

Rare ray of hope in UN climate talks

February 14 2015, by Mariette Le Roux



At the very core of the intended pact, countries remain deeply divided on the issue of "differentiation"—how to share responsibility for emissions cuts between rich and poor nations

The detente achieved at UN talks that concluded with a framework for a world climate pact is only temporary, achieved by kicking the difficult decisions down the road, parties and observers say.

But it also generated a degree of optimism rarely observed in the tense process—a sense of common purpose which many hope will bolster

negotiators in the months to come.

"I think this has been a very important meeting from a process point of view and a psychological point of view," said Union of Concerned Scientists analyst Alden Meyer.

He pointed to broad consultations held with country representatives by the talks' joint chairmen ahead of the six-day session in Geneva—one of four official meetings this year to prepare for the December conference in Paris that must adopt a universal [climate pact](#).

"That has paid off. People felt consulted, they felt listened to, they understood the process," he added.

"This is the parties' text, they own it now."

An official framework text prepared for the 2009 Copenhagen [climate](#) conference, which failed to produce an agreement, had exceeded 300 pages and was challenged by a number of alternative drafts.

The 86-page Geneva blueprint, the product of years of negotiations, seems manageable by comparison, and represents the first-ever proposal with buy-in from all the world's nations.

"At this early stage, the palpable positive spirit coming out of Geneva is a much better measure of progress than the current length of the negotiating text," said Jennifer Morgan, climate director at the World Resources Institute think-tank.

The document lists a variety of alternative approaches on most issues—often reflecting country positions that diametrically oppose one another.



A resident of East Porterville, California, receives a delivery of drinking water as water wells supplying hundreds of residents remain dry in the fourth year of worsening drought on February 11, 2015

It more than doubled from a 37-page draft compiled at a conference in Lima last December, with parties allowed to add items until they were satisfied all their views were represented.

"It's a bit unwieldy in the sense that they accepted every proposal that was made with no discussion or vetting or criteria, but that's what they had to do to assure parties that every idea that they wanted in the draft legal text that's going to be the basis for Paris was in there," said Meyer.

This, in turn, was taken to indicate a desire by all countries to be party to the final pact, though its form and content have yet to be determined and a lot of difficult editing now lies ahead.

"After years of false starts and broken promises, restoring ownership and trust in the process is no small achievement and I think we have come a long way toward doing that," said Ahmed Sareer, an envoy of the Alliance of Small Island States at highest risk of climate change-induced sea level rise.

UN climate chief Christiana Figueres, who oversees the negotiations, described such "trust-building" as the most valuable resource in the process to draft a plan for limiting manmade global warming.

"Optimism, trust, good mood is much more conducive to coming to terms with complicated issues," she said of the road ahead.

Spirit of Geneva

The Like-Minded Developing Countries group, which includes China, India, Saudi Arabia, several African, Asian and South American nations, said the talks had been "open, transparent and party-driven" and welcomed the result.

Europe said it would have wanted more progress on streamlining the text, but agreed the week had been "an important and necessary step for securing a negotiating text," according to EU delegation head Elina Bardram.



Countries remain deeply divided on how to share responsibility for emissions cuts between rich and poor nations

There had been "useful conversations with our partners in the corridors, in the margins, that will enhance common understanding," she added.

Parties will need all the goodwill they can muster for the last 10 months of negotiations for a universal pact seeking to limit warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

Christian Aid's senior climate adviser Mohamed Adow noted: "The tone of the negotiations here have been very optimistic but that's because we were only putting things in.

"The real fights will come when we start to take things out."



Developing countries want compensation for climate-change induced losses and damage

At the very core of the intended pact, countries remain deeply divided on the issue of "differentiation"—how to share responsibility for emissions cuts between rich and poor nations.

Developing countries also want their developed counterparts to commit to long-term climate financing, and compensation for climate change-induced loss and damage.

Yet co-chairman Daniel Reifsnyder closed the meeting on a hopeful tone.

"May the Spirit of Geneva remain with you and guide you all on the road to Paris," he told delegates.

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