

Doha summit launches climate damage aid

- 14:46 10 December 2012 by [Michael Marshall](#), Doha, Qatar
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The latest summit to stop climate change, [held in Doha, Qatar](#), over the past two weeks has been roundly slammed. Little was agreed to curb greenhouse gas emissions and [the latest modelling](#), carried out by the Climate Action Tracker consortium shows global averages temperatures are still set to rise by at least 3 °C above pre-industrial levels.

There was one breakthrough: developing countries won a promise from developed ones that they would compensate them for losses and damage caused by climate change. The deal offers the promise of large amounts of climate aid. But first, science will have to catch up with politics.

All countries will suffer from climate change. There will be consequences even if humanity slashed its emissions and [stopped temperatures rising more than 2 °C above pre-industrial levels](#), the stated goal of the UN negotiations. In actual fact, with [emissions rising faster than ever, a 3 or 4 °C rise is likely this century](#).

The consequences will be manifold. Deserts will spread and lethal heatwaves become more frequent. Changes in rainfall will bring droughts, floods and storms, while [rising seas will swamp low-lying areas](#), obliterating valuable territory. Food production will fall.

Before Doha kicked off, the charities ActionAid, CARE International and WWF released a report arguing that rich countries should compensate poor countries for such damages. [Tackling the Limits to Adaptation](#) points out that climate change will cost countries dearly, both economically and in less tangible ways such as the loss of indigenous cultures.

Two-pronged approach

So far, climate negotiations have taken a two-pronged approach to the problem. On the one hand, they have sought to create incentives or imperatives to cut emissions. On the other, they have established a pot of money for poor countries to pay for measures that will help them fend off the unavoidable consequences of climate change – such as sea walls and irrigation systems.

That, according to some, leaves a third element missing. Helping those who suffer the consequences of climate change is a moral obligation and must be part of any treaty on climate change, says [Niklas Höhne](#) of renewable energy consultancy Ecofys. The idea of climate compensation has been around since the early 1990s, when the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) was negotiated.

In Doha, a coalition including China, the [Alliance of Small Island States](#) and the [G77 group](#) of developing countries pushed for it to be revived.

They [proposed a scheme that would decide when countries had suffered climate harms, and compensate them](#). It would be a form of insurance, and the greatest international aid scheme ever. The idea gained momentum after Typhoon Bopha struck the Philippines last week, and that country's negotiator Naderev "Yeb" Saño broke down in tears during a speech. And, although developed nations had little incentive to agree, the conference concluded with a

promise to set something up next year.

Compensation poses a fundamental challenge to climate science, which still struggles to work out if trends and events are caused by greenhouse gases or would have happened anyway. "We can't say that an individual event was caused by climate change," says [Nigel Arnell](#) of the University of Reading, UK. "What we can do is say that the chance of it happening was greater."

Systematic tests

Some climatologists are now running [systematic tests to decide whether extreme weather events are caused by climate change](#). They run climate models with and without humanity's emissions. If the odds of a particular event are different, it suggests it was at least partially driven by emissions. By this measure, the [2003 European heatwave](#) and [2011 Texas drought](#) were both made more likely by human emissions.

But this science is in its infancy. We can confidently attribute large-scale trends and temperature changes, says [Kevin Trenberth](#) of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. But changes in rainfall, and short-term events like hurricanes, are harder because we do not really understand them. Trenberth speculates that [superstorm Sandy](#) would not have [flooded the New York subways](#) 🇺🇸 without climate change, but says it's not possible to prove.

Arnell says that might prove unworkable. Gradual changes – such as rising sea levels, melting glaciers and ocean acidification – are easy to attribute to climate change but their consequences difficult to cost; sudden events are easy to cost but difficult to attribute.

There may be another possibility. Rather than examining individual events, climate models could predict the extra climate-related costs each country would experience, allowing regular payouts. "That would be a way round it," says Arnell. Delegates at next year's conference will have to consider these questions.

