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## Prospects for climate deal 'slim'

By **Richard Black**

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**Prospects of finalising a new binding agreement on climate change by the end of the year are "slim", according to UN climate convention chief Yvo de Boer.**

He said the process used to draw up the Copenhagen Accord, the document produced at the end of December's UN climate summit, had worsened distrust.

About 110 countries have endorsed the accord, with others rejecting it.

Mr de Boer was speaking at a three-day meeting here aimed at agreeing steps towards this year's summit in Mexico.

The place of the Copenhagen Accord has been one of the controversial issues, with developed nations such as the US and Australia praising it as useful and something that should be incorporated into any new global agreement.

But developing countries regard it as far too weak, and object to the "undemocratic" nature of the process that saw it drawn up and announced by a small group of nations on the last day of the mammoth Copenhagen summit.

"It has heightened the feeling of distrust within the process," Mr de Boer told BBC News.

"But what Copenhagen also demonstrated is that if a process or procedure is followed that a group of countries does not like, then they have the ability and the power to resist the outcome of such a process."

**Two-step process**

Clearly, the accord is being resisted by a large group of developing countries.

According to Bolivia's representative Pablo Solon, the carbon constraints are so weak that "we're going to have one half of humanity living in a very difficult situation - without water in some places, in others living underwater.

"Can you imagine - to present this as a solution?"

*"It is a very involved process - it is not a sprint, it is a decathlon"*

**Vijai Sharma, India delegate**

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Many of the countries that have endorsed the accord have added the caveat that they see it only as a step towards a global, binding treaty, and that they want the treaty agreed at this year's summit, in Mexico's Cancun resort in November and December.

The chances of that happening, said Mr de Boer, were "very slim".

"I think that developing countries will want to see what the nature of an agreement is going to be before they will be willing to turn it into a legally-binding treaty, so that basically means a two-step process," he said.

"We first need to get the architecture agreed, and I think that can happen in Cancun; and then once if that architecture is sufficiently interesting to parties, there could be a decision in Cancun to turn it into a new treaty text, and that would have to be finalised later."

### **Running story**

Developing countries have been asking for a intensive sequence of meetings during this year in order to allow enough time to reach the treaty stage.



India's delegate Vijai Sharma said that progress was being made on that, and on the process for developing a new agreement.

"It is a very involved process - it is not a sprint, it is a decathlon," he told BBC News.

"As to the character of the agreement - there are different opinions on that, but everyone wants a good outcome."

However, Mr de Boer flagged up one potential stumbling block - the US demand for "symmetry".

In order to placate concerns about losing competitiveness, the US is for example demanding that China and other developing countries should be subject to the same regime on verifying emissions curbs as the industrialised world.

"What the US has also indicated is that it would want to be treated on a par with major developing countries, and that I think is going to be very difficult," said Mr de Boer.

After the busiest and most fraught period of climate negotiations since their inception two decades ago, Mr de Boer steps down later this year.

His successor is expected to be named soon - possibly later this month - with a number of former ministers in the frame.

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## UN climate talks to resume amid fear of more divisions



Prospects for a global climate treaty could be streaming away

By Richard Black

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The first round of UN climate talks since December's bitter Copenhagen summit opens in Bonn on Friday with the future of the process uncertain.

Developing countries are adamant that the UN climate convention is the right forum for negotiating a global deal and want it done by the year's end.

But others, notably the US, appear to think this is not politically feasible.

Some delegates are concerned that the whole process could collapse, given the divisions and lack of trust.

"There is the political will among developing countries. They are working for an agreement that includes further emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol," Martin Khor, executive director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental organisation of developing countries, told the BBC.

“ There's considerable uncertainty about whether there is going to be a US domestic bill that follows through on the president's 17% commitment ”

Alden Meyer,

Union of Concerned Scientists

Earth Watch: Bonn voyage

"Whether there is political will among the industrialised countries is another matter," he said.

Developing nations have been pressing to agree a series of preparatory meetings this year - as many as five - in order that outstanding differences on the text of a new agreement can be worked out in time for the next major summit in Mexico, in November and December.

But delegates here said that richer countries were resisting this, holding out for just one more meeting before November, which would leave no chance of agreeing a new global treaty or even agreeing a framework.

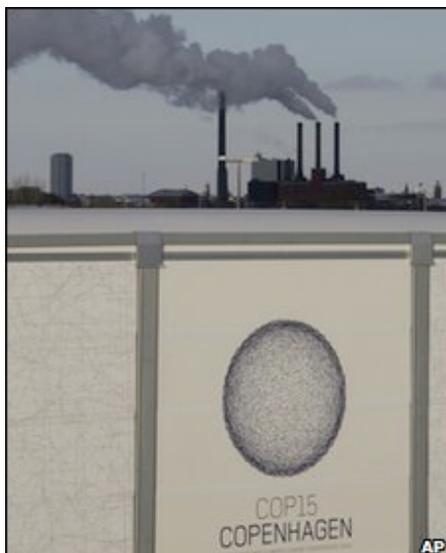
Analyses released since the end of the Copenhagen summit suggest that without further constraints soon, it will be very difficult to keep the rise in average global temperatures since pre-industrial times below 2C, a threshold commonly cited as indicating dangerous climate change.

Cross parties

The US, in particular, is in a sticky situation regarding domestic legislation.

An initial bill, introduced to the Senate last September, is widely seen as having no chance of passing.

A cross-party group of senators has been drawing up a new one, containing concessions to some states and industries.



The accord from Copenhagen proved as controversial as the summit

But this version, if enacted, may reduce US emissions by considerably less than the 17% figure (from 2005 levels by 2020) that President Barack Obama pledged when he addressed Copenhagen.

