



The “Bula Bulletin”



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DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

*They are like trees
planted by streams of
water which yields their
fruit in its season, and
their leaves do not
wither. In all that they
do, they prosper.
Psalms 1:3 (NRSV)*

*A life-size model Baobab
tree on Durban's
beachfront*



UN Climate Conference, Durban:

COP17 (re)covered?

The world is getting warmer, and the rate of warming is speeding up. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the warming trend in the last 50 years is nearly twice that of the last 100 years. As a consequence, global emissions must be reduced by at least half current levels by 2050, if, according to climate scientists, we are to have any hope of avoiding irreversible and catastrophic climate change.

Hundreds of millions of people will be adversely affected if we continue our lifestyles ‘as usual’. A resultant temperature increase of more than 2°Celsius above pre-industrial levels would be “a death sentence for Africa, Small Island States, and the poor and vulnerable worldwide”, said Nnimmo Bassey, Chair of Friends of the Earth International.

What is COP17? The climate negotiations take place within the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). Since 1995 the Conference of the Parties (COP) has met annually to assess progress in dealing with climate change. The most recent (17th) COP met in Durban, South Africa from 28th November – 11th December. I was fortunate to attend as an NGO-observer and member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation.

Why have annual COP meetings? The COP meet every year to negotiate and decide upon climate-change issues; resolutions are made at these meetings. In 1997 the 3rd Session of the COP adopted the Kyoto Protocol. This Protocol is still the only legally-binding instrument that commits industrialised countries and those countries in transition to a market economy to achieve emission reduction targets. In 2007 the Bali Action Plan was adopted that opened a new negotiation track under UNFCCC to attempt to bring the United States on board. And while the 2009 Copenhagen Accord disappointed, the 2010 Cancun Agreements provided detail to the rather vague Copenhagen text and established a Green Climate Fund.

Why did COP17 use the Baobab tree as its logo this year? Just like the coconut tree in the Pacific, all across southern Africa the baobab tree is the symbol of life. It represents protection, food, community and harmony. In using the tree in the COP logo it was hoped the Baobab would inspire a sense of hope and resilience.

Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Deuteronomy, 16: 20 (NRSV)

What were the pre-meeting expectations? Prior to COP17 hopes among those attending were not high for a successful outcome. The Green Climate Fund established at Cancun needed to become operational, and the Kyoto Protocol was at risk of collapse. Its first commitment period was to come to an end in 2012, and no one expected agreement for a second extension period.



Why are faith-based groups involved? Climate change is a moral and spiritual issue. People of faith are the conscience of these meetings as they can hold decision makers accountable to the task.

The faith communities came together in Durban to proclaim: "We have faith: Act now for climate justice". Climate justice is for all peoples, not just the select few. People in countries that contribute least to global greenhouse gas emissions suffer most from the effects of climate change. Where is justice for them?

South African Bishop Geoff Davies. "We are calling for a paradigm shift in the way we treat each other and the planet [...] that means putting people and the planet before profits". This is a very difficult ask for many politicians apparently in the throes of global economic melt-down.

What happens at the meeting on a day-to-day basis? Each day a UNFCCC programme is published that outlines both the open and closed negotiations and official side events. To attend the UNFCCC closed negotiations you have to be a party delegate; to attend the official side events you have to be an accredited delegate.



International Convention Centre, Durban

Other organisations arrange other events and exhibitions outside of the official programme. At each COP negotiations an alternative COP venue is established as a location where the people of the world can make their climate-justice voices heard. At COP17, the University of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) was chosen as the alternative site for the alternative civil-society programme, known as The People's Space.

A typical day for a negotiator during the negotiations:

8.00am	Party delegates / common interest groups meet
9.00am – 1.00pm	Negotiations
3pm - 6pm	Negotiations continue
8.00pm	Informal meetings / debriefs



University of KwaZulu Natal

COP17 was my first UN COP meeting and so the array of negotiations, side events and exhibitions, plus the open civil-society programme, was a little daunting. From the daily published schedule you choose which activities you wish to attend. As I was an NGO-Observer I was not entitled to sit-in on the closed negotiations, but all other events were open to me.



