

Glimmers of a climate deal emerge, backed by nontraditional coalition

Lisa Friedman, Environmental & Energy Publishing, 12-10-15

LE BOURGET, France -- Diplomats crafting a new global climate change accord pulled their first real all-nighter yesterday, working through dawn to stitch together a deal riddled with political bullet holes.

Yet by the time negotiators stumbled out of this U.N. tent city erected on the outskirts of Paris, the deal remained still largely unfinished -- despite the emergence of a potentially powerful new coalition of some of the world's poorest countries, vulnerable islands, the United States, Europe and progressive Latin American nations calling for ambition.

Paris Climate Talks provides in-depth coverage of the 21st U.N. summit to forge a new global agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Visit the special report.

"They haven't made a ton of progress," said Samantha Smith, who leads the World Wildlife Fund's climate and energy program. But, she said, "we still think we're going to get an agreement here. The question is what's going to be in this agreement."

As delegates filed back into the negotiating halls this morning, many agreed that despite vast differences on top-tier issues like how to divide up responsibility for cutting emissions among countries of different levels of wealth and helping poor nations to do the same, a deal is still possible.

"We've got to have more consultations with colleagues ... and really work on paper on the words," said Gao Feng, China's special representative for climate change. "Friday or Saturday we will get it. I think we will get it."

Some of the specific big issues on the table include: whether countries will identify keeping the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels as their goal, if the deal will demand that countries come back to the table every five years to increase their emissions targets, and the amount of money that countries will put forward and from where it will come.

'High-ambition coalition'

Alix Mazounie of French environmental group Réseau Action Climat, or RAC, said countries have been putting forward "Christmas lists," trying to add new language late in the game. She and others also downplayed a new group that includes the United States and has dubbed itself the "high-ambition coalition."

"What we're missing in that high-ambition coalition and what we hope to see is finance," she said. "It hasn't really spoken up on the finance issue, which doesn't make any sense."

"Coalitions are very normal," added Mohamed Adow of Christian Aid. "We're telling the rich members in that coalition that you can't just be talking about mitigation; you also have to deliver on finance."

The new coalition includes more than 100 countries. While the ringleaders have been the Marshall Islands and the European Union, it also includes the more than 30 countries representing the world's poorest, several (but not all) island nations, and progressive Latin American nations like Mexico and Chile.

Together, they have called for five key inclusions in the deal. At the top is a way to regularly ratchet up countries' targets every five years, which Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Tony de Brum called "the beating heart of the Paris agreement." That's opposed by several wealthier developing nations, most prominently India.

They also want "firm recognition" of the 1.5-degree target, a long-term goal that defines how the world will decarbonize, and "a strong package of support for developing countries" including delivery from wealthy nations of the \$100 billion annual mobilization they pledged by 2020.

Breaking down old divisions

"This is not a negotiating group. It is rather about joining the voices of all those who are committed to an ambitious agreement and a safe climate future," said de Brum. Countries "big and small, rich and poor," are members, he noted, and together "we will not accept a minimal or bare-bones package."

On a political level, the coalition is serving to break down the traditional divisions that have persisted over decades here between rich and poor nations.

Monica Araya, a former Costa Rica negotiator and founder of the nonprofit group Nivela, said after watching the group's announcement, "This is the future that I want.

"No more North-South blame games. No more divisions over who caused the problems, because what we need are solutions," she said, adding, "Many of the people who polarize don't take responsibility for the costs and delays they cause in this process."

By this morning, it was unclear what progress the group had made, but those that are not included in the coalition were openly irked by its existence and annoyed that the countries involved had declared themselves to be the ambitious ones.

"Everybody wants to be ambitious," Chinese negotiator Su Wei told *ClimateWire*. In a separate interview, Venezuelan lead negotiator Claudia Salerno echoed that. "I think everybody is part of the high-ambition coalition," she said. "We have different visions of ambition."

Alf Wills, a South African negotiator, said his country wasn't invited. "I hear in the press that this is an open-ended coalition, but they forgot to tell us what the contact details are. Who do we contact?" he asked.

E.U. head of delegation Elina Bardram, sitting next to Wills, raised her hand.

A number of key wealthy countries also are notably absent from the coalition, including Canada, Australia and Japan. Asked by *ClimateWire* if his country planned to join, a Japanese negotiator who declined to give his name said he wasn't sure.