

UN Climate Change Conference

# Copenhagen: India Signs Undemocratic US-scripted Accord

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The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP-15) has finally ended in Copenhagen, and it is now time to officially write the obituary. This week-long conference, where 110 countries of the world got together to try and evolve a blueprint to handle the climate change crisis, has quite predictably and most unfortunately ended in failure. Predictable, because for a long time now there have been indications that the US would continue to hold the rest of the world to ransom by refusing to accept responsibility for its role in creating the climate crisis.

Much was at stake at Copenhagen. The Kyoto Protocol, which was the first concerted attempt to address global warming, comes to an end in 2012 and the Copenhagen conference was meant to build on the foundations that Kyoto had set. The Kyoto agreement essentially suggested that all industrialized countries cut down on their carbon dioxide emissions. Scientists however believe that the emission reductions suggested in Kyoto are far from sufficient to keep the atmospheric carbon dioxide at an acceptable level, and therefore it was widely hoped that the Copenhagen summit would result in an agreement wherein industrialized countries would commit themselves to deep cuts in their current emission levels.

Before the negotiations officially began, the US came up with a proposal to cut its emissions to just 3 per cent below its 1990 levels. This proposal was patently absurd, since any meaningful effort towards mitigating the climate crisis demands that the US cut down its emissions by at least 40 per cent. Apart from this pathetic offer, Barack Obama (representing his corporate funders) came to Copenhagen armed with the usual bullying tactics and US's oft-used trump card: unless India and China agree to binding emission cuts, neither will we. In a most shameful betrayal of third world unity, India and China responded to this blackmail by breaking away from the group of 77 countries (G-77) and signing a US-scripted 'deal' on the last day of the conference. It is indeed shocking and shameful that India and China, along with Brazil and South Africa decided to sign this deal - an agreement which signifies an important departure from the developing countries' long-standing position at the climate change talks.

## Copenhagen Agreement: A Recipe for Disaster

The 'Agreement' that was finally tabled (though not approved) at the conference is nothing but a recipe for an environmental catastrophe of monumental proportions. To those millions all over the world who were looking forward to an agreement with some teeth, capable of ensuring swift and

effective mitigation of the climate crisis, the agreement is a huge disappointment.

To begin with, the agreement mentions no legally binding emission cuts for industrialised countries, thus effectively letting them off the hook. Given the fact that prior to the conference, many other industrialised countries had promised reductions (the EU for instance had unilaterally agreed to reduce its emissions by 20%, and the UK by 40%), it is clear that the US obduracy and arrogance finally scuttled any meaningful proposal. More importantly, the agreement asks developing countries to also 'voluntarily' reduce emissions, thus eliminating the important distinction between developing and developed countries. Developing countries have fought long and hard to maintain this distinction - and this huge political volte-face aided and abetted by Manmohan Singh absolves the developed world from their historic role in creating the present crisis, and essentially locks existing inequities for perpetuity. The agreement also states that developing countries' performance on emission reductions (even those that are not funded by international finance and technology) will be subjected to "international consultation and analysis". This clause clearly opens the door to enforcing international monitoring, and will soon lead to binding commitments by developing countries.

Regarding the other important agenda of funding mitigation efforts in developing countries, the developed countries have set a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion a year by 2020. This includes a short-term financing pledge (for 2010-2012) of \$10.6 billion from the EU, \$11 billion from Japan, and \$3.6 billion from the US. To put this 'dole' in perspective, the EU's contribution (which is the largest) is approximately 0.5% of global entertainment and media spending, 0.7% of the US military expenditure for 2008 and 1.4% of the bailout package that richest corporations of the world received following the economic recession! The priorities of the powers-that-be, and the level of their commitment (or the lack of it) to tackling the climate crisis, has become abundantly clear.

### **The UPA's Surrender to US Imperialism**

At Copenhagen, Jairam Ramesh and Manmohan Singh worked overtime to broker this blatantly pro-US deal. An effort which earned them praise from none less than Obama in his post-conference speech. And while this betrayal of G-77 and of India's poor is shocking, it is certainly not surprising. Some time back, Ramesh wrote a "confidential" letter to the Prime Minister articulating precisely the agreement which has been now signed. At that time, the UPA tried to defend itself and fend off the resulting uproar by distancing itself from Ramesh's proposals. Now, after the Prime Minister himself has signed this proposal, the slavish, pro-US kowtowing of the UPA stands thoroughly exposed. Let us not forget that India has already announced targets for reducing carbon intensity (i.e. not total greenhouse gas emissions, but emissions per unit of GDP generated) - as a result of a 'bilateral agreement' with the US.

Not surprisingly, India's and China's stand has deservedly invited an angry response from the other developing countries. And it was not just the content of the agreement that merited their anger. The entire process of drafting the agreement was marked by secrecy and a lack of respect for basic democratic principles - most countries were deliberately kept away from the drafting process. Bolivia, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Cuba have therefore blamed those who have drafted the deal for showing them great "disrespect" by leaving them out of the drafting process and imposing their document on the vast majority. The Sudanese delegate Lumumba Di-Aping has gone to the extent of comparing the deal to the Holocaust.

Overall, the Copenhagen summit was a shameful display of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)'s subservience to US imperialism. Instead of this betrayal, what Jairam Ramesh and Manmohan Singh

should have done was to cash in on the massive world-wide support and aspirations for a meaningful agreement. They should have joined hands with the vulnerable coastal nations most likely to suffer the most from the climate crisis and the G-77 to build pressure on the US. The industrialised countries, including the US, have to be forced to accept responsibility for their huge greenhouse gas emissions. More importantly, they have to be held accountable for the historic role that they have played over the past two centuries in contributing to the climate crisis through their capital and energy intensive economies.

India should of course also reduce its emissions - not because the US demands it, not even because it is a huge contributor of greenhouse gas emissions (though India's total emissions are quite high, its per capita emissions are just 0.9 tonnes per person per year compared to the US's 20.1 tonnes and China's 2.3 tonnes) but because it is in the larger interests of India's poor and because it is essential for maintaining the delicate ecological balance. India should have demanded funding and technology transfer from the industrialised countries for reducing its emissions. Let us understand very clearly that this funding is not a 'gift' from some of the richest countries in the world, it is rather a small attempt on their part to compensate the millions of poor in the developing countries for the massive crisis that they have plunged the world into through the mindless, profit-driven, ecologically insane 'development' paradigm that they have been pursuing for centuries. This funding could have been used to completely revamp our internal energy policy. It is an ideal time and occasion to pull away from our fossil-dependent energy policy to a more ecologically sensible one that depends more on renewable sources of energy.

However, it is clear that the UPA is least interested in pursuing any of this. For instance, forcing Indian industry to invest in cleaner technology or to comply with strict pollution standards is complete anathema to the current regime, which is hell-bent on protecting the huge profit margins of corporations. The UPA, with its single-minded agenda of pandering to US imperialism and corporate interests back home, would much rather take the business-as-usual approach. And in the process, be party to what the Sudan has called the new Holocaust.

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**P.S.**

\* Radhika Krishnan, Liberation, January 2010. From ML International Newsletter, January-February 2010.