

Two C or Not Two C? Little Mermaid; Little Progress in Copenhagen

The Co₂untdown to Co₂penhagen - Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the UN said that "the future of humanity depends upon these talks". Jim Hansen, NASA chief scientist, urged that Copenhagen must fail because political compromise would make any agreement worse for the climate than getting the right one. He is also fundamentally opposed to carbon trading, which is at the heart of climate treaties, which he compares to Papal indulgences that the Catholic Church sold to sinners for redemption in the Middle Ages.

Global warming is all about degrees of temperature. For a number of years it was accepted that a 2°C rise in global temperatures above pre-industrial levels would give an 'acceptable' chance of averting runaway climate change. We are already at 0.7°C. Last year Jim Hansen said that this should be revised to 1°C. At Copenhagen, the presidents of Bolivia and Venezuela called upon the world to minimize global warming to 1°C, forecasting that above this, "many islands will disappear and Africa will suffer a holocaust." The Alliance of Small Island States (43 countries) protest at Copenhagen that any deal that allows temperatures to rise by more than 1.5°C is 'not negotiable'. Their call was backed by a further 48 countries. The following day, the UN conference chief Yvo de Boer implied that this proposal had little chance of being adopted. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "We are facing impending disaster on a monstrous scale ... a global goal of about 2°C is to condemn Africa to incineration and no modern development ... it is better to have no deal than to have a bad deal".

A confidential UN analysis obtained by the Guardian stated: 'the emissions cuts offered so far at the Copenhagen summit would still lead to global temperatures rising by an average of 3°C'. The newspaper article adds: According to the Stern Review: 'A rise of 3°C would mean up to 170 million more people suffering severe coastal floods and 550 million more at risk of hunger, as well as leaving up to 50% of species facing extinction'. And 3°C implies runaway climate change.

What did the summit achieve? Given the heartfelt hyperbole from the great and the good, heart-breaking little: A political agreement was brokered by China, South Africa, India, Brazil and the US, much to the surprise of the G77 (130 countries) who had not seen the text, but learnt about it by watching Obama on a TV screen informing the world about the deal - The Copenhagen Accord - a political statement not a legally binding treaty. The agreement said that 'the increase in global temperature should be below two degrees', but dropped the initial 80% reduction target by 2050 and failed to set any long term reduction targets. No date was set for global emissions peaking when this should be 2015 or earlier. Rainforests and crop mono-cultures such as oil palm plantations for biofuels became part of the carbon markets which is not good news for biodiversity, human rights, Southern civil society or climate change.

So where do we go from here? The talks are clearly undemocratic and billions of people in the majority world are not represented. We all need to make sure our MPs and governments are accountable to us so that they do the right thing on our behalf. As well as taking this national action, the prevarication of our leaders since the 1992 Earth Summit brings even more clarity to the legend: Think Global, Act Local. It really is down to us. Join a green NGO (there are local Friends of the Earth groups in Cheltenham, Forest of Dean, Cirencester, Tewkesbury and a fledgling group in Stroud. Get active with the Transition Town (TT) movement. There are TTs in Stroud, Newent, Minchinhampton, Gloucester, Bishops Cleeve and Vision 21 are acting as a catalyst to get a group started in Cheltenham. And of course, you can join and support Vision 21. Vision 21 have joined the 100 Months initiative and 10:10 campaign. Log on below to get your friends, family and workplaces to sign up. As a New Year's resolution sign up to green electricity and calculate your carbon, ecological and water footprints – and then reduce them.

And finally a touching film, which should perhaps give us all hope and impetus to act:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z25Vj6Gm93Q&feature=player_embedded

<http://www.1010global.org/>

<http://www.onehundredmonths.org/>

<http://www.vision21.org.uk/?page=carbongym>

<http://footprint.www.org.uk/>

<http://www.waterfootprint.org>

<http://www.vision21.org.uk/index.asp?page=goodenergy>

<http://www.vision21.org.uk/index.asp?page=ecotricity>

For a full version of this article analysing Copenhagen please visit our website.

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