Copenhagen was a unique opportunity to turn the world’s course away from climate disaster, towards a safe future for all of us on this small planet. Massive global public mobilisation demanded it. But leaders of the major powers negotiated for their national interests, instead of safeguarding our shared destiny.

In the closing hours of negotiations, world leaders drew up the Copenhagen Accord. It grabbed headlines, but offered no lifelines – and so may end up on the sidelines. The talks ended with little more than agreement to keep talking, offering just a dim beacon for the way forward.

At a time when the urgency of the climate challenge is blatantly clear, stand-offs between the most powerful countries have left the world heading towards 4°C global warming – a catastrophic prospect, most especially for the world’s poorest people.

Negotiations must get straight back on track. All countries need to get back round the table and deliver what science – and people worldwide – are demanding: a fair, ambitious and binding deal in 2010.
1. Why Copenhagen mattered

Climate change is already devastating poor people’s lives on an appalling scale. Decisive action can halt this and unlock a green new deal for low-carbon transformation and for building resilience to climate impacts (see Box 1). We have just five years to peak global emissions, yet are currently on course to increase them at least half as much again by 2030. The failure of political leadership on display in Copenhagen only makes this task harder.

The urgency and opportunity for progress in Copenhagen was unique:

- **scientifically**: Global greenhouse-gas emissions have been rising ever faster for over 150 years. They must peak in the next five years to stand any chance of preventing runaway climate change. Decisive action in Copenhagen was crucial to ensure that this demanding trajectory is still feasible.

- **legally**: The Kyoto Protocol currently binds rich countries (except the US) to cut their emissions by the end of 2012, but there is no agreement on targets for the second phase of cuts beyond that. A renewed commitment to cut their emissions from 2013 must urgently be agreed so it can be ratified and come into force within the next three years. A parallel legally binding agreement, giving comparable obligations to the US, is also urgently needed.

- **politically**: 2009 saw an unprecedented groundswell in global demand for leaders to tackle climate change. Climate hearings gathered testimony from millions of affected people in over thirty countries. Demonstrations, mobilisation, and voluntary action on a massive scale built new alliances across civil society, unions, and progressive business. Never before had there been such public momentum for conclusive political action.

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- Shorbanu Khatun, a climate migrant at the summit with Oxfam

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Box 1. Key elements of a fair, ambitious and binding deal

Copenhagen was the place to agree a fair, ambitious and binding global deal to tackle climate change: the ‘landing zone’ of that deal has been clear for more than a year. It calls for action to:

1. Prevent dangerous climate change
   • Keep global warming far below 2°C by ensuring global emissions peak by 2015 and greenhouse gas concentrations ultimately fall to 350 ppm (parts per million)
   • Developed countries (Annex 1) take on emission-reduction targets of at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, with individual country targets based on their respective responsibility (for historic emissions) and economic capability
   • Developed countries deliver most of these cuts through domestic action - not offsets overseas - and loopholes in emissions accounting are closed
   • Developing countries limit their emissions growth with finance and technology support from developed countries starting in 2010 and rising to at least $100bn each year from 2013.

2. Protect poor people from unavoidable climate impacts
   • Deliver substantial fast-start adaptation financing in 2010-2012. Oxfam has estimated urgent adaptation needs are at least $50bn every year
   • Provide for a progressive scaling-up of adaptation financing from at least $50bn per year in 2013, rising to $100bn or more by 2020, in line with scientific and economic assessments
   • Ensure all financing for adaptation and mitigation is additional to existing commitments by rich countries to deliver 0.7 per cent of their national income as development aid
   • Ensure adaptation finance is channelled to the most vulnerable communities, and through gender-sensitive programmes
   • Finance an international climate insurance pool, and take steps to help people recover from damages and losses due to unavoidable climate impacts

3. Governments commit to making a historic climate shift
   • Produce a legally binding agreement between all countries that builds on existing principles and rules, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.
   • Establish a new global climate finance mechanism, governed with equitable representation of all countries, and effective in delivering finance for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.
   • Establish stronger compliance and enforcement mechanisms for counting and cutting emissions, and for delivering finance.
2. The climate of negotiations

The talks in Copenhagen, and the two years leading up to them, were undermined by a style of deal-making unfit for driving collective action in a multi-polar world. The failed tactics of world trade talks - high-stakes brinkmanship - have, once again, led to a result that is in no-one’s interests.

