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Climate change talks began in Germany

Sean McDonagh | Jun. 9, 2011 Eco Catholic

The UN sponsored climate change talks began in Bonn, Germany on June 6th 2011 and will run until June 17th 2011. These talks will attempt to revive negotiations on various aspect of climate change so that a fair, ambitious and legally binding treaty, a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, can be signed at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Durban, South Africa, later in the year.

While the UN negotiation process on climate change was revived and strengthened at the Climate Conference in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010, none of the hard decisions were taken, especially when it came to pledging serious cuts in CO2 levels from economically rich countries. There was general agreement among the participants at Cancun that deep cuts in emissions ?are required ?.. so as to hold the increase in global average temperatures below two degrees Celsius.?

In order to inject a sense of urgency into the Bonn negotiations, Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the UNFCCC, reminded the participants on the first day of the Conference that greenhouse gas emissions had climbed dramatically in 2010. Unfortunately, the clock is ticking towards what are called ?tipping points.? An average rise in global temperature of four degrees Celsius would have a devastating impact on the life-systems of the planet and the knock-on effect on people would be devastating.

In a report published in April 2012, entitled ?Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene,? a working group commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences state that ?some of the current and anticipated impacts of climate change include losses of coral reefs, forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems; a rate of species extinction many times faster than the historic average; water and food shortages for many vulnerable people. Increasing sea level rise and stronger storm surges threaten vulnerable ecosystems and peoples, especially in low-lying islands and coastal nations.?

The task facing the negotiators during the next two weeks in Bonn and later in the year in Durban was not made any easier by the release of data on greenhouse gas emissions by the International Energy Agency ((IEA). In 2010, a record 30.6 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide was released into the atmosphere. According to a spokesperson for IEA ?it is becoming extremely challenging to remain below 2 degrees. The prospect is getting bleaker. That is what the numbers say.?

The IEA?s figures are confirmed by preliminary data from the US government which show that carbon dioxide levels are at the highest levels on record with 394.7 parts per million (ppm): an increase of nearly 1.6ppm compared to last year.

Lord Stern, author of the Stern Report on the economic implications of climate change was clearly taken aback by the data. According to him, ?these figures indicate that (emissions) are now close to being back on a ?business as usual? path. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projections, such a path .. would mean around a 50% chance of a rise in global average temperature of more than 4 degrees C by 2010.? He went on to point out that ?such warming would disrupt the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people across the planet, leading to widespread mass migration and conflict. That is a risk any sane

person would seek to drastically reduce.?

It is also important to remember that this dramatic increase in CO2 emissions happened during the most serious economic recession since the 1930s. There was a small decline in emissions in 2009 due to the financial crisis. Unless corrective action is taken soon emission will increase dramatically because almost every country in the world is seeking ways to boost their economic growth and, to date, no country has yet has found a way to promote economic growth without increasing carbon emissions.

The European section of Climate Action Network (CAN), one of the largest non-government organizations which monitors the actions of governments on climate change, said that the weak response of Climate Commissioner Hedegaard to the IEA data in the run up to the Bonn Conference was deplorable.
Fatih Biro, the chief economist at the IEA said that disaster could be averted if governments head the warming and are willing to take bold, decisive and urgent action soon. CAN-Europe asks EU policy makers to implement a ?40% emissions reduction target by 2020.

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