

## Climate-change diplomacy

### The UN climate conference achieved some results, albeit modest ones

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WATCHING a man being rolled over by a bulldozer, reflected a negotiator at the Cancún climate conference in the small hours of the morning, is unpleasant. The man in question was Pablo Solon, the head of Bolivia's delegation to the UN talks. The bulldozer was the other 193 countries' determination to get a deal, even if only a modest one.

In a rancorous all-night debate in 2009 Bolivia and a handful of others had kept the "Copenhagen accord" put together by heads of government from being fully adopted as part of the UN's climate negotiations. But at the final session of the 2010 conference, standing alone, Mr Solon was unable to repeat that feat. The principle of consensus on which the conference runs does not give one country the right to veto the will of all the others, ruled Patricia Espinosa, Mexico's foreign secretary and the conference's chair. Delegates stood and cheered. The bulldozer rolled.

The deal that passed over Mr Solon's flattened dissent found a significant amount of common ground between the rich and the developing worlds. At its heart were some elements co-opted from Copenhagen's accord. One was a pledge of \$100 billion a year from north to south to help pay for emissions cuts and climate adaptation by 2020. Developing countries like

that. The deal describes the money as being “mobilised”, however, which suggests a role for private-sector money. That pleases rich countries. A similar balance came with the establishment of a new fund for some of the money to flow through. Poor countries like that. But in a nod to the rich world, the fund gained some independence from the climate conference itself.

Another bit of the deal was an agreement on REDD+, a system to reward countries for lowering (or not raising, depending on their history) rates of deforestation. This includes safeguards meant to ensure the fair treatment of indigenous people. A new adaptation framework makes dealing with the effects of climate change a bigger part of the UN process. A final element was a deal on technology transfer.

All of these now need to be turned from paper agreements into practical ones. That is something that parties to the talks have shown little flair for in the past. In particular the clean development mechanism, which moves money from rich-world carbon markets to developing countries, is in dire need of reform.

The Cancún agreement missed out some topics. Moves towards a deal on shipping and aircraft fuels, unpopular with oil producers, fell out of the text. They took with them—quite unfairly—worthy proposals in nearby paragraphs for new work on agriculture, a greenhouse-gas emitter on a par with deforestation.

The big countries got the specific things that they were after. China wanted not to be blamed for a failure, as it was after Copenhagen. America wanted pledges made in that summit’s accord to be recognised, plus progress on verification.

### **Keeping the sushi chilled**

Most controversially, Japan wanted to be clear that it would not make a new commitment to emissions cuts under the Kyoto protocol after 2012, when its current promise runs out. Developing countries, which like the Kyoto protocol a lot (it demands nothing concrete of them), said this was an outrage. But the subtly constructed final text in essence gave Japan its way.

The all but universal buy-in to the agreements, though, was not just a testimony to Mexican diplomacy (much admired here), balanced outcomes, great-power satisfaction and textual finesse. It was also an act of desperation. The UN talks were in bad shape. Failing to meet the very modest expectations of Cancún would have been fatal. Nobody wanted that: hence the bulldozing.

It was not done without some pangs of regret. The Cancún meeting has given the UN process a new wind and the chance of real progress on forests, on footing the bill (if rich countries stump up) and on adaptation. But, as Mr Solon argued, the pledges made in the Copenhagen accord, and now annexed to the UN process, are nowhere near strong enough to limit climate change to an increase of two degrees, which is what the Cancún texts require. Bolivia may have been an irritant and an obstruction but the other negotiators knew it was right about this.

Many negotiators still say they will fight on for legally binding targets for all major economies that go well beyond their Copenhagen pledges. Evidence such as Japan’s success at Cancún suggests strongly that such targets will never be applied while specific countries resist, as some—America, China and others—always will. And treating hard targets as a make or break issue would surely lead to another, perhaps final, breakage. The UN climate process did quite well out of Cancún. The climate, not so well.