



OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

A Fair, Ambitious and Binding Deal

By KUMI NAIDOO
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As a child I once watched the television broadcast of an anti-apartheid demonstration held in New Zealand, just before a rugby match that violated the international sports boycott against apartheid South Africa.

My younger brother and I were confused. "What are the whites doing in that rally?" he asked. We didn't understand what they had to gain by supporting our struggle for justice. Only later, I understood what they wanted; what they needed. They needed to live in a world that is just.

Ten years later, apartheid was brought to an end and millions of people who could have sat back and done nothing were instead able to take satisfaction in having played a part.

The same thing is happening on the climate issue. People everywhere are uniting in their call for climate justice, in the call for a fair, ambitious and legally binding treaty to be agreed at the U.N. climate summit in Copenhagen.

For a long time it was uncertain whether heads of state would come to Copenhagen; whether they would be willing to take personal responsibility for negotiating a climate saving deal. At last count some 120 heads of state are now Copenhagen-bound. This is to a large extent a response to the growing band of people, rich and poor, north and south, who realize that our common fate is bound and will be defined by how we respond to this gravest of threats.

It is becoming abundantly clear to our heads of state that they cannot change climate science — although some continue to try. It is clear that they will have to change the politics.

It is now emerging that many heads of state intend to come earlier than planned and stay to the end. Each wants an opportunity to address the conference, to speak to their electorate from Copenhagen to show they are serious about stopping climate chaos. But Copenhagen is not a photo opportunity.

Success will be measured on three broad criteria:

Will the treaty be fair? That would require rich, industrialized nations to accept their carbon debt and historic responsibility. It would mean providing funding to help the developing world to both adapt to and mitigate the already inevitable impacts of a warming world.

Will it be ambitious? That means global emissions of greenhouse gases peak by 2015, with industrialized countries agreeing 40 percent emissions by 2020 and moving away from business-as-usual.

Will it be binding? Legally binding. The history of U.N. talks is littered with political deals not worth the carbon or airfare they cost to negotiate.

A F.A.B. (fair, ambitious and binding) treaty is an incredible opportunity to make the world more just. It could add 3 million jobs to the world economy by 2030. It could lift 2 billion people out of energy poverty by giving them access to clean, reliable renewable energy.

It could end many forms of air pollution, with health benefits for all. And it could help stabilize some of the world's trouble spots by taking resource struggles and energy politics

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out of the world's list of security concerns.

Justice and peace are key. Unchecked climate change will place the world's natural resources under incredible stress: Drinking water, food production and habitable land will all become scarcer. It will hit the poorest hardest and fastest, but none of the world's 6.8 billion people will be exempt.

Science tells us that if we don't act now, an estimated 1 billion people will be uprooted because of climate change between now and 2050. Our children and grandchildren will bear the brunt of a climate that could, according to a growing body of scientific opinion, make this planet virtually uninhabitable.

A F.A.B. deal is possible in Copenhagen, and that is what the negotiators must strive for. Many pundits are saying this will not happen, that national and international politics will stand in the way. What they seem to be forgetting is that power is owned not by those in office, but by those who put them there. Politicians come and go — they are negotiable.

Our leaders need to understand the world is watching. We understand that nature does not negotiate, we understand that we cannot change the science, we demand that they change the politics, otherwise they must understand we have the power to change the politicians.

On Saturday, the largest ever mobilization is being planned under the banner of the tckctck.org coalition to send another appeal from a broad range of constituencies: faith based groups, trade unionists, NGOs, social movements, women's organizations, community groups and even some progressive business groups.

We expect our leaders to listen and act with courage.

Kumi Naidoo is the new executive director of Greenpeace.



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