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A parable for our time

Far back in the mists of time, Parties agreed on a Durban Platform. Concerned that the train of negotiations might leave the station and quickly gather speed, Parties proceeded to have a two-year “contemplation phase” in an effort to stay on track.

They then decided to go into a “workshop phase” where they were expected to express their basic desires to their benign and all-knowing spiritual guides. These guides would then translate these desires into suitable language for polite company before presenting them to the outside world. But some of the travellers began to complain that they preferred their own words, however unrefined and divergent.

The language of the much-anticipated central covenant of all the peoples was given special treatment, since agreement was not needed immediately. It was particularly elevated and deliberately vague, so that the travellers would not begin to bicker over the details. But some began to rebel against the ritualistic debates and increasingly frustrating attempts to discover exactly what others were talking about, and what they might be able to agree on once they had to make decisions.

More of them started putting forward their own versions of the covenant. Though the guides paid little attention to their crude efforts, they did generously offer the possibility of going into a side carriage on their own and return with more worthy offerings. But they never said what fate would await these offerings.

Meanwhile in the main carriage, the travellers continued to offer up their modest ideas, in the hope the guides would find some of them worthy to put into their non-covenant. But most of them looked in vain for a true representation.

ECO's invitation to you

ECO welcomes you to the UNFCCC tree planting ceremony to celebrate CAN turning 25 at 13:00 outside today. There will also be a plaque unveiling. All are welcome to attend.



ECO asks, if you were a tree, what kind would you be?

However, the words of one wise traveler resonated from beyond the dawn of time: “Discussions in the absence of negotiations cannot prosper.”

Then began a clamour for true negotiations –to engage with the actual words of their fellow travellers, and not the words of the guides. More and more of them made this demand, but fearful of the consequences if the travellers became too aware of the real divisions among them, the guides preferred to hold to their more refined version as long as possible...

Mail: from the UN Human Rights Council

Dear Negotiator,

We know you've been busy trying to hammer out the details of the Paris Agreement, but ECO would like to draw your attention to an important letter that has been addressed to **YOU**. This letter was sent, last week by 28 independent experts from the UN Human Rights Council.

Tasked to provide support to all countries with the promotion of human rights—from the right to clean drinking water to development—these experts all came to the same conclusion: climate change threatens to undermine the protection of human rights. Let this sink in for a moment: it means that the UNFCCC has a crucial role in effectively protecting human rights for all. If you haven't read the letter, please check your inboxes.

The open letter clearly states that “all of the State Parties to the UNFCCC have committed to respect and protect human rights.” Building on the Cancun Agreements, that makes reference to these obligations, the UN human rights experts urge Parties to:

recognise the adverse effects of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights, and to adopt urgent and ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures to prevent further harm. We call on the State Parties to include language in the 2015 climate agreement that provides that the Parties shall, in all climate change related actions, respect, protect, promote, and fulfil human rights for all. And we urge the State Parties at COP 20 in Lima to launch a work program to ensure that human rights are integrated into all aspects of climate actions.

On behalf of present and future generations, ECO supports these conclusions and calls on all Parties to include rights protections for all.

Beyond binary

ECO has always believed that the Convention, with its Annexes and principles, need not, and must not, be a straight jacket that restricts the ability of the UNFCCC to adapt to emerging realities. While some developed countries give the distinct impression that they would like to sweep the Annexes (and perhaps the whole Convention) aside and start over, there are now some developing countries showing how we can move forward by building on the current structure of the Convention.

Different proposals have been put forward that provide interesting ways to move past a binary world to cross the rigid firewall.

The LDCs proposed an interesting idea in this regard: Annex I Parties should adopt economy-wide targets, and non-Annex I Parties “in a position to do so” (the so-called “POTODOSO countries”) should do the same. Both of these groups – all parties with economy-wide commitments – would then inscribe these commitments in Annex A to the new agreement. This would be an elegant way of using the current Annexes to ensure no backsliding, while progressing beyond an exclusive reliance on these commitments. ECO could imagine other creative ways to do the same thing.

Another way of moving beyond a binary world is the route proposed by Brazil (yes, that Brazil!). Making clear they did not support a bifurcated approach, Brazil proposes “concentric differentiation”, where Annex I countries with absolute reductions targets are at the centre of concentric circles of less rigorous commitments going outward. (ECO is paraphrasing here.)

So far, so good (or, “so far, so Art. 4.1/4.2”, as it were). But where Brazil advances the discussion is by saying that everyone should be encouraged to move towards the centre over time. This would pave the way for voluntary graduation, and prevent any voluntary backsliding. Many countries should be prepared to move close to (and some into) the coveted inner circle now. ECO is sure they know who they are.