Positive step

[Harjeet Singh](#) of ActionAid in New Delhi, India, calls the Doha deal "a positive step forward". But it is only an agreement in principle: no money was committed, and even a promise to do so in the future was left out of the final text. [Edward Davey](#), the UK's secretary of state for energy and climate change, said it was "far too early" to talk about committing money. "We aren't saying there should be compensation," he said.

Singh says the developed world would save money by cutting emissions now, rather than letting temperatures rise and then paying compensation. Small island states were keen to get an agreement on loss and damage because emissions cuts are going so slowly, making dangerous climate change almost certain. The Doha agreement is a first step towards dealing with the consequences of that failure.

On 'other business'

Aside from agreeing to make compensation available for loss and damage, the Doha summit achieved little. Nearly two decades ago, the world's governments set out to agree a binding deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Doha included [some baby steps towards a deal in 2015](#), but that is not guaranteed and in any case will come too late to stop dangerous climate change. Only

Lebanon and the Dominican Republic made new emissions pledges.

The talks were bogged down in rows over financing. In a deal that was separate to the adaptation fund, developed countries had promised in 2009 to deliver \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poor nations prepare for climate change. Between 2009 and 2012 they allocated \$10 billion a year. In Doha they refused to say how they would scale that up, simply promising to "continue" – leaving developing countries unsure if or when they would get more.

The Kyoto protocol [was renewed until 2020](#), but its global effect is likely to be limited. Its value is partly symbolic, to show that binding agreements can be reached, and as one of many small and medium-scale projects to cut emissions.

8 December 2012 Last updated at 19:20 GMT

UN climate talks extend Kyoto Protocol, promise compensation

By Roger Harrabin BBC Environment analyst, Doha



The Kyoto protocol on climate change had been due to expire later this year

UN climate talks in Doha have closed with a historic shift in principle but few genuine cuts in greenhouse gases.

The summit established for the first time that rich nations should move towards compensating poor nations for losses due to climate change.

Developing nations hailed it as a breakthrough, but condemned the gulf between the science of climate change and political attempts to tackle it.

The deal, agreed by nearly 200 nations, extends to 2020 the Kyoto Protocol.

It is the only legally-binding plan for combating global warming.

The deal covers Europe and Australia, whose share of world greenhouse gas emissions is less than 15%.

"This is a watershed in the talks. There is no turning back from this"

Saleem ul-Huq IIED think-tank, Bangladesh

But the conference also cleared the way for the Kyoto protocol to be replaced by a new treaty binding all rich and poor nations together by 2015 to tackle climate change.

The final text "encourages" rich nations to mobilise at least \$10bn (£6bn) a year up to 2020, when the new global climate agreement is due to kick in.

Final turmoil

There was last-minute drama as the talks were thrown into turmoil by the insistence of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus that they should be allowed extra credit for the emissions cuts they made when their industries collapsed.

After a long delay, the chairman lost patience, re-started the meeting and gavelled through the agenda so fast there was no chance for Russia to object.

A cheer exploded into prolonged applause. Russia bitterly objected at what it said was a clear breach of procedure, but the chairman said he would do no more than reflect the Russian view in the final report.

The big players, the US, EU and China accepted the agreement with varying degrees of reservation. But the representative for the small island states at severe risk from climate change was vociferous.

"We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands," he said.

"There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) - only promises that something might materialise in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

The island states accepted the agreement because for them it is better than nothing. Other diplomats will point to the immense complexity of the UN process, which is attempting to move away from the old Kyoto Protocol into a new phase binding rich and poor nations together in the task of tackling climate change.

The proposed new Loss and Damage mechanism is held up as an example of the success of the diplomatic process.

"This agreement really opens a can of worms"

Nick Mabey E3G think-tank, UK

Until now rich nations have agreed finance to help developing countries to get clean energy and adapt to climate change, but they have stopped short of accepting responsibility for damage caused by climate change elsewhere.

But in Doha that broad principle was agreed.

"It is a breakthrough," said Martin Khor of the South Centre - an association of 52 developing nations. "The term Loss and Damage is in the text - this is a huge step in principle. Next comes the fight for cash.

"What helped swing it was [US President Barack] Obama asking Congress for \$60bn for the

damage caused by [Hurricane] Sandy," he said.

