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The Achievements of COP6: Yes, the Achievements!

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Can we call COP6 a success? Most definitely so!

As we returned from The Hague, our backs were bent and our spirits were low. All of us had made such an effort to find convergence, and in the end, Minister Pronk, President of COP6, had to announce that agreement had not been reached.

One can reasonably argue, and many already have, that there were several "crunch" issues which were not resolved:

- The extent to which industrialized countries can use domestic land-use related activities beyond reforestation and afforestation, to contribute to their achievement of the Kyoto target;
- The portion of reductions which must be attained at home, versus those that can be attained through the purchase of reductions abroad;
- What the penalty rate for countries' non-compliance with Kyoto targets should be;
- Whether land use change and forestry projects should be included in the Clean Development Mechanism;
- How do the industrialized countries transfer to the developing world the funding needed for capacity building, adaptation, and technology development, while ensuring that this funding will be disbursed effectively and used wisely.

Much has already been written about the reasons for the shortcomings of COP6. Some of the identified causes are: the disagreement among the members of the European Union, the bottom line of the United States, the various financial needs of the Group of 77 and China, and the tardiness with which Minister

Pronk brought out his conciliatory text. We can speculate forever, but we will never know with certainty, what would have happened if any one of these factors, or several of them, had been different.

For those organizations dedicated to the advancement of climate change awareness and action around the world, the crucial question is: did COP6 throw us into a stalemate, or did it increase general awareness and advance progress?

Although there is an understandable temptation to obsess on the recent events, one must remember that COP6 is just one step in a long process, and that a longer term view is the one that makes sense. Once the melodramatic dust of The Hague meeting has settled, we will begin to realize that, in fact, much **was** achieved at COP6.

Acceptance of the science. Not unlike other COPs, the meeting opened with a clear presentation on the current understanding of the science of climate change. Bob Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, gave a comprehensive preview of the Third Assessment Report, scheduled for publication next year. What was astonishing was the fact that the rest of the meeting transpired without dissident voices being raised to challenge the fundamental premise of the Climate Change Convention. Throughout the negotiations Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries left the “there is no scientific basis” argument out of the dilatory tactics which they employed. Just as surprising, the Global Climate Coalition, created in 1989 with the express purpose of discrediting theories of human-induced climate change, was seen roaming the halls, but has clearly given up the fight on the science. Although there is still no irrefutable scientific certainty, COP6 proved that governments and corporations have accepted the phenomenon as real, and the responsibility as their own. In and of itself, this is a major landmark in the history of the negotiations. If this were the only result of COP6, we have reason enough to declare COP6 a success.

Shift in the focus of the discussion. Concomitant with the overall acceptance of the science, there is a clear shift in the focus of the discussion. The period leading up to Kyoto was intent on answering the question, should industrialized countries be expected to reduce their emissions, and if so, by how much? Since Kyoto the discussion has focused on how the emission reductions are going to be achieved. What was new in The Hague was the prominence of economics.

While the US has long been aware of the economic impacts of Kyoto, the European Union has traditionally been more concerned with the environmental integrity of the process. The Europeans certainly did not abandon that concern, but for the first time, at COP6 it was evident that they had become more aware of the economic implications. First, costly natural disasters in Europe immediately preceding the meeting made economic vulnerability a

major concern of those nations. Second, growing analysis of their own cost of compliance lead the Europeans to gradually embrace the use of the flexibility mechanisms, as economic drivers are proving critical to the policies countries are deciding to undertake. In fact, underpinning all the unresolved issues from COP6, is the question of cost. The fact that cost has moved to front and center is good news, as it testifies to the fact that countries have moved beyond the virtuous phase of accepting responsibility, to the more active phase of preparing for the actual implementation of reduction efforts.