"There's considerable uncertainty about whether there is going to be a US domestic bill that follows through on the president's 17% commitment," said Alden Meyer, director of strategy and policy at the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

"[The administration is] very sceptical about the ability to get a full-blown legal deal that replaces the Kyoto Protocol or builds on it, given the state of play back home."

As to whether growing scepticism about the science of climate change - evidenced in some US opinion polls - was slowing the legislative process, Mr Meyer suggested it was not.

"The manufactured debate over the science is in our view just an excuse for [opposing senators] not to do what they weren't going to do anyway," he said.

"The attempts to swing votes behind the new bill aren't anything to do with climate science, they're to do with alleviating concerns from industries the senators are close to."

**BASIC instinct**

Immediately after the Copenhagen summit, the US appeared to have formed a powerful new alliance with the BASIC group of countries - Brazil, China, India and South Africa - that steered through the controversial and weak Copenhagen Accord on the summit's final day.

There were signs that this group saw the accord, with its voluntary nature, as more attractive than the traditional negotiations and supposedly binding commitments of the UN process.

However, the BASIC countries have now affirmed that the UN climate convention (UNFCCC) should be the sovereign body for international climate talks.

More than 120 countries have sent letters to the UNFCCC secretariat saying whether or not they endorse the accord.

A majority do endorse it, but many with the rider that they see it as just a political declaration leading to a full-blown treaty at some stage, and certainly not be a replacement for such a treaty.

Sources said the US was "bullying" small developing countries into endorsing the accord, claiming they would not be eligible for financial help from rich nations unless they did so.

Whereas this accusation appears to be straining relations that were already stretched, there are signs that the EU is preparing to give ground on one of the major demands of developing countries - that further emissions cuts for rich countries are made under the Kyoto Protocol.

In a strategy document released last week, the UK said it was prepared to consider the idea; and other EU leaders are also reportedly sympathetic.

"This is a pretty good first step," said Mr Khor. "It's not enough, but if more countries in the EU take this position, that could be the foundation of something that could be a salvation to this situation."

However, if the EU did formally move in this direction, it would put the bloc at odds with traditional allies such as the US, Canada and Japan.

The meeting here runs until Sunday evening.

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**Climate 'more urgent than ever'**

**By Richard Black**

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**The need for a new global climate deal is "greater than ever", according to developing country delegates speaking at the opening of UN climate talks.**

Blocs representing the poorest nations called for intensive talks during the year, leading to agreement on a legally binding treaty in December.

The EU backed the call, re-stating that the conclusion of December's Copenhagen summit had not met its ambitions.

But other industrialised countries do not appear so keen for a new treaty.

The three-day meeting here in Bonn is the first since the Copenhagen summit concluded without the global treaty that many countries had aimed for, instead producing a political declaration known as the Copenhagen Accord.

*"As a well-known politician once said, the one thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history"*

**Tosi Mpanu Mpanu, Africa Group of nations representative**

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The US and other rich countries see it as a positive development, but others decry it as a figleaf that detracts attention from the real issues.

Describing Copenhagen as "a total failure", Venezuela's delegation chief Claudia Salerno said the accord would not reduce emissions enough to prevent significant climate impacts on poorer countries.

"My country raised its voice against the misnomer 'Copenhagen Accord' because... it contains proposals for voluntary reductions in carbon emissions that according to scientists would lead to increases in temperature of about 5C (9F)," she said.

"So nobody should be congratulating themselves on that. The urgency we face now is even greater than 2009."

Not all analyses of the Copenhagen Accord's pledges on curbing carbon emissions produce such high estimates for temperature rise, but many of those pledges are far from precise.

## Lessons of history

The US - which did not speak during the opening session here - has been the accord's principal champion, saying it "achieves a number of landmark outcomes".



Its written submission to the UN climate convention (UNFCCC) backs "further formalisation of the accord" at this year's summit in Mexico, and says that "it will be difficult to find consensus around alternative proposals that depart from the accord understandings".

These statements have raised the hackles of developing countries, which interpret them as meaning that the US now sees the accord as the central global agreement and is not prepared to engage in anything that goes much beyond it.

"As a well-known politician once said, the one thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history," said Tosi Mpanu Mpanu from the Democratic Republic of Congo, speaking for the Africa Group of nations.

"The Africa Group believes that if we are to avoid a repetition of Copenahgen and repair this damaged process, then we must learn from Copenahgen."

And one of the lessons to learn, he continued, was that breaking away from formal inclusive negotiations and instead focusing on "a secret text put together by a selected few fundamentally broke the trust that is necessary for any partnership that aspires to be succesful and enduring".

Fernando Tudela, the Mexican delegate whose government will host this year's summit, referred to the need for "an authentic process of multilateral negotiations", with many others echoing his call.

## Time and money

How and when these negotiations can happen, though, is another matter.

Developing country blocs called for at least three extra meetings this year - and perhaps as many as five - in addition to the regular fortnight in Bonn scheduled for June.

Staging all the extra meetings between the 2007 Bali summit and Copenahgen cost more than

\$30m (£19.5m), according to the UNFCCC secretariat; and governments would have to provide the money needed to hold another series.

Among wealthy nations, the EU appears the bloc most likely to engage with developing country concerns.

"We all need to frankly assess and examine the lessons learned last time," said Spain's Alicia Montalvo Santamaria, speaking for the EU, as Spain currently holds the presidency.

"The EU recognises the positive outcomes of the Copenhagen conference that gave important political guidance from the highest levels.

"However, the outcome did not reflect the EU's ambitions, and... we remain fully committed to negotiations with all parties in order to conclude a comprehensive global legal framework that allows us to stay below a rise of 2C (3.6F) since pre-industrial times."

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