Saleem ul-Huq, from the think-tank IIED in Bangladesh, told me the text should have been firmer, but he said: "This is a watershed in the talks. There is no turning back from this."

Nick Mabey, from the UK think-tank E3G, said: "This agreement really opens a can of worms - it might be applied to countries damming transboundary rivers, for instance. It could be very significant in future."

No US veto

The US had been adamant that this measure would be blocked, and the EU nearly vetoed it, too.

Todd Stern, the US head of delegation here, was seen for much of the past few days walking in circles near the tea bar on his mobile phone to Washington. He told me: "We don't like this text, but we can live with it."

The key to US agreement was the positioning of the Loss and Damage mechanism under an existing process promising to mobilise \$100bn a year for poor nations to adapt to climate change.

Facing tough budget decisions at home over the "fiscal cliff" it was essential for the US to avoid the impression that it was giving away more cash at this time.

The UK Climate Secretary, Ed Davey, told me: "We haven't agreed to set up a new institution - and there's no blank cheque. But there is clearly an issue if, say, an island state is lost underwater."

Ronny Jumea, from the Seychelles, told rich nations earlier that discussion of compensation would not have been needed if they had cut emissions earlier.

"We're past the mitigation [emissions cuts] and adaptation eras. We're now right into the era of loss and damage. What's next after that? Destruction?" he said.

The US has been blamed on finance and on failure to cut its emissions more aggressively.

The EU has also been under fire for failing to raise its promised cuts from 20%, which it is reaching easily, to 30%. (Scientists say it should be 40%.)

The EU has been held back by Poland, which insists on its right to burn its huge reserves of coal.

'Crushing Russian revolt'

Warsaw was refusing to sign the extension to the Kyoto climate protocol until it had a reassurance from the EU that it would receive flexible treatment on emissions cuts.

Russia, Belarus and Ukraine then further delayed the endgame of the conference with an argument over so-called "hot air" - the pollution permits they were given to allow their heavy industries to thrive.

Those industries collapsed but Poland and Russia insist that - as they suffered economic pain during the collapse - they should be allowed to use up the pollution permits as their economies

grow again.

In effect, they want to be able to increase their emissions as other nations are obliged to cut theirs.

The nature of the Russian objection was unclear, but an EU negotiator told me he believed the Russians were making a point of principle and did not expect further action.

The major task of this two-week conference has been untangling of the diplomatic spaghetti from climate agreements that have grown piecemeal over the past 15 years.

It is widely agreed that a useful house-keeping job was done to help the UN move towards the next phase, which aims at a globally-encompassing agreement.

Preliminary discussions were held on this, and it was quickly evident that making a global agreement fair to all parties will be monumentally difficult.

The talks were chaired by Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, a former head of the oil cartel Opec.

He was widely criticised for his laid-back style earlier in the week but at the last there was the unlikely spectacle of environmentalists cheering the ruthlessness of the chair in crushing the Russian revolt.

Climate change diplomacy makes strange bedfellows.

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Doha climate talks: US faces dilemma over final text

By Roger Harrabin BBC Environment analyst, Doha, Qatar



Various NGOs have protested at the talks in Doha

There has been a historic shift in the UN climate talks in Qatar, with the prospect of rich nations having to compensate poor nations for losses due to climate change.

The US has fiercely opposed the measure - it says the cost could be unlimited.

But after angry tussles throughout the night the principle of Loss and Damage is now in the final negotiating text.

Small island states at risk from inundation say they will walk out if the US vetoes the proposed deal.

The political stakes are high. The EU's position is not yet well defined, but soundings suggest that it can live with the text.

The US will be seeking support from other big polluters - like Canada - likely to face liability for climate damages.

If the US is left alone fighting against the chair's text, its negotiators face a dilemma - either to bow to the majority and accept that the nations which caused climate change bear a moral responsibility to other nations damaged by it, or to refuse to sign.

If the US vetoes the text, President Barack Obama will be accused of hypocrisy and failure after re-committing himself to tackling climate change since his re-election.

