

PRESS RELEASE

Week two of COP23: civil society reps call for the reality of climate impacts to be brought into negotiating rooms

“Talanoa Dialogue must be designed to increase ambition”

13 November, 2017, Bonn. The beginning of the UN climate conference's second week marks a transition as negotiators make way for ministers to begin the real political process. We've seen a well-received push by the Fiji presidency for openness and transparency in the Talanoa dialogue, including input from both governments and non-state actors. We've seen mixed progress on the work programme – negotiations over issues of transparency going well, while there are sharply polarised positions over national contributions to limiting global warming.

On the vital question of finance – for mitigation and adaptation, as well as for loss & damage – things are not going so well.

Tracy Carty, Climate Change Policy Advisor, Oxfam GB, said: “We need a work programme that will explore sources of finance for loss and damage, because that's currently a massive gap. Unlike adaptation and mitigation, which have the 100 billion commitment, there are currently no sources of finance for loss and damage.

Carty said it appeared that developing country governments are resistant to committing more public money for badly needed climate finance, but pointed out that there are innovative sources of funding that would not come from the public purse, including levies on shipping and aviation or on the carbon majors, a group of one hundred large corporations that are responsible for the major share of emissions.

“At the moment, those carbon majors are off the hook. Nobody is looking at what's their contribution. If they were to pay their share and their responsibility for the damages that's been caused because of the impacts of climate in parts of the world, what would that look like? How much would it look like? So this process needs at a minimum to start to explore those kind of options and there are many,” said Carty.

Reminding us that COP23 is presided over by a vulnerable country already experiencing severe climate impacts, Mohamed Adow, International Climate Lead, Christian Aid, said we have a unique opportunity to bring the reality of climate change into the negotiations. This has not happened through the first week but needs to happen in the second week.

“There is an opportunity for the ministers coming in to grasp and help deliver that important gift to the vulnerable countries who are suffering first and worst, it would be advancing loss and damage, particularly support to be able to implement the actions and activities that are needed.

[Vulnerable countries] got a mechanism in 2013; they got an article in Paris; but those two don't deliver the actions and activities that are needed. They need to be translated so that they can be able to implement loss and damage.”

Turning to the Talanoa dialogue, Adow reminded everyone that this is the new name for working on an established principle to ratchet action and ambition upwards, and called for Fiji to retain a role right through the end of this COP and into 2018 when the Paris Agreement comes into force.

“What will be critical, now that this dialogue has been set up, is for the Fijians to be given a leading role next year so that they can be able to help deliver on the promise and the vision they've set out. It's not something we can leave in the hands of the Polish alone, and so in this second week, we need to be able to strengthen hand of the Fijians so that they can play a role [...] on an ongoing basis so we can effectively design the dialogue to be able to increase ambition.”

Asked about the seemingly mild treatment of the US despite the Trump administration's declared intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, Alden Meyer, Director of Strategy and Policy, Union of Concerned Scientists, responded that the US negotiators have in some places continued with constructive engagement, but in others show problems linked to new administration's hard line: loss and damage and finance which may become sharper as the ministerial phase of the conference begins.

“There's also a recognition that there are major elements of American society – states, business, mayors, universities and others, represented by the We Are Still In initiative – that are doing their best to meet America's emissions reduction obligations under Paris with or without Donald Trump. And I think that message has been well-received.

“The problem is of course is that they are not representing that same kind of initiative on the finance side of table, and making up for Donald Trump's refusal to meet the remaining two billion dollars of the Green Climate Fund pledge and proposing deep cuts in other areas of US climate finance. So yes on the domestic ambition, that's making up some of the damage caused by Donald Trump, but on the finance side it's a different message than what we're hearing. We're hearing the US is taking a pretty tough line on finance and on having loss & damage be a standing agenda item in this process.”

Mohammed Adow said that he would like to see a strategy used to deal with Trump Administration intransigence brought into the climate negotiations.

“When the US blocked the climate outcomes in the G7 and the G20, we effectively ended up with a G6 climate outcome and a G19 climate outcome. And so on loss & damage, if the US continues to block, I think it will be about time the rest of the world basically noted the US blockage, but moved on and gave effectively a proper process that is going to consider how climate finance for loss and damage is going to be mobilised.

“We cannot afford to have the rest of the developed world hiding behind the US and I think we have to make the distinction between a country, in this case the Trump administration, that has already announced its withdrawal, and the rest of the world collectively moving forward – and on finance for loss & damage and on finance for adaptation but also having a clear process to ratchet up ambition we have to make that distinction.