoulder is going to be taken forward,” she said.

Besieged by the dispute over a long-term legally binding regime, the UN climate conference was extended for two days and officially became the longest such UN climate meeting since one was held up in 1995.

The European Union (EU), which produced the roadmap for the new regime, was challenged by the US, China and India. China and India voiced concerns about the details of the plan, particularly if it would put greater burden on them as the largest emitters, while the US said it would prefer to see only a voluntary commitment to emissions reduction and that would not join unless all countries agreed to commit.

In the final hours, China and India submitted to the roadmap under the condition that the new legal framework would adopt the principles of common and differentiated responsibility and respective capability, which acknowledge national conditions in the establishment of targets for emissions reduction.

The conference concluded its final results, known as the Durban Package, on Sunday morning. Alongside the Kyoto treaty extension and the Durban Platform, the conference also authorizes the management of the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Committee that was mandated by the Cancun consensus.

The EU, which had initially threatened to halt contributions to the climate fund and the second commitment to the Kyoto protocol in the absence of the adoption of the new roadmap, saw some of its members – Denmark, Germany and Great Britain – make pledges for the fund capitalization. South Korea, which co-hosts next year’s conference with Qatar, also said it would chip in.

Key points of Durban Platform

- Ad-hoc working group on Long-Term Cooperative Action would expire within a year
- To launch a process to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or a legal outcome applicable to all countries
- Mandates the establishment of Ad-hoc working group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action that shall start its work on establishing the legal framework in the first half of 2012 and finish its work by 2015
- Requests countries to submit by Feb. 28, 2012, their views on options and ways for further increasing the level of ambition gap with a view to ensuring the highest possible mitigation efforts by all parties