A typical day for me during the negotiations:

8.30am	Arrive at International Convention Centre
9.00am – 12pm	Attend side events
12pm - 3pm	Meet with fellow delegates over lunch and check out civil society programme / protest events
3pm – 6pm	Attend side events and meetings

What type of side events were organised? Numerous side events were held each day. The EU, the US and China had dedicated Pavilions, and for the first time the Pacific and Caribbean also shared an *Island* Pavilion, where climate issues exclusive to islanders were discussed.

I tried to attend a variety of events within my wider interests of climate-change adaptation and community awareness and participation, as well as taking the opportunity to learn about the latest climate science releases.

As a member of the faith delegation, I also attended the Multi-faith Prayer Service mid-point during the negotiations, when representatives from seven faith communities gathered to give support to the call for climate justice.



Interfaith representatives

What about the prophetic voice at COP17? The vulnerable and marginalised in society will be most affected by climate change, and they don't have a voice of their own at the negotiations. Notice who's missing from the COP17 logo opposite.

COP15 in Copenhagen at the end of 2009 received considerable media coverage, and drew tens of thousands of people onto the streets to demonstrate for climate justice. Durban in comparison was strangely quiet, though only later did I learn that spontaneous gatherings of more than 14 protesters risked the arrest of the activists involved.

Our focus was on the Global Day of Action rally, held on the middle Saturday. It was a joy and honour to march alongside several hundred fellow faith delegates at the rally, as we joined the wider protest. While numbers did not match previous COP Global Day of Action rallies, (the local Sunday Tribune newspaper said there were 5,000 protesters, the local radio station said 8-10,000, and other sources put the figure closer to 20,000) we certainly made our presence felt, and it will be one of my lasting memories of the meeting.

Key demands for COP17 from the faith delegation:

- A fair, ambitious and legally-binding agreement, plus a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol.
- Carbon reduction targets to ensure average global temperature are kept well below 1.5 °C.
- Ensure adequate finance for climate-change adaptation in Africa.



Our Key Demands for COP 17
 and legally binding agreement and to a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol to ensure the sur
 targets for carbon emission reductions that keep average global temperature increases well below 1.5 de



What were the outcomes from COP17? COP17 made history; it was the longest COP meeting to date, having overrun by almost two days, and key negotiators surprised everyone by reaching a last-minute agreement when none was expected. But despite agreeing to a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol and the launch of the US\$100 billion Green Climate Fund to aid climate-change adaptation in the developing world, scientists and environmental groups criticised the outcomes as being too little too late.

Reflections: Since the first COP climate meeting, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has spoken out at every COP on behalf of those whose lives and livelihoods are severely affected by climate change. This COP was no exception.

Prayer points:

- Give thanks for the positive outcomes from COP17.
- Pray that political leaders and representatives have fair and ambitious vision during future negotiations.
- Pray for those who are suffering now from climate change. Let decision makers hear their voices.
- Give thanks for negotiators with the strength and wisdom to seek compromise.
- Pray that governments of developed nations provide adequate finance for climate-change adaptation in areas of most need.
- Pray that we do not sit back and do nothing as our world is damaged beyond repair.

However, most delegates had left for home before the end of the Durban negotiations, and only afterwards could reflect on the outcome of the meeting. Retrospectively, Lic. Elias Crisostomo Abramides, WCC Working Group on Climate Change, was “quite pleased” that the Kyoto Protocol had been saved at the last minute, though he admitted, “there is a lot more to be done in order to alleviate the risk of severe impacts due to climate change on vulnerable communities around the world.”

At Durban some steps were taken towards a new legally-binding agreement in 2015, and global progress was made, however small. But we do not have the luxury of time, people are suffering today.

Let’s pray for continued open and visionary negotiations, for action as well as rhetoric and for a future Fair, Ambitious and Binding climate agreement.

Now wouldn’t that be F.A.B.?

“³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

Philippians 2: 3-4 (NRSV)

God bless
Julia

