

05 January 2009

Statement to the House: Ed Miliband on the Copenhagen climate change conference Statement

With permission, I would like to make a statement about December's Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, at which I represented the United Kingdom, alongside my Rt. Hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Today I want to report back to the House and set out where we go next in the global battle against climate change.

Let me say at the outset that the outcome of Copenhagen was disappointing in a number of respects.

We are disappointed that Copenhagen did not establish a clear timetable for a legal treaty, and that we do not yet have the commitments to cuts in emissions that we were looking for.

However, the Accord agreed at Copenhagen does mark significant progress, progress we can build on, and I want to explain how.

The Copenhagen Accord, which is available in the Library of the House, was agreed by a group representing 49 developed and developing countries that together account for over 80% of global emissions.

- It endorses the limit of two degrees warming as the benchmark for global progress on climate change;
- Unlike every previous agreement, not just developed, but also all leading developing countries have agreed to make specific commitments to tackle emissions, to be lodged in the agreement by January 31st.
- Also for the first time, so that we can be assured that countries are acting as they say they will, all countries have signed up to comprehensive measurement, reporting and verification of progress;
- And on finance, there are significant commitments made by the rich world to developing countries.

This includes fast start finance worth 10bn dollars a year by 2012 – with a total of up to 2.4 billion dollars from the UK – and specific support to tackle deforestation.

In the longer term, the Accord supported the goal - first set by the Prime Minister - of 100bn dollars a year of public and private finance for developing countries by 2020.

By any measure, these are important steps forward.

But we know the world needs to go much further.

We need more certainty and a greater scale of ambition.

So, the urgent task ahead is to broaden, deepen and strengthen the commitments made in Copenhagen, drawing on the large coalition of countries that wanted more from the agreement.

Broadening the commitments is vital.

49 countries is not enough. To tackle this global problem we need a wider group.

The United Nations is seeking to persuade all countries to sign up to the Accord and the UK is determined to play its part in making this happen.

In addition, we must act to deepen the commitments on emissions made by countries across the world.

Lord Stern has shown that if nations make the biggest emissions cuts in the range they have put forward, we can be within striking distance of the two degree pathway that we need, including the peaking of global emissions by 2020.

We know that this is in our economic as well as our environmental interest: greater certainty about emissions is necessary to provide the strongest incentive to business, including through the carbon price.

So we will work to persuade other countries that we all need to show the highest levels of ambition on emissions as part of the commitments we make.

For Europe that means, provided there is high ambition from others, carrying forward our commitment to move from 20% to 30% reductions by 2020 compared to 1990.

And, we must also act to strengthen the Accord, including by continuing our effort to secure a legally binding framework.

In taking on clear commitments and actions we should recognise how far major developing countries have come.

But, we must allay their concern that they will be constrained from growth and development by the demands of a legal treaty.

And we must draw on the coalition between some of the world's richest developed countries and some of the world's poorest developing countries, all of whom want a legally binding structure.

Strengthening the Accord also means that richer countries must make good on the promises made on fast start finance to 2012; and show that we can fully fund the longer term 100 bn dollar goal – one of the tasks for the High Level Panel on sources of revenue that was agreed in the Accord

These efforts to make progress on substance must be accompanied by reform of the process of decision making.

The conference was held up by disagreements over procedure: which text negotiators should look at and whether, as in Kyoto, a representative group of countries could be formed to avoid having to discuss everything in a plenary of 192 nations.

These disputes about process meant that it was not until 3am on Friday, the last day of a two week conference, that substantive negotiations began on what became the Copenhagen Accord.

By then, there was simply too little time to bridge some of the differences that existed.

So we need to find better ways of running the process of negotiation, and I welcome the UN Secretary General's decision to look again at these issues.

We also welcome the decision by Chancellor Merkel to host a Conference as part of the mid-year negotiations in Bonn, and will work with the incoming Mexican Presidency who will be hosting COP 16 in November.

But dialogue and negotiations need to restart before June, something I made clear to the executive secretary of the Convention on Climate Change when I met him just before Christmas in London.

In looking back at Copenhagen, we must bear in mind that agreement was inevitably tough because we are seeking consensus among 192 countries.

Like most ambitious efforts, it was always going to be difficult to succeed first time round.

But we should not let frustration with the two weeks at Copenhagen obscure the historic shift which this last year has marked.

I want to pay tribute to the enormous effort of those in the UK, from the scientific community, civil society, British business, and from the general public who have mobilised on climate change.

Their ideas and energy helped drive us forward over the last twelve months and during the Copenhagen conference itself.

Let me assure them and this House that we are determined to strengthen and sustain the momentum behind the low carbon transition in the UK.

Building on our low carbon transition plan, a world-leading policy on coal, and our plans for nuclear; in the coming weeks and months we will be making further announcements on energy generation, household energy efficiency and transport.

And following Copenhagen, as part of the work already ongoing on the roadmap to 2050, we are looking at whether further action is necessary to meet our low carbon obligations and will report back by the time of the Budget. This will include looking at the advice of the Committee on Climate Change published last autumn.

Internationally, thanks in large part to the deadline of Copenhagen and the mobilisation behind it, every major economy of the world now has domestic policy goals and commitments to limit their greenhouse gas emissions: the US, China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Mexico, South Africa, and of course the EU.

Throughout the world policy is now set to improve energy efficiency, to increase investment in low carbon power, to develop hybrid and electric vehicles and smart grids, and to reduce deforestation.

So while Copenhagen did not meet our expectations, 2009 did see the start of a new chapter in tackling climate change across the world.

This global shift may not have yet found international legal form, but scientific evidence, public opinion and business opportunity have made it irreversible.

In 2010 and in the years ahead, this government and I am sure the vast majority of this House is determined to ensure that we redouble our efforts to complete the unfinished business of Copenhagen.

Climate change remains the biggest global challenge to humankind.

It requires a global solution. We owe it to our children and their children and the generations that come after to find it.

The work has started, it will continue this year and it will succeed. The fight against climate change will be won.

I commend this statement to the House.