

Durban Climate Conference Report

Introduction

Graham Petersen represented the UCU on the international trade union delegation to the CoP17 meeting in Durban, South Africa in December, 2011. Overall the results from the formal sessions were largely disappointing. Progress was made in some areas but the lasting impression was one of yet another missed opportunity to combat climate change.

The UCU supported the World of Work Pavilion co-ordinated by the International Trade Union Confederation which brought together trades unionists from around the globe and other civil society organisations. These events run outside the Conference Centre highlighted the importance of the trade union movement linking the fight for jobs with concerted action now on climate change.

Durban Platform for Enhanced Action

The Durban Platform promises to lead to an agreement that involves action by all countries, not just the developed ones, as is the case under the Kyoto Protocol. It would include commitments on climate "mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer, transparency of action, and support and capacity-building."

But it will be 'agreed no later than 2015' and 'implemented by 2020'. In Bali in 2007, governments agreed to reach a global agreement two years later, at the summit that took place in Copenhagen in 2009. This didn't happen and the same thing could happen again. It's relatively easy to make commitments for 9 years down the line when many of the political leaders will no longer be in power and have no personal responsibility for making good on commitments. Even these commitments don't reference any targets to be achieved after 2020.

The major concern is that the science is highlighting the need to take action now in order to keep the global temperature increase to below 2 degrees. If we are to avoid dangerous climate change then emissions need to peak by 2015. Durban leaves us with an international framework that won't begin the process until 2020.

Climate Finance

The 'Green Climate Fund' agreed in Copenhagen was taken forward in a very limited way. The World Bank was appointed as interim trustee and this has caused concern given its track record. The issue of how it will fund the \$100 billion per year needed by 2020 is still shrouded in mystery.

Kyoto Protocol

The Durban summit did reach agreement that there will be a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, beginning in 2013 and ending in either 2017 or 2020.

However, the only group of countries to commit to targets under it were in Europe – with the EU listing its existing pledge to reduce emissions by 20-30% by 2020, Norway by 30-40%, Switzerland by 20-30% and the Ukraine by 20%. Most of the other major developed countries – the United States, Canada, Japan and Russia – announced that they would not take part. Indeed, as soon as the conference ended, Canada pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol entirely. That means that by 2013, Kyoto will only cover about 15% of global emissions and even then will include no new commitments.

The ITUC

More encouraging was the World of Work Pavilion organised by the trade union and civil society organisations. The workshops at KwaZulu Natal University covered a wide range of sustainability topics. The TUC delegation led 3 workshops on Extreme energy, Energy efficiency and Green workplaces.

We also addressed and led workshops at the 'Cool it with people power' conference on December 4th. Over 500 people attended and the COSATU pamphlet 'One million climate jobs' was launched. The day before we had marched with approx. 20,000 people to the UN centre under the banners of climate justice and green jobs.

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