FROM FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) have increased their engagement in climate advocacy since forming an inter-faith caucus at COP14. As the Parties negotiate the 2015 agreement, faith movements are carefully watching the process.

Churches, mosques and temples are at the frontline of disaster relief services: helping to bury the dead and console the grieving. People turn to places of worship for safety, support and emergency services. FBOs are reporting soaring emergency expenditures and they feel a duty to be involved in climate crisis prevention. They argue that climate justice should be understood as part of a broader agenda of justice, peace and meaningful quality of life. Drivers of climate change are also related to the causes of other types of suffering.

FBOs are concerned that the UNFCCC process has shifted from the core mission of the United Nations. From the upholding of human rights, promotion of peace and security, these values seem to be morphing into competitive self-interest. Perpetrators of harmful climate impacts show no remorse, and the emerging economies are fiercely insisting on the right to the same harmful development pathway. As the Roman Catholic member of the FBO caucus noted, this is akin to the story of Cain and Abel: just as Cain kills his own brother, countries' failure to address climate change threatens to harm all members of the human family.

Not content to just signal an interest in an enhanced interpretation of the Convention, Brazil also made a very useful suggestion on finance. Brazil recommended that developing countries indicate South-South financial contributions and collaborative actions in their INDCs. The LDCs' and AILAC's submissions also call for financial contributions from an expanded group of countries, while placing primary responsibility on Annex II Parties.

ECO wonders how developed countries will justify their refusal to talk about finance in their INDCs when developing countries are willing to do so.

Want concrete deliverables from WS2? Switch to RE and EE now!

In the TEMs followup meeting yesterday, ECO was reminded of the need to move beyond never-ending discussions into concrete action under Workstream 2. It also appears that the areas where Parties show the greatest interest are renewable energy (RE) and energy efficiency (EE). In their Technology Needs Assessments (TNAs), Parties have also expressed their priorities for mitigation technologies, and guess what? They begin with EE and RE. The science tells us that to limit global temperature rise to below 1.5°C, we need to phase out fossil fuels by 2050 and phase in 100% RE as quickly as possible. This means that in the pre-2020 period, we should be rapidly scaling up RE to at least 25% globally, along with doubling the rate of EE.

It just so happens that RE and EE are the two issues that have been most thoroughly analysed throughout the TEMs. Being armed with a good understanding of the policies that are needed for a rapid scaling-up of these approaches marks a potential turning point for transforming understanding into action.

In a Workstream 2 decision, Parties should explicitly call on the GCF and other international funding institutions to prioritise, within their mitigation windows, investments in tried and tested policies that promote sustainable renewable energy and energy efficiency. All multilateral energy funding should only flow towards clean and sustainable renewable energy technologies, and highly efficient industrial and demand-side applications. This funding will have to come from somewhere, so developed countries should indicate what kind of support (finance, technology and capacity building) they intend to make available under Workstream 2, in addition to the actions that they themselves will take. To help, ECO has an idea: Lima could be the time for a TEM session to consider how actions with high mitigation potential could be supported.

Turn Back Japan: Don't Go From Nukes To Coal

The tragic Fukushima nuclear accident showed the world how dangerous and unsustainable nuclear technology is. As affected people continue to suffer, it's clear that nuclear is not an option for the Japanese people any more. ECO was encouraged to see the rapid expansion of renewable energy since the disaster thanks to the feed-in-tariff introduced in 2012. The focus on energy efficiency by individuals and companies also proves that there is still plenty of potential for energy efficiency improvements in Japan. That's why ECO is astounded by the news that there are now plans for the construction of 25 new coal-fired power plants (totalling 13,640MW) between 2016-2027. They would emit more than 82 Mt CO₂ per year. Shockingly, most of these plans were conceived after the Fukushima accident, and it is expected that more plans will come.

Energy transition is an urgent need in all countries, and it is key to get the direction of the transition right, Japan! Hint: when we talk about energy transition we are talking about transitioning away from, not towards, high-carbon technology. Coal a very dirty fossil fuel. The IPCC warns that if we don't shift investments away from high-carbon infrastructure, future emission reductions will be difficult.

ECO hopes that Parties have read the IPCC report, but in case some important details got lost in translation: coal is not needed as an alternative to nuclear. The Japanese government's own research shows that Japan has large renewable energy potential.

ECO has learnt that Japan is finally starting discussions about its own INDC today. Here's our friendly tip: stop the coal expansion. It would help you put forward an ambitious reduction target by March 2015.