The 2007 Bali Action Plan set out a road map for two years of negotiations, working on two tracks, with two parallel texts:

- To agree new, legally binding obligations for all rich countries (except the US) to cut their emissions, beyond their existing commitments to cuts by 2012 – under the Kyoto Protocol track.

- To bring all other countries into a new legally binding agreement which includes: comparable and binding emissions cuts for the US; limiting emissions in developing countries with the support of finance and technology to do it; and funding for developing countries to adapt to climate impacts – all under the track for Long-term Cooperative Action (known as the LCA).

In those two years of talks, little was resolved along the road, and rich countries – critically – failed to earn trust because they showed no resolve to meet their historic responsibility in cutting emissions.

The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2007 assessment – now considered conservative – states that rich countries must cut their emissions by at least 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020 in order to limit warming to the 2 to 2.4°C range. Preserving a good chance of keeping warming below 2°C would require cuts of 40 per cent or more.1 Yet rich-country pledges going into the negotiations added up to merely 11-19 per cent cuts by 2020 - an appalling shortfall.

Worse, the current rules for counting and trading rich-country emissions are riddled with loopholes. Countries such as Russia and Ukraine hope to sell emissions permits left over from their previous allocations (known as ‘hot air’). Others propose creative accounting in calculating their emissions from forestry. Others still plan to fulfil most of their cuts through offsetting overseas, through Clean Development Mechanism projects that do not always deliver the cuts claimed. And rich countries’ share of emissions from international air travel and shipping are not even counted in their national totals.

Take account of these loopholes and rich-country pledged cuts could actually result in their total emissions being higher in 2020 than in 1990, heading the world towards a catastrophic temperature rise of 4°C by 2100.2 The prospect? Water availability halved in South America, Southern Africa and the Mediterranean, and severe water shortages for hundreds of millions of people in India and China. Crop yields falling in all regions – by up to 35 per cent in Africa and Western Asia. An additional 220-440m people exposed to malaria. Up to 330m people
permanently displaced due to sea-level rise, with many small-island nations doomed, and major world cities – New York, London, Tokyo – under serious threat. These would be unthinkable disasters.

The road to Copenhagen

US moves in 2009 to legislate a cap on national emissions were welcomed as a first step towards joining an international agreement, but the country’s low level of ambition (equivalent to 4 per cent cuts below 1990 levels by 2020) was seen as deeply inadequate by developing countries and other rich countries alike. Further, the US’s unwillingness to join the Kyoto Protocol created the need for a second binding treaty, so talk of merging the two tracks began. This alarmed developing countries who feared that rich countries would collectively try to use the move to water down their obligations.

In the run-up, some countries did step forward with clear offers of progress. The EU was first, in 2008, to pledge new emissions cuts (unilaterally 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, rising to 30 per cent in the case of a strong global deal). China, India, Mexico, South Korea and others likewise made significant unilateral offers to tackle their emissions, and South Africa also pledged cuts they would make if supported with finance to do it.

One month before talks in Copenhagen began, however, all big decisions – on adequate emissions cuts in rich countries, and on finance for adaptation and mitigation – were still on the table. The Danish Prime Minister, echoed by a round of rich-country ministers, started claiming it would not be possible to agree a legally binding deal in time, and proposed a single outcome, rather than the two tracks agreed in Bali – again, raising alarm.

Too much text, too little trust

Rumours of an alternative negotiation text by the Danish presidency turned to anger when an early draft was leaked in the opening days of Copenhagen’s talks. It had been presented to an exclusive group of countries a week earlier, leaned to rich-country interests, and aimed to replace the two-track approach with a single new agreement.

This triggered an atmosphere of mistrust that never faded. To ensure a two-track approach remained on the table, China, India, Brazil and South Africa (BASIC) presented their own alternative to the Danish text, followed by additional proposals from the African Group, and from the small-island states (AOSIS). The formal process finally focused back on official texts, but critical time and trust had already been lost.