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“Start Quote

"I will block this. I will shut this down"

Todd Stern US chief negotiator

If he agrees the text he will face criticism from Republicans, whilst he tries to negotiate his own deal over US government finances.

One campaign group in Doha tweeted that before the text was agreed Todd Stern, the US chief negotiator, was heard saying: "I will block this. I will shut this down."

Saleem ul-Huq, from the think-tank IIED, told the BBC: "This is a watershed in the talks. There is no turning back from this. It will be better for the US to realise that the principle of compensation is inevitable - and negotiate a limit on Loss and Damage rather than leave the liability unlimited.

"[President Obama] has just asked Congress for \$60bn (£37bn) for the effects of Sandy - developed nations are already having to foot the bill for loss and damage of their own."

The Qatari chair has warned delegates that only a few hours remain to sign off the deal. He says the conference will not overrun by another day.

Principle at stake

It is a point of principle that is at stake here for developing countries. In the end it's questionable how much extra money a Loss and Damage Mechanism might bring.

Already poor nations are bitter that rich nations, particularly the US are dragging their feet over a promise made at the failed Copenhagen climate summit to mobilise \$100bn by 2020 to help poor nations get clean energy and adapt to climate change.

The developing countries say the original sum was too low - especially in the light of Mr Obama's request to Congress for Sandy damages of \$60bn, and the UK's bid to raise £200bn for clean energy by 2020.

Climate talks stumbling towards a deal

- 17:56 07 December 2012 by [Michael Marshall](#), Doha, Qatar
- For similar stories, visit the [Climate Change](#) Topic Guide

This year's climate conference was supposed to tie up loose ends, allowing countries to move forward towards a global deal by 2015. But as of lunchtime Friday, with just hours to go, many of the ends are as loose as ever.

Here are the key issues, and how they might be resolved.

What sort of global deal are we supposed to get in 2015, and are we on track?

At last year's conference in Durban, all countries agreed to work towards a [binding deal](#) which would be agreed in 2015 and come into force in 2020. This deal is intended to be legally enforceable, and will ensure global emissions cuts.

The last attempt at such a deal was in Copenhagen in 2009. It collapsed at the last minute. The new process should set milestones for the next three conferences, allowing a steady build-up to 2015.

Work on the new deal has been stymied by the need to tie up loose ends from previous conferences, such as the idea of continuing the Kyoto protocol. Nevertheless there have been some promising signs, and NGOs say the process has started well. Essentially, the negotiators have agreed how they are going to decide what issues they will talk about over the next three years.

Even if all goes to plan, though, the deal is likely to be [too late to prevent dangerous climate change](#). Global emissions need to peak by around 2020 to give a good chance of ensuring that temperatures do not rise more than 2 °C above pre-industrial levels. Any rise above 2 °C is considered "dangerous" – meaning that the damaging consequences will be more than many societies can cope with. If a deal comes into force in 2020, emissions will not peak for several years after, making it more likely that the world will warm by 3 or 4 °C.

If dangerous climate change is likely to happen, what are we going to do about it?

In theory, there are three things we could do. We could stop climate change happening, by cutting our greenhouse gas emissions. We could adapt to it, by doing things like developing drought-resistant crops and building up sea defences. And we could help those who suffer unavoidable harms, for instance by compensating them.

Even if we keep warming below 2 °C, which is vanishingly unlikely, some countries will suffer. Low-lying island states are at particular risk as rising sea levels will swamp some or all of their territory. Countries with coastlines have the same problem: they will lose land, much of it farmland or densely populated cities, to the ocean, and suffer more flooding from storms.

An alliance of developing countries, spearheaded by China and small island states, has called for the world to set up an international mechanism to give aid or pay out some form of compensation to countries and people harmed by climate change.

So rich countries should give money to poor countries when the latter are harmed by climate change. Is that likely to happen?

This idea has been a political hot potato, with many developed countries – particularly the US – rejecting it outright. It amounts to admitting responsibility or even blame for climate change, which they are reluctant to do. It could also open the way for legal claims for damages.

