

All eyes are now on Copenhagen

The UN climate change summit in Poznan ended without groundbreaking results, but it left the road to a post-Kyoto Protocol clear. To strike an ambitious deal by the end of 2009, however, the world will have to significantly step up its efforts.

| by Stefan Nicola

The new US President Barack Obama did not attend the climate conference in Poznan this past December, but his mantra of 'change' was omnipresent. When, in the second week of the summit, Democratic Senator John Kerry arrived, he quickly became the most sought-after interview partner in Poznan. Kerry wasn't part of the official U.S. delegation, he was much more important – he was Obama's messenger.

From Tuvalu to Tanzania, from Berlin to Beijing, people were waiting for Obama to join the fight against climate change, and to render obsolete the Bush Administration's hesitant, if not outright blocking approach to the issue. Kerry told people what they wanted to hear. 'President-elect Obama recognises the need for the United States to take the lead regarding climate change, and he will

In 2007 in Bali, nearly 200 nations agreed to come up with an ambitious global climate protection treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which runs out in 2012, by December 2009 at a summit in Copenhagen. The prospect of a US-led Obama has encouraged several countries to great hopes for ambitious climate negotiations in 2009. Apisai Ielemia, the prime minister of Tuvalu, a small island state that says it faces extinction because of rising sea levels, said he was looking for the US to step 'out of the dark ages of inaction and become a leading light on climate change.'

Key player |

The wait for Obama, however, also derailed progress in Poznan, which became a halfway house between Bali and Copenhagen.

administration. The EU agreed to hold on to its ambitious targets for emissions reductions, but watered down some parts of its climate package by granting exemptions to heavy industry. The actions by most major emitters in Poznan followed a logical, though opportunistic, strategy. Why throw down your best cards if the key player isn't even at the table yet?

Tedious and bureaucratic as it was, the summit did produce some results. First, it moved parties into 'negotiation mode'. At a March meeting in Bonn, countries will start drafting a negotiation text for Copenhagen, to be finalised in June. Another meeting is planned for August or September. Nations will also have to start giving the UN concrete figures regarding emissions they would be willing to slash. Delegates also agreed to hand the poorest countries direct access to a fund intended to help nations deal with the effects of global warming.

The so-called 'Adaptation Fund' stalled progress deep into the night of the summit's final day. In the end, delegates agreed to give the fund's board the capacity to grant developing countries direct access to about \$80 million per year.

Environmental groups and developing

The Kremlin will not sign up to a deal that threatens to damage its economy

push that lead,' he told reporters. Meanwhile, Harlan Watson and Paula Dobriansky, the official US negotiators, were holding press conferences in half-empty rooms.

Several rich countries were accused of scaling back their efforts because the US, one of the world's biggest emitters, was represented by a team from a lame-duck



Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Photo: Joe Klamar/AFP/Getty Images

nations were furious that the fund was not enlarged. Its money comes from voluntary contributions; starting in 2012, it will receive money from emission trading schemes and emissions reductions projects (the Clean Development Mechanism, CDM). But even then, with an anticipated value of up to \$300 million a year, it will be dwarfed by the enormous costs poor nations will face because of climate change. 'We are so sad and so disappointed,' said Colombian Environment Minister Juan Lozano. 'The human side of climate change is the suffering of our orphans and our victims and that was not considered here.'

To be fair: The Poznan summit wasn't meant to be groundbreaking. Yvo de Boer, the UN's top climate change official, who is known for his compassionate yet sober-minded leadership, called Poznan a "blue-collar conference". By that he meant that some basic work had to be done in Poznan. Delegates would likely revisit the Adaptation Fund next year, he said. 'Doing a deal in Copenhagen is, to an important extent, about engaging developing countries,' he said. 'And an important part of engaging countries is providing funds. Politically, this was not the time to do it.' Al Gore, the world's most famous climate activist,

said in a speech to the Poznan delegates (who celebrated him like a rock star, or better, a climate messiah) that the road to Copenhagen was nevertheless 'clear'.

Overexpectations |

And indeed, there is reason to believe that developing nations can be engaged. Mexico vowed to slash greenhouse emissions in half by 2050. Brazil and Peru said they could reverse and stop forest loss (which would effectively reduce their carbon emissions, as growing trees consume CO₂). And China has introduced ambitious domestic energy efficiency and emissions reductions projects. But several larger economies still refuse to sign up to concrete emissions reductions. Japan, Canada and Australia cited the financial crisis for their hesitancy and Russia may soon replace the US as the world's main climate refusenik. Alexander Pankin, deputy head of the Russian delegation in Poznan, said the Kremlin would not sign up to a deal that threatened to damage its economy.

But it is probably fair to say that all hope in the world rests on the new US Administration. Nations hope that Obama will personally conduct negotiations until

Copenhagen. Gore called on Obama and his fellow heads of states to become 'personally involved' in climate negotiations by meeting several times in 2009. So far, all of Obama's nominations and policy statements have sent clear signals that the new US president is indeed willing to vigorously tackle climate change.

Yet analysts also warn against overexpectations. Obama's room to manoeuvre America into a new green era may be limited. The economic crisis puts significant pressure on US companies, which will surely urge politicians in Congress to lobby against all-too ambitious climate reduction goals. Second, Obama has very little time, just over ten months, to break a stalemate his predecessor has cultivated over the past eight years.

Some politicians are nevertheless optimistic. 'It is clear to me talking to developed and developing countries alike that there is real prospect of an ambitious global deal,' said Ed Miliband, Britain's new energy and climate secretary. 'Of course it will mean the whole world will have to up the pace of negotiations but I am convinced it is not only essential but it is also possible.' ■