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Last minute deal saves fractious UN climate talks

By Matt McGrath Environment correspondent, BBC News, in Warsaw



Delegates negotiated through the night in Warsaw before clinching a deal on Sunday

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After 30 hours of deadlock, weary delegates finally agreed an outline framework for a new global deal at UN climate talks in Warsaw.

The agreement was achieved after a series of last minute compromises often involving single words in draft texts.

Negotiators also made progress on the contentious issue of loss and damage caused by rising temperatures.

But green groups were angry about the lack of specific commitments on finance.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) started two weeks ago in the shadow of Typhoon Haiyan.

Speaking at the time, the lead delegate from the Philippines, Yeb Sano, drew tears in the auditorium with a heartfelt plea to "stop this climate madness."

But the good intentions foundered on the political and economic realities of a complex process where agreement has to be by consensus.

The mood was not helped by the Japanese government announcing it would not be able to meet

its 2020 emissions cuts target.

Substance

The Poles, tasked with chairing the talks, were criticised for being seen to be too close to the coal industry.

The head of the meeting was then sacked as environment minister in a Polish government reshuffle.

All the while there were reports from many participants that little of substance was being achieved.

There were problems with finance, compensation for loss and damage and developing a framework by which the parties would get to 2015, the deadline for a new global deal.

The critical element was the outline framework. This proved the most difficult aspect of the negotiations as meetings continued through Friday night and late into Saturday evening.

The delegates were trying to capture the shape and outline of how a global agreement would look. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the richer countries want it to apply to everyone, especially emerging giants like India and China.

However, many of the emerging countries, including Venezuela, are keen on inserting a "firewall" into the prospective agreement to preserve the past differences.

2b or not 2b?

In this meeting that battle took place over a single word in the pathway document.

Paragraph 2b of the text originally spoke of "commitments" by all parties. But in a plenary session, delegates from China and India ripped into this and said they could not accept the language.

"Only developed countries should have commitments," said China's lead negotiator Su Wei.

"Emerging economies could merely be expected to "enhance action", he said.

With time running out, desperate ministers and their advisers huddled in the corner of the hall to work out a compromise.

After an hour, they agreed to change "commitments" to "contributions".

The more flexible word allows the US and EU to insist that everyone is on the same page, while also allowing China and India to insist that they are doing something different from the richer countries.

EU climate commissioner Connie Hedegaard was relieved that this key element had been agreed.

"It is extremely challenging, but we got the process on track," she told BBC News.

"There are more beautiful and faster ways to Paris but what is important here is that we get there and get a good outcome, I think that is doable after what I have seen here.

Another key battle was over the issue of loss and damage. This was crucial for developing countries who say that money to help them adapt to climate change is all well and good, but they need something extra to cope with extreme events such as Typhoon Haiyan.

They had argued for a new institution called a loss and damage mechanism that would have the financial clout to deal with the impacts of events that had been clearly affected by climate change.

But in the text the new mechanism would have to sit "under" an existing part of the UN body that dealt with adaptation.

This one word stuck in the throats of delegates from developing countries, including Filipino Yeb Sano who again made a moving intervention.

"It has boiled down to one word and I would say this is a defining moment for this process. Let us take that bold step and get that word out of the way."

After another huddle the word was changed and the text accepted.

Not everyone was happy.

Harjeet Singh from Action Aid said the new mechanism was merely fulfilling a pledge made last year.

"It is the barest minimum that was supposed to be achieved at Warsaw on loss and damage anyway. A few rich countries including the US held it hostage till the very end," he said.

By themselves, these compromises are not major breakthroughs and delegates know that far bigger battles lie ahead.

"As the Rolling Stones said 'you don't always get what you want,'" said Alden Meyer, from the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"But sometimes you get what you need if you try hard enough."

Warsaw climate change talks falter as EU and developing countries clash

EU chief chastised for expressing frustration with failure to agree timetable on emission cuts and attempts by some to opt out

- [Fiona Harvey](#) in Warsaw
- [The Guardian](#), Friday 22 November 2013 19.58 GMT



Connie Hedegaard, EU climate chief, is accused of 'damaging seriously the atmosphere of confidence and trust in this process'. Photograph: Julien Warnand/EPA

United Nations talks on [climate change](#) were on the brink of breaking down on Friday as a group of developing countries launched a furious attack on the European Union over plans to set out a timetable towards a global deal on greenhouse gas emissions.

Rows over whether rich countries should pay compensation to the poor for the effects of climate change, and over how governments can move to a historic global deal on emissions, have disrupted the fortnight-long talks, which have been marked by walk-outs and recriminations.

As the talks dragged on into the night, the EU's climate chief, Connie Hedegaard, expressed frustration with the failure to agree a timetable on emissions cuts, and with attempts by a small number of developing countries to opt out of the proposal.

In a dramatic intervention late on Friday, Venezuela's head of delegation, representing a group of "like-minded countries" including China, India, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, accused the EU of "damaging seriously the atmosphere of confidence and trust in this process". Claudia Salerno said: "We are shocked by the brazen attack against our group by Hedegaard – it is incredible that she has chosen to accuse our group of blocking progress."

