

It took a whole two hours of crawling on an expressway jammed by cars, buses and trucks heading to the Cancunmesse, a centre where delegates are screened before being ferried another 20-30 minutes to the Moon Palace venue of the COP. For those who have visited this city, the location of the venue is rather isolated from the main city and may well have been selected for this reason. The routes are lined with armed police including some on vehicles mounted with machine guns. The picture one comes off with is that of security overkill.

While welcoming delegates to the conference of the parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), president Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico stated that the world must embark on the pursuit of green development and green economy as the path to sustainable development. The president also stated that some of the steps to be taken to attain this ideal include progress on the negotiations on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD) as well as development of technologies to reduce fuel emission. Another key point was that the financing of sustainable development should start with support for the poorest and the most vulnerable countries.

These were nice words. These were also very contentious ideas. There are several red flags and concerns about REDD by indigenous groups and forest dependent peoples as well as mass social movements across the world. The idea of canvassing the extension of financial assistance to the poorest and the most vulnerable countries is also seen by critics as a possible way dividing those same nations and making them pliable to suggestions and decisions that may actually be contrary to their best interests.

Even before the Cancun conference opened there were concerns that efforts may already be afoot to rig the outcome, as was the case in Copenhagen in 2009. One concern is about a text for negotiation that is emanating from the chair of one of the working group through an untransparent process. Another concern has arisen from a decision of the Mexican president to invite selected heads of states to the conference. The list is not openly available, but already it is becoming clear that some uninvited presidents intend to be in Cancun.

The Copenhagen conference began and ended under a cloud of doubts and perceived undemocratic actions. At that meeting many delegations from developing and vulnerable nations believed that drafts of what would be the final outcome document were being discussed and circulated within privileged circles away from the standard practice where such negotiations took place on the open conference floor.

Many delegates in Cancun hope that the conference will take a transparent pathway. In Copenhagen there was a steady flow of leaked documents allegedly prepared by the president of the COP. Already in Cancun there are concerns over draft text prepared by the chair of the ad hoc working group on Long-term

Cooperative Action (LCA) without due mandate of the working group. The other major working group under the COP is the one that deals with the Kyoto Protocol and another text is being

expected from the chair of that working group also possibly without a mandate from the working group.

The year between conferences is spent on technical negotiations and preparations during which delegations review texts prepared by chairpersons of the working groups on the basis of the submissions made by the delegations or members.

The document produced by the chair of the LCA appears to be something quite at variance with what many delegates expected would be the outcome of the negotiations and work done since Copenhagen. The document that delegates are to debate is allegedly based on the

Copenhagen Accord which some delegate insist was not an agreement at the end of COP15, but was merely taken note of by that conference. Questions are being asked why such a document would now be legitimised and made the foundation for serious negotiations expected to produce a fair and ambitious agreement at the end of the conference in Cancun?

After the Copenhagen conference ended without an agreement, the government of Bolivia hosted a first ever World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba in April 2010. The outcome of that conference was the Peoples Agreement that the government of Bolivia then articulated into a formal submission to the UNFCCC as well as the Secretary General of the United Nations.

The essential fault line between those following the path crafted by the Copenhagen Accord and those who do not accept it as the way towards and fair agreement that recognises the principle of common and differentiated responsibilities are quite serious and the resolution has deep consequences for the future of our planet and the species that inhabit it, including humankind.

The draft text circulated by the chair of the LCA puts forward the ambition that may lead to an aggregate global temperature increase of up to 2 degrees Celsius as opposed to proposals made by a number of delegations that the target should be between 1 degree and 1.5 degrees temperature rise above 1990 levels. A 2 degrees Celsius temperature increase would mean catastrophic alteration to some parts of the world with Africa being particularly vulnerable.

The text in question has also disregarded the demand by vulnerable nations that to ensure urgent and robust technology transfer for the purpose of mitigation and adaptation such transfers should not be governed by subsisting intellectual property rights regimes.

Another sore point in the text is that the financial commitment proposed does not step up to the level of ambition needed to tackle the climate crisis and is even less serious than what was suggested by the so-called Copenhagen Accord.

A coalition of civil society groups complained about the text from the chair of the LCA and also raised concerns about the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, where the Chair of that track intends to propose his own text that will postpone adoption of legally binding emission reductions targets by the developed countries in Cancun, risks the expansion of accounting loopholes and replaces a legally-binding system with a voluntary pledge-based approach reflected in the Copenhagen Accord.

The immediate past chair of the COP in her final statement indicated that the conference must move in a way that would show that Cancun can deliver a good outcome for tackling climate change. Papua New Guinea suggested in a first statement at this conference that where there are no consensus decision should be made by voting. He referred to the rejection of the Copenhagen Accord at COP15 and subsequent signing on by 140 countries. The delegates take was that only a small minority of states were holding others hostage. PNG pledged cooperation and reasonableness in the COP. The suggestion by PNG was promptly opposed by Bolivia, India and Saudi Arabia among other states. They insisted that that consensus must be maintained as a way to reach decisions.

Besides the crawl to the COP and the fact that getting to the different venues for the side events as well as the mobilisation and civil society spaces could mean a full day travelling, one hopes that the debates will be robust. That is one of the three things that will make being cocooned in Cancun bearable. The other is the exciting camaraderie of being among great FoE I folks. And thirdly the first day of a two-weeks conference is not the appropriate day to lose all hope.