The idea of compensating countries for climate-induced damage has been around since the early 1990s, when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was first being negotiated. But it got little prominence until the past few years, as countries had focused on getting a deal to cut emissions and provide money for measures to adapt to changing climate. As dangerous climate change begins to look almost certain, compensation has come to the forefront. Developed countries have been caught on the hop as a result.

"One needs to have a solution to this," says Niklas Höhne of renewable energy consultancy Ecofys. Any truly global approach to climate change must have a system for helping people who have suffered as a result of it, he says. "It is a moral obligation."

The trouble is that developed countries have little incentive to agree to these payouts. Although they receive some benefits if they help other countries cut their emissions and thus reduce climate change, they will not gain from paying compensation – unless it helps to prevent a mass influx of climate refugees.

"It's difficult to see where there is common ground," says [Liz Gallagher](#), a senior policy adviser at non-profit organisation E3G. She says small island states are anxious to get some sort of agreement on this, as pledges to cut emissions have been thin on the ground.

Is this all a row about money?

Money is certainly a big part of it. Back in 2009 in Copenhagen, the US promised that it would help to raise [\\$100 billion a year in aid for developing countries by 2020](#). This began with a "fast start finance" period covering 2010 to 2012, during which \$30 billion has been allocated.

So far there is no sign of a plan to increase these amounts to reach the \$100 billion pledge, and this has become a major sticking point. Developing countries want a concrete plan, showing how funding will increase over the next eight years. They are unlikely to get it and may have to content themselves with a vague promise to examine how to ramp up funding.

I heard they saved the Kyoto protocol. Is that right?

More or less. It looks like the Kyoto protocol, the world's only binding agreement to cut emissions, will continue for several more years. However, [as we reported yesterday](#), it is unclear how long the extension will last, or how effective it will be. Nevertheless, its value as a proof of principle – that binding agreements can be reached and adhered to – remains.

6 November 2012 Last updated at 09:19 GMT

Kyoto protocol gets a second lease of life

- 17:19 06 December 2012 by [Michael Marshall](#), Doha, Qatar
- For similar stories, visit the [Climate Change](#) Topic Guide

The Kyoto protocol expires within weeks and a successor is still being argued over. So it's good that negotiators at the United Nations climate summit in Doha, Qatar, have almost

finalised a deal which could extend the treaty out to 2020.

[Christiana Figueres](#), the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), announced the deal just after 1 pm Qatar time, declaring it "an enormous victory".

What has actually been achieved, and what will it mean? *New Scientist* explains.

Remind me: what is the Kyoto protocol?

It is an agreement under which many of the world's industrialised countries – including Australia, Japan and members of the European Union – promised to cut their emissions of greenhouse gases. It was agreed in 1997 and came into force in 2005. The first "commitment period" ends on 31 December.

The US did sign up but was never able to get the protocol through Congress. Canada, too, signed up but dropped out last year.

All signatory countries promised to cut their emissions by a certain percentage by 2012, compared to what they emitted in 1990. They could do this either directly, by reducing their own emissions, or indirectly, by financing projects in the developing world that cut emissions or trap carbon.

What is going to happen when the current commitment period ends?

At last year's UNFCCC summit in Durban, South Africa, [the European Union agreed to start a second commitment period](#) that would begin in 2013.

Durban also saw countries commit to drawing up a wider global agreement to cut emissions, one that would include developing as well as developed nations and that is supposed to take effect in 2020. In theory, the second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol could bridge the gap between now and 2020 – but its coverage will barely extend beyond the EU.

What's more, it was unclear in Durban how this second period would work. This is what the negotiators have now more or less sorted out. The technical negotiators have agreed a [draft text](#) which has been passed to ministers for final discussions. If all goes well, it will be finalised by the end of tomorrow.

What issues have negotiations been focused on?

The first was seemingly simple: how long should the next commitment period last? The draft text does not resolve this. It will either be 5 years – ending in 2017 – or eight years, to finish in 2020. Ministers will have to decide.

There was also a thorny dilemma. Between 2005 and 2012, many countries managed to cut their emissions by more than they had promised, so they now have a surplus of emissions permits, known as "assigned amount units". If these AAUs are carried over into the second commitment period, it could render the whole exercise virtually pointless, as the extra permits will allow countries to continue emitting. However, countries with surplus permits argue that they have earned them by doing a good job of cutting emissions.

