

## Mixed results from Durban climate talks for Indonesia

*Fitrian Ardiansyah, Canberra*

Agreements achieved in the early morning of Dec. 11 in Durban, South Africa, not only appeared to salvage the UN climate talks but have also raised further questions about the commitments and capabilities of countries around the world in urgently tackling climate change.

After two weeks and more than a day extension of difficult negotiations, governments involved in the 17th session of the Conference of Parties (COP-17) agreed to extend the Kyoto Protocol and to negotiate a binding agreement for all countries to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

These agreements, known as the "Durban Platform", also include the implementation of the Green Climate Fund, establishment of the Adaptation Committee, and further development of REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation).

The results of Durban climate negotiations need to be cautiously analyzed since they have potentially different implications for the planet and developing countries like Indonesia.

For Indonesia, it is crucial if negotiations in Durban resulted in decisions which clearly translate into or present strong signals leading to global actions to cut GHG emissions and to financially and technologically support actions on mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

Developing countries in Durban, for instance, managed to get developed countries to agree to the inclusion of a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which will commence in January 2013, in the "Durban Platform".

This result will definitely avoid a gap at the end of the first commitment period of the Protocol, ending in 2012.

The Protocol, having set binding targets for 37 developed countries to reduce GHG emissions to 5 percent below the 1990 levels by 2012, however, may lose its significance in the second period since some countries such as Canada, Japan and Russia were reportedly unwilling to take part.

With the US still opting out of the Protocol, it is likely that the Protocol will only achieve small reductions of GHG emissions.

This situation apparently justifies the importance of another agreed decision, as included in the "Durban Platform", which is to have a roadmap to negotiate a new global treaty covering all countries to reduce GHG emissions.

The negotiations for this treaty are expected to be concluded by 2015 and the treaty will come into force from 2020. Many climate analysts, nevertheless, are not convinced with the possible directions of this particular agreement.

Although covering both developed and developing countries, including Indonesia, the projected emissions resulting from this possible treaty – calculated based on the current pledges made by these countries since Copenhagen COP-15 in 2009 – may likely lead to a global average temperature rise of more than 3.5 degrees Celsius.

This means that the future of people living on this planet, particularly in vulnerable countries like Indonesia, is at stake. The economy and many aspects of human civilization are threatened.

Therefore, there is a need for serious new commitments and actions to address the "emissions gap" so that the planned treaty can effectively tackle climate change.

As of Durban, there were no new pledges for stronger emissions reductions.

In addition, waiting until 2020 for the treaty to take effect may also be too late. There is a huge risk that by that time, the limit of emissions in the atmosphere has been reached so that actions to stabilize the climate are next to impossible and too expensive.

Another perceived crucial agreement incorporated in the “Durban Platform” is a formal structure of the Green Climate Fund and a work plan to operate it by mobilizing funds from both private and public sources.

A number of countries signaled their readiness to contribute to the Fund but realizing the promise may prove to be a daunting task.

The global financial crisis was often cited as the reason behind the difficult negotiations and realization on finance.

This situation, hence, has left many unanswered questions for developing countries to fight climate change since the Fund is supposed to be used to support policies and actions in these countries.

Also, the negotiations on finance, specifically on the Green Climate Fund, have not resulted in the establishment of a specific window for REDD+. A special window funds for REDD+ at the global level, if agreed, is expected to provide significant support for tropical forest nations, including Indonesia, to advance their REDD+ development at national and local levels.

A decision coming out in Durban which can lead to financial support for REDD+ is the agreement on a variety of sources for financing ranging from public and private finance, as well as market mechanisms.

This decision will not only open the door for new and long-term investments in REDD+ but also at least help ensuring the future of investments already put in place in supporting REDD+ readiness and early actions. Other aspects of REDD+ were also agreed, among others, covering the reference levels and safeguards.

The progress made on the reference levels is necessary since establishing these levels is important not only for determining emission reductions but also as a basis for REDD+ funding mechanisms.

However, the aspect of rules on safeguards in REDD+ decision appears to be weak, especially when it comes to rules on protecting indigenous communities and biodiversity. This may undermine the credibility of REDD+ and make it unattractive in the eyes of investors.

Another positive decision reached in Durban, especially for vulnerable countries like Indonesia, is the establishment of the Adaptation Committee.

This Committee will coordinate adaptation activities on a global scale. The establishment of this Committee has put one of important the components to help developing countries confronting the increasingly dangerous impacts of climate change.

In general, the Durban climate talks have provided mixed results for developing countries like Indonesia. There was some marginal progress made but huge unanswered questions remain.

Political promises and weak agreements will hardly reduce GHG emissions. Only strong decisions and real actions can demonstrate the level of seriousness in addressing climate change.

It is therefore imperative for Indonesia, unilaterally and with other countries, to continue to work hard and show real actions on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Without these actions, the survival of the nation and the fate of the planet will look uncertain and grim.

*The writer is a doctoral candidate at the Australian National University, and the recipient of the Australian Leadership Award and Allison Sudradjat Award.*