It Always Seems Impossible Until It’s Done

Ministers and Delegates:
The youth streaming through the halls of the ICC yesterday were looking for their future — the future of a rules-based, fair, multilateral system that will adequately deal with climate change. That future can start today.

The momentum finally seems to be shifting in favour of the ambition coalition. The voices of progressive countries have been amplified. The calls from AOSIS and LDC’s that 2020 is too late and that we need ambition now are being heard.

The Ball roadmap was intended to get us to a fair, ambitious and binding agreement, but we got lost along the way. A ‘new roadmap’ risks repeating that history. With the science and the science alone, that could be disastrous. Parties, you must leave Durban with a mandate for negotiations for a legally binding and enforceable agreement.

The Africa Group’s progressive proposals have had an impact. The EU’s increasing alignment with vulnerable countries was evident in yesterday’s joint call for action. There are signals that the BASIC countries are engaging in the discussion about shape, timing and form. And the US is increasingly isolated with their own roadmap to nowhere.

The pathway we are on has us hurtling to a future where we decide to agree almost as much as we can on a needs assessment; principles for burden sharing and adaptation; and parameters for scaling up financing and overcoming the limits of our institutions. If nation states cannot act collectively in the common interest, what is the purpose or legitimacy?

We need an African Spring in economic and social systems, and we can’t afford to wait for some is equity too high an ambition? Even if it takes us all day Saturday, we must secure content as well as form and not settle for merely avoiding the demise of Kyoto.

Let’s deliver an African springboard for effective multilateral action.

On Sources of Finance

As we write, the media are quoting excided ministers who report advances, even breakthroughs. An air of possibility is seeping back from the press conferences into the negotiating rooms. The storm clouds over the Green Climate Fund are moving away, and on Thursday, the first welcomed announcements of funding came in.

Ministers need to ensure the Green Climate Fund is not just an empty shell. They need to give developing countries confidence that the commitment of $100 billion by 2020 made in Copenhagen is indeed serious.

In that spirit, progress must now be made on the central finance issue: mobilizing and scaling up innovative financing.

As proposed by the African Group and AOSIS, a work program is needed on sources of finance leading to a decision at COP 19. This will facilitate a convergence around options that can best generate the needed financing for adaptation and mitigation.

A credible work programme must deliver the following at a minimum: arrangements for revenues from measures to reduce emissions from maritime transport and aviation (bunkers); a short list of other potential sources to be agreed later; a way forward on a needs assessment; principles for burden sharing among developed countries in meeting existing financing commitments; and parameters for scaling up financing from fast-start levels to hitting at least the $100 billion mark by 2020.

A second area that is ripe for a breakthrough is putting a price on emissions from shipping and aviation globally, to meet financing and emissions reduction goals while ensuring that developing countries are not left vulnerable. There is a convergence of labour, industry, environmental organizations, finance ministers and a growing number of countries around a solution that uses this revenue to deal with the incidence on developing countries, as well as generate money for the Green Climate Fund.

After a decade of circling around, the issue of international transport has been forwarded to Ministers under the Cooperative Sectoral Approaches agenda item. In returning to this challenge, Durban can make a historic contribution to climate protection and finance. Progress should be made on shipping, where ambitious proposals are already under consideration. Agreement at COP 17 could result in a global deal on maritime. Establish a dedicated Assembly in 2013. A further extension would delay curbing these fast-growing emissions for at least another three years.

Ministers, please do not leave a shipwreck on the shoals of Durban. You have the wind in your sails. Getting us into the harbour today should be easy.

It is self-evident that the African COP must deliver a positive outcome in finance. That must include adoption of the governance instrument of the Green Climate Fund; commitment for initial contributions to the fund; identification of bunkers as a particularly promising source; and a work plan on long term finance specifying further work on bunkers, financial transaction taxes in developed countries and innovative use of Special Drawing Rights.

Today, many of us are quoting the words of the great Nelson Mandela: “It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

Ministers and Delegates: The good news is that it no longer seems impossible, but much work remains to be done here in Durban. And now you must decide.

THANK YOU SOUTH AFRICA!
ECO would like to commend South Africa for the high standard of hosting for COP 17. In Durban, we have experienced a venue that is centrally located, minimizing travel costs and carbon footprint, with efficient transport links. Within the venue, the UNFCCC Secretariat and local staff have been friendly and efficient.

There have been enough meeting rooms, enough computers and – a big help for reinvigorating us when sessions go on for too long – plenty of outdoor spaces. And African music at the opening reception and the closing ceremony have lifted our spirits.

There were a few heavily-handed engagements beyond the venue as local politics intersected with the conference, but this will not inhibit the effort to pull together the outcomes we need in these last hours.

It is a large effort for any host country to make proper arrangements. South Africa has done so and provided its own truly distinctive stamp on COP 17.