This led to some pretty intense discussions. From an environmental point of view, the best option is to cancel the surplus permits, effectively tightening the noose on countries to make them cut emissions. However, few of the countries involved want to do that.

One possibility is that they will be allowed to carry the surplus emissions forward but will have limited options for using them, as a way of keeping up the pressure to cut emissions.

Critics say the original Kyoto protocol was not great. Will this new version be better?

The big problem with the Kyoto protocol was that it covered a fraction of global emissions because it only applied to a group of industrialised countries, and did not include big emitters like the US and China. The second commitment period is likely to be worse in that regard, as several countries have dropped out.

There is one improvement, however. Countries will be encouraged to review their emissions targets over the next few years, but will not be allowed to weaken targets, only to strengthen them. If a country decides it wants to make deeper cuts, it will be easier than before for this to be approved. Under the existing system, a country needs to get any changes to its targets ratified by 75 per cent of the signatories to the protocol. In effect, countries need to seek permission to cut their emissions. This bizarre situation will be fixed.

Nevertheless, the limited scale of the Kyoto protocol means that, by itself, it cannot prevent dangerous climate change. Even if the signatories adopt and stick to strict emissions targets, emissions from countries that have not signed up will mean greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere keep rising. So its value is partly symbolic, to show that binding agreements can be reached, and as one of many small and medium-scale projects to cut emissions.

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Climate compensation row at Doha



By Roger Harrabin Environment analyst, Doha, Qatar



Protesters hit out at the "hot air" surplus some nations want to carry over into the next Kyoto Protocol commitment period

Frustration at slow progress of the UN climate talks bubbled over when a spokesman for small island states (AOSIS) rounded on rich nations.

US representative Jonathan Pershing had been discussing plans to compensate poor nations for

losses due to damage from climate change.

But AOSIS spokesman Ronald Jumeau condemned wealthy countries for their lack of urgency.

The UN talks are into their second week in the Qatari capital.

Mr Jumeau said that there would be no need for talk about compensation if the rich had cut their emissions in previous meetings.

"The Doha caravan seems to be lost in the sand," he told a joint news conference. "As far as ambition is concerned, we are lost.

"We're past the mitigation (emissions cuts) and adaptation eras. We're now right into the era of loss and damage. What's next after that? Destruction? Disappearance of some of our islands?

"We're already into the era of re-location. But after loss and damage there will be mass re-locations if we continue with this loss of ambition."

The issue of compensation for climate losses looks set to become a major focus for negotiations at the conference.

The task of the meeting is to wind up negotiations under talks associated with the existing Kyoto Protocol on cutting emissions of greenhouse gases, and move towards a new treaty in 2015 binding all nations, rich and poor in tackling climate change.

Developing countries are attempting to bolt down as many commitments as possible and they sense that there may be some movement on a new mechanism for loss and damage.

The idea is being backed in a petition to governments by 44 NGOs representing millions of people concerned about the impacts of climate change. It has been led by Care.

"The first and foremost response must be to immediately and dramatically cut emissions and help vulnerable countries and ecosystems adapt to new climate realities, " it says.

"Governments must now also recognize that we are in a "third era" and redress the permanent loss and damage from climate impacts.

"Given historic inaction by developed countries we are heading for the biggest social injustice of our time."

They urge governments to establish a formal mechanism for loss and damage (the word "compensation" is being avoided; some nations, including the US won't countenance it because of the implication of guilt). They also want the UN to monitor and assess losses, and to find new approaches for addressing loss and damage, particularly for slow-onset events like, say, sea level rise.

Nick Mabey from the think-tank E3G told BBC News it was useful that the issue of long-term risk might become embedded in the negotiations. There were costs, he said, to avoiding action to cut emissions:

"The debate on loss and damage brings an important new dimension to the climate negotiations. The costs of failing to reduce climate risk must be internalised in the negotiations or agreement

will be reached merely by lowering ambition for mitigation ."