The wrangles and rumours of these competing proposals reflected a far bigger struggle for power in the talks, as the rise of emerging economies shifts the world to a multi-polar power balance. Powerful countries sent in big teams of people to do politics and business: Canada sent 183, Japan 134, the US 194 – Brazil 750, India 52, and China 233. Poor countries, most under threat from climate impacts, had small delegations – Chad 10, Haiti 7, and Dominica 4 - who could not
possibly cover all the parallel talks and ever-changing texts. Rich countries applied pressure down the phone lines too: Australia, for example, leaned on Tuvalu and other Pacific islands to stop calling for a goal of keeping global temperature rise below 1.5°C.4

**Pushing for progress - and against**

Suspicious may have filled the conference centre, but on the streets outside – and around the world – there was massive public demand for strong action in a global day of action. In Copenhagen 100,000 people marched and over 3,000 events were held in almost 140 countries. Fourteen million people worldwide signed the tcktcktck petition calling for a deal. Civil society has been deeply involved in the climate talks for years, but their ability to take part was dramatically curtailed in the second week. The UN severely restricted access: from 15,000 observers at a time down to just 300 for the final days.

Some prominent and progressive US companies – recognising the threat of climate change to their core business – have also mobilised to call for decisive action. Coalitions such as Business for Innovative Climate and Energy Policy (BICEP) in the US – founded by Nike, Starbucks, Levi’s, Sun Microsystems, and Timberland – call for national legislation based on the science. But their voices and influence are still heavily outweighed by decades of high-level lobbying by entrenched corporate interests delaying the shift away from fossil fuels. On the opening day of negotiations, Business Europe – representing the EU’s main business confederations – openly called on the EU not to raise its emissions cuts unilaterally from 20 to 30 per cent.

**Descending into Copen-chaos**

When Heads of State joined the talks, they ended up negotiating from the podium, rehearsing their national positions instead of proposing breakthroughs. Many people had expected rich countries to bring new offers (as they had suggested they would), but their hands turned out to hold only tentative offers of finance. The US joined earlier calls by the UK and Ethiopia to mobilise $100bn of long-term finance, but late in the day, and with no sources clearly identified.

In the final, chaotic hours of negotiations the US, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa – without the EU – drew up a text which was then discussed by 25 heads of state, and turned into the Copenhagen Accord. It was tabled before all countries late in the night, giving them one hour to read and sign on. The EU reluctantly agreed, but many developing countries refused, and so the conference ‘noted’ rather than ‘adopted’ the Accord – turning it into a petition open for national sign-ups. They also agreed to keep negotiating for another year based on the two official texts produced through the formal UN process. Ironically – and fortunately – these texts hold far more promise than the Accord for producing the deal needed.
Who killed the COP? The G8 + 5.

Rich countries have the responsibility to lead in cutting global emissions – that is clear. But virtually none of the rich countries – Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and the United States – came to Copenhagen with enough on the table or in their back pockets to seal a real deal. The European Union had more in reserve than most, but held it back as a final offer, which it was never called on to make. The US came into the talks with the low offer expected; the surprise was that it didn’t raise it with tangible commitments during the talks. This allowed Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand to hide behind the US. Worse, these countries actively blocked a range of progressive proposals for moving forward. There was no collective vision and will to lead; and the cost falls hardest on small and poor developing countries that hold none of the blame but face the worst consequences.

Developing countries have been pushing rich countries to greater ambitions. However, there were some differences in the tactics. China and India take the position that a new legally binding treaty should only be negotiated once the second commitment period of rich-country cuts under the Kyoto Protocol is agreed. But dogged pursuit of this strategy seems unlikely to deliver either. A more forceful pursuit by China and India of a legally binding result under the Convention track could help lock-in the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa all played important roles in the lead-up to the talks, as well as in their waning hours, but will need to work more concertedly with other developing countries to spur rich countries’ ambition in 2010.

3. What’s in the Copenhagen Accord?

The Copenhagen Accord – a three-page political declaration patched together by a select group of world leaders and ministers, and objected to by many developing countries – is useful for understanding the state of play. It reveals where there is currently some space for international agreement, and where the devastating gaps in global vision remain.

Climate threat: high

Hollow commitment to halt global warming (paras 1 and 2). The Accord makes a weak commitment to keep the rise in average temperature below 2°C – recognising the scientific consensus around the threshold for catastrophic and irreversible climate change – but sets no targets for emissions in 2020 or 2050. It simply calls for global emissions to peak ‘as soon as possible’ – an empty strategy in the face of
emergency. The Accord calls (para 12) for a review in 2015, when it should consider strengthening the global temperature ceiling to 1.5°C – but by then it would be too late to achieve.

**Rich-country emission cuts dangerously off-course** (para 4). In the face of this gaping hole, the Accord’s approach to securing cuts from developed countries by 2020 is pathetic. With no global targets as a guide, and no criteria for calculating national fair shares, it calls for each country to submit its pledged cuts to an international list by the end of January 2010, but for information purposes only - nothing binding. And it sets no limits on countries buying offsets overseas instead of taking action at home. Such bottom-up approaches, driven by national interest – and lobbied by vested interests – will not drive the pace or scale of action needed.