Separation of technical from political issues. The first week of COP6 was slow in the pace of work. However, by the time Minister Pronk assumed the chairmanship on the second week, it was clear that, with the exception of land use change, most of the purely technical issues either had been resolved, or could be resolved. Minister Pronk was very clear in pointing out which were the political decisions which had to be made, and most of those still remain on the table to be resolved between now and COP6/2. During COP6/1 negotiators were able to distill the nature of the issues, which allows for a more focused approach to the next round of negotiations, avoiding the temptation to hide political issues behind a curtain of technical questions.

Wide range of carbon services on display. Visionary corporations, such as BP Amoco and Shell, have over the past few years demonstrated their leadership in the climate arena by announcing voluntary targets or internal cost reduction systems. The competitive advantages of integrating carbon into the corporate investment strategy is no longer a novelty. What was new at COP6 was the wide range of "carbon services" which have been developed by accounting giants, engineering firms, and even small consulting companies. Ranging from quantification services, through monitoring and verification protocols, to a plethora of electronically based market places, the halls were literally jammed with stands of companies showing their new services. The strength of their presence is indisputable evidence that the awareness of a carbon-constrained future has gone beyond the producers of emissions, to those who will service their reduction efforts. In itself, that is a clear sign of the growing maturity of the carbon market.

Broad consensus around the CDM. In the heat of the negotiations, we seem to forget that the Clean Development Mechanism was defined only three years ago. It was brought into being by the decisive gaveling of Chairman Estrada, not by an organic consensus building process. On the contrary, coming out of Kyoto, key developing countries such as China and India, and important industrialized members of the European Union, were highly resistant to the CDM. COP6 has marked a change of positions. During the November session, negotiators worked diligently on many of the details of the CDM, and were actually able to reach agreement on the many of the design and operational issues. Other than the inclusion of land use sector projects, the CDM stands poised to be approved at the resumption of COP6.

Clarification of positions. Although it was the difference in positions particularly between the United States and the members of the European Union which impeded a final agreement, it is precisely the tough negotiation process which finally clarified mutual positions. Despite frequent informal consultations previous to COP6, the United States had not been transparent on their bottom line, nor had they been forthcoming on the issues where they could show flexibility. Even more so, for the European Union, since a myriad of internal consultations prior to COP6 had not cleared differences among the members themselves. It was precisely the high pressure of the COP6 process which led to the unveiling of the reservation positions. It will now be easier to enter into an integrative negotiation process where all Parties can get some of their needs met.

Strong desire to reach agreement. At the outset of COP6 negotiators entered the Convention Center in The Hague with the dismal feeling that there were too many outstanding issues to be resolved in two short weeks. The despondency was evidenced by the extremely slow pace of the first week, and the fact that Minister Pronk had to resort to an uncharacteristic work format for the second week. The intensity of negotiations during the last few days transformed the sense of hopelessness into one of anticipation. In fact, particularly those who had worked so hard during the last long night constantly suggesting creative ways of meeting different needs while finding common political ground, were extremely dismayed by the abrupt suspension of the process. It is precisely these actors who expressed, during the closing session, their commitment to continue the dialogue until agreements were reached. This strength of this commitment was demonstrated by the fact that industrialized countries actively sought an opportunity to informally further the discussion in Ottawa scarcely ten days after The Hague.

CONCLUSION

The suspension of COP6 can easily lead to rash conclusions. It is however, only prudent to see COP6 within the context of the longer term effort. At the concluding ceremony of COP6 in The Hague, Michael Zammit Cutajar, Executive Secretary of the Convention, wisely reminded participants that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting held to adopt the Framework Convention in December of 1991 was not able to adopt the text, and had to be called together once more in February of 1992 in order to adopt the Convention. Thus, it is not unusual in the climate regime for meetings to reconvene for the purpose of finishing the task.

And frankly, considering that what is being laid is the foundation for a fundamental restructuring of the global economy, we should all recognize the remarkable progress achieved over the last ten years, including The Hague meeting. History will see COP6/1 as having laid the ground for the agreements

of COP6/2. Should we choose to convert hindsight into foresight, we could focus our energies now into preparing the next successful meeting in Bonn.