

Progress in climate talks welcomed, Ambassador Beck

By Online Editor

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Ambassador Colin Beck (right) with Solomon Islands delegate, Chanel Iroi

The resumed climate change talks in Panama has recorded some progress in the lead up to the 17th Conference of the Parties in Durban, South Africa in December. While little progress has been made, the Pacific is happy with movement of a number of issues important for the region. Ambassador Colin Beck, Solomon Islands Permanent Representative to the United Nations explains to PACNEWS Editor and Climate Pasifika Journalist, Makereta Komai.

Ambassador Beck: I think there is some progress made here in Panama considering what happened in Bonn and Bangkok. There was some progress in Bangkok on the Convention. The Cancun decisions left out some of the Bali Action Plan, so it required just a whole session to go through what has been agreed in Cancun and what has been left out. Here in Panama we built on that work left out in Bangkok. Some texts have been produced here but I describe the talks here as 'baby steps' in the Kyoto Protocol.

On finance, there is also some movement on the draft text. Depending on where one looks at it, there is progress but it's not even across the board. Certainly one of the most important aspects is the refusal by some Parties not to take a second commitment period. Disappointing is an understatement to say the least. It's a concern to the Pacific and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and something that what we have said in Cancun is 'an attack on

multilateralism.' If we believe in multilateralism then we must work on it. I think we should not use multilateralism at our convenience and discard it when it does not suit our interest.

Q: If that is the case, where consensus is hard to achieve, should voting be considered to get results? I learnt that Mexico is considering this option and canvassing Parties views.

Ambassador Beck: I think the issue of voting has always been on the table. If we vote right now, we can win because G77 and China have the number. We might win the vote but lose the battle on climate change and that is why need all the 194 Parties to support a global climate regime that is legally binding. Consensus is important. While off course we have voting at the back of our mind, the question is when do we apply it and in what area do we wish to use it? But I think there is some consideration on the issue. In the past, the rules of procedures have not been formally applied but i think it stems from the Annex 1 countries on finance when it was earlier looked at but things have changed and evolved.

Q: Even with the difficulty of getting a consensus, is voting the best option given that Parties have not been able to agree to an agreement, from Copenhagen to Cancun and then onto Durban?

Ambassador Beck: Everything that the UNFCCC has done has always been by consensus. Like I said, we can easily vote on second commitment and win but what do we do with those who do not wish to take that second commitment. How do we deal with them? Unless the vote is mandatory, then you will need to comply. This is similar to the United Nations where decisions by the General Assembly are not legally-binding, only resolutions by the Security Council are mandatory and legally binding.

Secondly, we might be politicising the issues at hand. If voting is done, it will take a lot of issues away from the hands of negotiators. Diplomatic pressures will be placed on capitals to vote and the job of negotiators will be just be like 'pressing the button.'

Q: Back to Japan – what are its reasons for not committing to a second commitment period. How is it justifying its decision?

Ambassador Beck: I think the unfortunate aspect is that Japan has not said anything and is burning its bridges with so many countries. Sometimes silence does not mean we accept everything that Japan is doing. In the Pacific this week, coast guards are trying to ship water to Tokelau and NZ trying to assist Tuvalu. What we did in Copenhagen, we battered multilateralism. Trust and confidence was restored in Cancun but it remains fragile if Durban will not be able to deliver on a number of issues, especially the second commitment period, and multilateralism will take another hit.

Q: Mitigation remains a sore point here, any movement or middle ground achieved?

Ambassador Beck: There are talks of trying to increase the ambition level of the current pledges on the table. I think negotiators have presented options to Ministers to consider in Durban. Personally, I think a lot of these issues require no political decisions because if we say that what we do is driven by science, then we must all act and keep our temperatures lower. An important issue for Small Island Developing States is the Review of the below 2 degrees by 2015. This is

something the IPCC will be releasing its report in 2014. We are hoping that report will be out in time to have a decision going forward by 2015.

Q: So that means for now until 2015, industrialised nations will not have to adhere to the below 2 degrees goal?

Ambassador Beck: At the moment, it's not even 2 degrees. It keeps on increasing beyond 2 degrees. We are trying first of all to maintain it to below 2 degrees as agreed in Cancun, with a view to reviewing it to see how close are on science on whether 2 degrees is sufficient

Q: Is 2015 okay for AOSIS?

Ambassador Beck: AOSIS wants to see a procedural discussion in Durban and then a technical study at the next COP and a decision taken by 2015. So we should not be seen to be trying to do everything in 2015.

Q: On financing

Ambassador Beck: One of the sticking points was long term financing. During the discussions there have been debates on how the Green Climate Fund will be financed. We want these funds to be operational.

Q: AOSIS speaks with support of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the African Union (AU). Do you think collective diplomacy works in climate change negotiations?

Ambassador Beck: To get a common voice in multilateral negotiations, we need the numbers. This is where the growing collaboration between small island developing countries and LDCs have really put on the front burner a lot of our issues, otherwise we will be working in isolation. We need to come together to push our agenda. And we find in AOSIS that it has worked in our favour here at the climate change negotiations....ends