**Measure, Report and Verify** (paras 4 and 5). Independent checks to ensure countries are meeting their responsibilities to cut emissions are essential – and agreeing on this was a big step made in Bali. The Copenhagen Accord further built the will to do so. It calls for measuring, reporting and verifying rich-country emissions cuts and finance. Further, it calls for international measurement, reporting and verification of developing-country mitigation actions that are supported by rich-country finance. To aid this, the Accord proposes a registry for matching developing-country mitigation actions to finance and technology support from developed countries. As an additional step, it calls for developing countries to agree that their voluntary actions on reducing emissions – receiving no international finance – would be subject to international consultation and analysis. This concession, made by China and India in the final hours of drafting, was a step towards agreement on their part, and would meet significant rich-country concerns if made legally binding.

**Where is the finance?**

**Fast-start finance: yes - but make it real and don’t fast-finish** (para 8). The Accord commits developed countries to providing new and additional resources approaching $30bn for the period 2010-2012. This is welcome and will help meet the backlog of urgent adaptation demands and mitigation opportunities. But based on pledges made so far, the total falls short by $2bn per year, most of Japan’s funding is loans, much EU money has simply been re-pledged, and little has been committed as additional to the 0.7 per cent aid target promised since 1972. Further, there is no commitment to fund needs from 2014-2019.

**Long-term adaptation funds proposed – but no clear sources** (para 8). The call to mobilize $100bn for adaptation and mitigation by 2020 is an important step: it is only half of the minimum needed, and creates no specific obligations for countries, but it finally puts an initial number on the table. Yet there is no mention of how to raise fair shares, how funds will be divided between adaptation and mitigation, or how much will be predictable and public finance, rather than private finance through
carbon markets. The Accord also calls for a High-Level Panel (para 9) to assess the potential of raising funds from alternative sources – much needed - but does not list those sources, or a timeline for concluding.

The risk of aid-raiding and empty promises (para 8). The Accord’s commitment that rich-country financing be subject to measurement, reporting and verification is important because it would help end the financial hide-and-seek of current pledges. At the same time, the Accord leaves funding loopholes open. It makes no clear statement that climate finance will be raised separately and additionally to rich-countries’ existing aid commitments of 0.7 per cent of national income. Without that, funds risk being raised by diverting future spending away from essential services in poor countries – taking money to build flood defences out of budgets to build schools and hospitals. And there is no clarity on how much individual rich countries will contribute, leaving the promised $100bn hanging as an aspiration.

New financial mechanism – but how governed? (paras 8 and 10). The Accord establishes the Copenhagen Green Climate Fund – intended as one of the financial mechanisms under the UN Convention, for financing mitigation, reducing emissions from deforestation, adaptation, capacity-building and technology development and transfer. It is unclear how this mechanism is intended to relate to the mechanisms under negotiation in the formal tracks, but its governance must help deliver climate finance in a more transparent and democratic way – a commitment not established in the text.

Little protection for the poorest

No vision for adaptation (paras 1 and 3). The Accord does little beyond stating that adaptation is a challenge, it will need finance, and that the most vulnerable developing countries should be prioritised in getting it. All true. But it proposes no number for adaptation finance, and promises no certain source of funds. It makes no mention of the need to cover unavoidable loss and damage – such as helping communities rebuild their homes and livelihoods after hurricanes and floods, or cope with slow-onset damage such as losing freshwater supplies as glaciers melt. Likewise, it is silent on proposals for an international insurance mechanism. Instead - and absurdly - it bundles the adaptation needs of the world’s poorest people together with calls for compensation (known as ‘response measures’) for oil-producing countries that claim they will lose revenue when the world shifts away from fossil fuels.

Accord or discord?

The significance of US engagement in the Copenhagen UN climate talks cannot be underestimated: after more than a decade of inaction, its renewed engagement with international rules and norms is essential. And yet as UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in his address to the conference, Copenhagen wasn’t just about leaders doing their best – it
was about them doing what was necessary.

The Copenhagen Accord may end up as a postcard to the future – from a generation of leaders who stumbled separately in the dark, instead of uniting behind an ambitious and decisive vision.

