



Early on in the second week of COP15, the cordoned path created for long lines of NGOs seeking entry into the Bella Centre was a crowded mass of people. The cold was setting in, but the people pressed in.

The story was different for the last two days of the COP. The path was desolate and taken over by a carpet of snow. Observers had been barred from entering the venue and the few with possibilities of entry had to contend with long waits as security officials thumbed through sheets with names of those cleared to enter.

Within the conference venue the most democratic space appears to be the entrance hall where the registration of delegates was carried out. The pull here is the large UNFCCC logo on the wall where virtually every delegate sought to be photographed as a memento to a conference of lost opportunities.

Inside the chambers, more went on behind closed doors than in plenary. The Danish president of the COP spent more time denouncing leaked or rumoured secret texts rather than spending precious time negotiating. Blocks and hurdles were erected in the path of negotiators to ensure that real progress was not made.

The UNFCCC erected banners inviting people to raise their voices for climate change. Out on the streets the Danish police fought to ensure that the voices of dissent were silenced.

Thousands demand Climate Justice

If any good news emerged from the climate conference, it must be that the climate justice movement is rising up. On December 12, 2009 over 100,000 citizens of the world braved the cold and marched more than six kilometres through the streets of Copenhagen to show their disgust with politicians and leaders who consistently refuse to act but keep talking about climate change.

Would emissions be cut? Would these be done at source or would it be through acts carried out elsewhere rather than at home? Who would pay for the mitigation measures needed to be effected in poor developing nations? The impacted nations have said that levels of funding needed to tackle these impacts have been put at about US\$400 billion per year. With brave generosity, rich nations offer to place \$30 billion for the period 2010 to 2020. And then ramped up to US\$100 billion by 2020.

President Lula of Brazil, while speaking at the plenary on the closing date, wondered if the negotiators would have to wait for angels to put intelligence in their brains before they could come to a good deal. His statement suggested that there was a case of lack of intelligence. Was it really a lack of intelligence or an unwillingness to toe the paths of true ambition?

Take it or Leave it

When President Obama took the stage, he asserted that climate change poses an unacceptable risk to our planet. The world should act boldly in the face of the threat. He said he came to act and not to talk. So what was the act

Obama stated that the USA would change the way they create and use energy as a necessary block in their national security. In addition they would work to ensure reduction of dependence on foreign oil. At the end of the day, all that President Obama said amounted to declaration of US interests that the world had to accept or leave. It brought nothing new to the table.

Even the funds promised for mitigation in poorer nations was made with a snigger that no one expecting aid should escape the demand for responsibility.

Talking about responsibility, who is responsible for the climate impacts in these poor countries? The pledge of President Lula to meet Brazilian challenges with own funds and the promise to assist poor countries in their efforts to take mitigation measures shone in the dark hallways of the Copenhagen talks.

With several versions of the Copenhagen Accord, coined perhaps from a phrase in President Obama's speech, one leaves the conference wondering where all the hype about working for an ambitious deal went. If there was a deficit of anything at this conference it was that of ambition.

A disaster for the world's poor

I left the Bella Conference at 1:45 AM to meet the warm chants of climate justice activists protesting in the cold, beneath the Metro tracks, denouncing the lack of seriousness in the climate negotiations. The protesters could have been snugly asleep in their beds, but these were mostly young people whose future was being jeopardised for the political expediency of a few and for the comfort and profiteering of carbon speculators.

As we said in our final statement at the talks, the so-called accord was a disaster to poor nations. A two degrees Celsius temperature rise means sure disaster and death to millions in vulnerable countries.

As I crushed the snow beneath my feet, each step raised a question: for how long will leaders be disconnected from the voices of the people? But I took great comfort from the strength of Friends of the Earth International activists who demonstrated to the world that the time for the growth of the climate justice movement has indeed come.