Talks had been inching towards a conclusion, with participants reporting "productive" meetings and "modest progress". The negotiations were meant to lay the groundwork for a crunch meeting in Paris in late 2015, at which governments are supposed to sign a new global treaty on climate change, to come into force from 2020, which would be the first to include commitments on emissions from both developed and developing nations.

Before this can happen, it is crucial that all countries set out national targets on emissions well in advance of the Paris talks, so that other participants can assess the targets – which would lay out cuts into the 2020s and beyond – and can see whether they are sufficiently ambitious to

head off dangerous levels of climate change.

The US, the EU and many other rich and poor countries see such a programme as essential. But as the talks dragged on into extra time in [Poland](#)'s national football stadium on Friday night, there was still no consensus.

Salerno's outburst underlined the fractious nature of the talks, and the new divisions between some rapidly emerging economies, some of them with large fossil fuel interests, and other developing countries that have more to lose from the effects of climate change.

The spokesman for Hedegaard said some countries wanted to portray the talks as divided between the developed and developing world. "It's not like that. It is the willing versus the unwilling."

The EU and US are also anxious to ensure that rapidly growing economies – especially China, which is now the world's biggest emitter of CO2 and second biggest economy – take on responsibilities for their emissions, which they did not under the Kyoto protocol.

In another strand, the highly contentious issue of "loss and damage", by which developing countries stricken by the effects of severe weather would receive assistance, was moving towards compromise.

That would involve a mechanism for channelling funds to vulnerable countries when they suffer natural disasters related to global warming. This is very different from the "compensation" that some developing countries want from the rich world, and which rich countries have ruled out, but they may accept this compromise as it would allow them to receive funding when disaster strikes.

Ed Davey, the UK's energy and climate secretary, said: "I think we will be able to reconcile these views."

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Struggle for agreement at UN climate talks as green groups walk out



By Matt McGrath Environment correspondent, BBC News, Warsaw



Several hundred people walked out of the negotiations held at the national stadium in Warsaw
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Environmental campaigners walked out en-masse from climate talks here in Warsaw saying they felt no progress was possible.

Several hundred people left the national stadium venue amid anger over the slow pace of negotiations.

But UK climate secretary Ed Davey told reporters he still expected "modest progress" to be made.

And other negotiators indicated that a deal was possible on some of the most contentious issues.

The talks began almost two weeks ago in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan with an emotional plea for rapid movement from the Philippines lead delegate.

Yeb Sano, said it was time to "stop this madness" but his call has fallen on deaf ears according to many civil society groups like Oxfam, WWF and Action Aid.

"Governments are not doing enough," said Oxfam's Celine Charveriat, speaking to BBC News as she walked out of the talks.

"We need to tell them you are not allowed to make a mockery of this process. We can't continue to watch in silence. Enough is enough."

The conference has shipped a number of blows in recent days. Japan surprised the meeting by

announcing that it would have to significantly revise its targets on emissions cuts.

Instead of being able to cut their carbon dioxide by 25% below 1990 levels, the Japanese admitted they would actually rise by 3%.

Getting shirty

There was also annoyance among negotiators from developing countries about the attitude of Australia, which, under new prime minister Tony Abbott, has signalled a more sceptical approach to climate issues.

Delegates were upset to see two members of the Australian team wearing T-shirts in a late night negotiation session, during which they were said to be blocking progress on key texts.

But campaigners have reserved most of their wrath for Poland. The government gave its backing to a meeting of the coal industry in the capital on Monday. On Wednesday, the environment minister who was chairing these talks was sacked in a government re-shuffle.

Executive director of Greenpeace International, Kumi Naidoo, was sharply critical of the overall handling of the talks.

"The Polish government has done its best to turn these talks into a showcase for the coal industry," he said.

But some of those engaged in trying to move the process forward were not so downbeat.

UK climate secretary Ed Davey said he was hopeful of "modest progress" and didn't expect the walkout by green campaigners to have an impact.

"The UK government works very well with NGOS, but I don't think their walkout affects the talks."

Mr Davey struck a hopeful note on two of the major issues outstanding at these negotiations.

Participants are trying to develop a framework for a global deal in 2015, that would be legally binding and applicable to all.

Bland ambition

However the text that has been circulating here is said to be lacking in clarity and in ambition. Mr Davey believes it will emerge from these talks in a better shape.

"I can see a good landing ground on that, but we've got a bit of work to do and I think we may well be up for a long time tonight."

He was also hopeful that a deal could be done on the most contentious aspect, loss and damage. This is something that developing nations are desperately keen to see some progress on.

Richer countries are fighting tooth and nail against the idea of a legally binding compensation arrangement, that in their words, would see them on the hook for every storm in every part of the world, forever.

However, ambassador Ronny Jumeau, from the Alliance of Small Island States (Aosis), also struck a cautiously optimistic note. He said there were different definitions of compensation

that could allow some movement in the talks.

"It depends how you view compensation," he told BBC News.

"It doesn't necessarily mean I am blaming someone for it."

"We are past the blame game here, there is no black and white division between whose emissions caused what where."

The talks are due to finish late on Friday but the expectation is that, as usual, it will be sometime on Saturday before the final gavel falls.