ADP: Elements of Urgency and Action

It was an all too familiar feeling when Parties started repeating their well-known positions and citing already agreed decisions here in Warsaw. But ECO does like the recent trend citing one key notion: urgency.

AOSIS has made significant efforts to establish a concrete technical process to accelerate action on renewables and energy efficiency – that's a direct way to close the ambition gap.

Columbia (AILAC) and The Gambia (LDCs) have been trying to capture the discussion of ‘elements’ in the 2015 agreement in as concrete and formal a manner as possible.

And the LDCs and Trinidad and Tobago have stressed the need for a compliance mechanism item in the list of issues to discuss next year. Those are all elements of action that respond to urgency.

The Like-Minded Developing Countries stressed another very important issue. Finance, technology and capacity-building support are essential for developing countries to implement their NAMAs.

On the other hand, the proposal from various like-minded countries to delete paragraph 9 altogether is a disappointing development.

For a change, we can even commend some developed countries, in addition to Swaziland (African Group) and South Africa, for their efforts to specify the timeline and concrete steps toward Paris.

Norway made a good proposal to have mitigation commitments presented within 2014.

And we especially welcome the African Group's comments on the necessity to check the adequacy and equity of commitments, and South Africa's support for an equity reference framework.

Furthermore, today in the High Level Segment presentations, the Chinese minister called for the adoption of a work plan towards agreement on the 2015 deal.

With all these good proposals on the table, ECO has to wonder why Parties still seem to be unable to find common ground to produce a clear work plan with milestones to address both closing the pre-2020 ambition gap and agreeing the 2015 deal.

We are coming to the final hours of this conference. The time for reiteration and recitation has ended. The co-chairs have made it clear: this is decision time. Parties now have to show they have come to Warsaw to make progress, not just to repeatedly repeat what they have already repeated.

Ontario Moves Beyond Coal

After being subjected to the taste of coal in the air and statements about the inevitability of continued coal use for almost two weeks, at last we have exciting news from the Canadian province of Ontario. The provincial government has just announced it will switch off its last active coal-fired power plant within weeks.

This will make Canada’s most populous province the first jurisdiction in the world to complete a coal phase-out. Just 10 years ago coal was 27% of the energy mix in Ontario’s power sector, with a total capacity of 7,500 MW. This week’s announcement is an example of how political will, spurred by public concern and combined with smart policies supporting energy efficiency and renewables, can help break coal addiction. As a result, smog, dust and mercury levels have already fallen substantially, and GHG emissions from the Ontario electricity sector were slashed by 75%, making this the largest carbon reduction project in North America.

Note that this feat was achieved despite a federal policy environment in Canada that is entirely hostile to climate action and has been moving the country in the opposite direction. Case in point: in the same period of the coal phase-out unfolded in Ontario, emissions from tar sands oil, a resource aggressively promoted by the federal Conservative government, soared by roughly the same amount that the Ontario coal phase-out saved. So in effect the additional emissions from tar sands exploitation have cancelled the gains from Ontario’s flagship climate action program.

Federally promoted tar sands growth is also the single biggest reason why Canada’s own estimated emissions growth is 20% above the target pledged in Copenhagen.

While it’s a good thing the new Canadian environment minister decided to attend the Warsaw COP, ECO wants to remind her that claiming to play a leadership role on climate is not the same as actually being a leader. Perhaps she should have a word with her Ontario counterpart. Here are some relevant ideas for real climate action: promoting renewables and energy efficiency, getting rid of...
fossil fuel subsidies, phasing out coal and reversing oil growth are all good.

At the same time we are celebrating the Ontario announcement as a clear sign that the end of the coal era is coming, there are also encouraging signs internationally.

Yesterday the UK announced they would build on the new US policy to end financing of coal-fired power plants abroad. As the energy and climate minister rightly pointed out, ‘It is completely illogical for countries like the UK and the US to be decarbonizing our own energy sectors while paying for coal-fired power plants to be built in other countries’. Now it’s time for Japan, Germany and other countries that continue to finance coal abroad to join this positive effort to phase out global fossil fuel subsidies.

Congrats, Ontario.

The CCPI 2013 Performance Rankings

The new edition of the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), which ranks the climate protection performance of the 58 largest emitting countries worldwide, was released by Germanwatch and CAN Europe this week. The report shows worldwide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continue to climb, and not a single country is on track to deliver their fair share of emission reductions.

But there are some rays of hope this year. There appears to be a slowdown in the rate of increase for global CO2 emissions. And China, the highest emitter on a national basis, improved its performance.

While no country performed well enough to earn a coveted top-3 ranking, Denmark led the league table, improving their score in nearly every sector. The UK took 5th place, up from 10th, due to an emissions decrease of 15% in the last 5 years plus improvements in energy efficiency.

But you won’t be surprised that Canada and Australia are the bottom ranked performers among industrialised countries, while Japan also dropped several notches. Australia is ranked 57th but its recent election produced a government that is backtracking even from there. Canada still shows no intention of moving forward with meaningful climate policy and remains at a humiliating 58th position. Only Iran (59), Kazakhstan (60) and Saudi Arabia (61) have worse ratings.

For the first time Germany has dropped out of the top ten, sliding from 8th to 19th position, one of the biggest losers in this year’s index. The main reason is the country’s dithering on EU climate policy. And to no one’s surprise, Poland’s overall performance (45th place) remains one of the worst in the entire EU.

Every country can endeavour to improve its CCPI ranking by addressing a few critical factors. Improvements in renewable energy must continue; efficiency levels must increase; countries must take bold national climate policy decisions; and effective coalitions between front-runner nations should be strengthened. Those are exactly the same actions needed to close the pre-2020 emission gap so that an international climate agreement worth the name can be finalised in 2015.

A Down Under Daydream

ECO nodded off during the plenary and heard this:

Dear Ministerial colleagues:

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you at this High Level Roundtable on Market Approaches for Enhanced Climate Action. I want to report to you now that after 18 months Australia’s carbon market is working well.

After the first 12 months the carbon price, supported by other policies, delivered 7% emissions reductions from covered sectors. The proportion of renewables in the energy mix surged by 23%. Inflation impacts were almost exactly as predicted at 0.7%. Auctioning revenues funded support for low and middle-income households, leaving them better off than before the reform. Scare campaigns saying that entire cities and industries would be wiped out proved to be mere fear-mongering.

Australia’s carbon price and limit on carbon pollution was of course designed to give a long-term signal to drive investment decisions towards low-carbon technologies and projects. The next step includes an assessment of increasing our ambition based on science and comparative action. To that end, our statutorily independent Climate Change Authority has released a draft recommendation for Australia’s emissions reduction target, informed by work programs under the Convention.

The Authority is chaired by a former head of Australia’s central Reserve Bank, and its board includes Australia’s chief scientist and the former head of the Australian Industry Group. It has recommended that Australia take a 15 to 25% emission reduction target by 2020 with up to 50% reduction by 2030. It identified these targets in relation to an overall carbon budget and with a clear statement of our national interest in avoiding 2°C warming.

Australia looks forward to working with you in increasing our collective targets and ambitions well in advance of COP 21. Finally, with the time-bound support for phasing out coal power generators and the need for free permits for trade exposed sectors now almost completely irrelevant, Australia would like to announce that 10% of the carbon price revenue will be directed to climate finance.

Thank you, Chair.

Well, it was a pleasant few moments anyway. But then it was back to plenary reality . . .