Getting back on two tracks

The flurry of texts in Copenhagen that became the last-minute Accord was, in many ways, a distracting sideshow. But it may, ironically, have raised the alarm and re-energised negotiations on the official texts, which got significantly tightened up. Both official tracks of talks were given extended mandates to keep meeting for another year. The talks in 2010 must now seize this critical chance to reach real agreement.

The good news is that the draft text on long-term cooperative action (LCA) still contains most of the options needed to secure a fair, and ambitious and binding deal – though some key additions will be needed in 2010. And the bad news? The most promising options could all be lost, instead of strengthened, with the sweep of a pen. That is why visionary leadership and full public attention must accompany the process through the year.

4. Change the politics, not the climate

"The failure of the political process in Copenhagen to achieve a fair, adequate and binding deal on climate change is profoundly distressing. Our leaders must regroup, learn, and make good their failure, for the sake of humanity's future."

- Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town

Politics-as-usual negotiations are failing to solve the climate crisis. For the crucial year forward, the UNFCCC has proposed just one intersessional, in May or June, and then final talks (known as COP16/CMP6) in Mexico, in November or December. Such thin engagement will not turn the talks around. Options on the table are too many and too vague for decision-making, and do not reflect evolving climate science. Technical negotiators are left debating issues that demand ministerial mandate but too little time is given for ministers’ talks to make progress. Governments are still focused on securing national interest instead of securing our shared destiny.

2010 may be the last year for these climate negotiations to prove they are an effective process for stopping climate change – and perhaps the chaos and near-collapse in Copenhagen will give governments the nerve to make it work. Sustained and focused engagement must run through the year – at the political, scientific, technical and public levels.

Heads of State: demonstrate Climate Leadership. The last two years of competitive negotiations must now be turned into collaborative engagement for a deal in 2010. That new mindset must be driven by Heads of State, especially in the Annex 1 countries, and must become
the overriding mandate for negotiations.

**Ministers: prepare for Sleeping-Bag Ministerials.** A set of intense ministerial meetings for both tracks of negotiations – held in March, June and September – must propel political decisions. The meetings must be hosted by the UNFCCC, with all country groupings represented, and ensuring full reporting back. Each ministerial ends only when its mandated milestone is reached: to halve the number of brackets in the text, and halve the size of the numeric ranges set out in those brackets. By COP16/CMP6, this will produce tight ranges on emissions cuts and financing which can realistically lead to agreement.

**Climate scientists: put facts back at the heart of negotiations.** Climate science is evolving rapidly and alarmingly, but negotiations continue on the basis of old projections – and fudge the science in their promises. The IPCC and leading climate scientists urgently need to provide updated estimates on emissions trajectories and temperature increases, starting with 1.5°C, so that negotiators – and the world - know what they are agreeing to. Research on the impacts on people must be deepened and communicated, so that governments understand the true human and national costs of their inaction.

**Negotiators: draw up text that can drive decisions.** Climate talks (unlike trade talks in Geneva) do not have a hometown, and sporadic intersessionals don’t allow for steady progress. Instead, setting up semi-permanent negotiations - Delegate Dormitories - in one city (Bonn, New York, or Geneva?) is needed to finish this negotiation in time. Developing countries must put their best negotiators into these talks – they have shown they make a difference - and the Least Developed Countries will need financial support to be part of this standing community, as well as access to a pool of UNFCCC experts offering additional technical support.

The scope of negotiations is left unhelpfully wide by vague definitions and unclear options in the text. Technical experts must use the year to set out specific modalities for negotiating – clear parameters for decision-making - by clarifying rules (such as on accounting for forestry emissions), and clarifying options (such as criteria for burden sharing).

**Public support: build the case and widen the base.** The last two years has seen an unprecedented and broad movement emerge across the globe for climate justice. But there is still enormous potential to harness.

• **Business:** progressive companies in all countries must draw the next swathe of corporates into alliances to build an international green new deal, and must more proactively call on governments to act.

• **Civil society:** keep highlighting the devastating poverty and environmental impacts of climate change, and make climate justice the most electorally dangerous issue for politicians to ignore.

• **Public voices:** keep demonstrating the growing international public demand for urgent action.
This generation cannot leave a legacy of climate shame. Governments cannot negotiate with the atmosphere – only with each other. They must get back round the table and work throughout 2010 to deliver the fair, ambitious and binding agreement that the world so urgently needs.

Notes


2 The Climate Scoreboard www.climateinteractive.org


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