"With a truly global agreement now possible in 2015, countries must now decide how much climate risk they are willing to take and what they are willing to do to reduce their exposure."

Mr Jumeau, from the Seychelles, went out of his way to praise the UK for its leadership on climate change, especially for its re-stated pledges of increased finance to help poor nations get clean energy - £1.8bn by 2015.

Germany followed by promising to increase its contributions further.

A spokesman for the UK delegation told BBC News: "The UK is still taking part in important negotiations around loss and damage. So far, we have indentified a number of areas where parties agree and we are working hard to find common agreement on the way forward."

Back in the UK, the Chancellor George Osborne was facing complaints from some Conservatives that money was going on climate finance when budgets were being cut for services in Britain.

His gas strategy, published alongside the Autumn Statement, confirms that he wants to review and maybe scrap the UK's unilateral targets on reducing emissions.

Doha climate talks represent 'golden opportunity'



By Matt McGrath Environment correspondent, BBC News



It is the first time a Gulf state has hosted global climate negotiations

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The latest round of UN climate talks have opened in Doha, the capital of [Qatar](#).

More than 17,000 participants from all over the world are expected to gather in the Gulf state over the next two weeks.

The President of the meeting said it was a "golden opportunity" to make progress on a new global climate deal.

But many delegates remain concerned that divisions between developing and wealthy nations will hamper progress.

The meeting elected the former Qatari energy minister H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah, as President of the Conference of the Parties ([COP18](#)).

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Fault lines

- **Ambition:** A growing sense among developing nations that richer countries are not aiming high enough in cutting carbon
- **Money:** Lack of clarity about where the money to help poorer nations to adapt will come from
- **Disengagement:** Major emitters including the United States, Canada, Russia and Japan say they will not take on new carbon targets under an extension of the Kyoto Protocol

In his opening remarks he said the "phenomenon" of climate change was a common challenge and the meeting in Doha was critical.

"This is an historic conference," said Mr Al-Attiyah, "it is of vital importance considering the items on its agenda. It is a turning point in the negotiations on climate change."

Some delegates were critical of the decision to hold the meeting in a country with some of the highest per capital emissions of carbon dioxide on earth. Jennifer Morgan, from the environmental think tank [World Resources Institute](#) called on the Qataris to announce actions to curb their own carbon footprint.



Mr Al-Attiyah hopes the negotiations will mark a "turning point"

"I think the best way they could show their intent would be to announce what action or pledge they are going to put forward as part of this entire negotiation," she told BBC News. "They don't currently have anything on the books."

"There's much poorer countries who have said they are going to go climate neutral, so if they want to set the record straight that they are in this for the climate, then putting forward some sort of commitment early on, would I think help." she said.

There are also concerns that the meeting could end in stalemate as old divisions between rich and poor resurface.

Delegates will seek to negotiate a new commitment period for the [Kyoto Protocol](#), the first phase of which runs out at the end of the year. Many poorer nations want the wealthier countries to take on substantial new cuts in carbon for the next five years.

Increasing ambition

A statement from a group of over 100 of the poorest and most at risk nations demanded action on this issue.

"The Kyoto Protocol is more than a treaty, it is the foundation upon which our multilateral effort to address climate change rests," it said.

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Climate change glossary

Select a term to learn more:

Adaptation

Adaptation

Action that helps cope with the effects of climate change - for example construction of barriers to protect against rising sea levels, or conversion to crops capable of surviving high temperatures and drought.

[Glossary in full](#)

"The countries most responsible for the crisis must agree to a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol that will deliver genuine benefits to the climate that sustains us all. Currently, what is on the table falls far short of this climate imperative."

There are also likely to be serious disputes about finance and about the issue of "[hot air](#)" - the carrying over of unused permits to emit carbon.

Some of these issues may have to be resolved by cabinet ministers from more than 100 countries who will join the negotiating teams for the last four days of the meeting.

But Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Christian Figueres expressed the hope that the negotiators themselves could make progress

"May I dare say that much of this can be accomplished before the high level segment, to allow this COP to finish not on Saturday, not on Sunday but actually make history by finishing on Friday," she said.