

THE ACCORD AND BEYOND

DR STEVE HOWARD, FOUNDER AND CEO, THE CLIMATE GROUP

Last year, 2009, was a watershed for international climate action. In the course of twelve months, an array of developed and developing countries put forward unprecedented climate action plans and pledges. Although the Copenhagen summit failed to turn these pledges into legal commitments, the eponymous Accord it produced broke new ground on international co-operative action. This was no small achievement.

This year, the challenge for government leaders and negotiators is to build on this political success. Ideally, this would mean agreement on a comprehensive and ambitious deal at the next UN climate summit in Cancun in November. But we should be careful not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. An incremental approach, which builds confidence and trust, may be better suited to the post-Copenhagen world. This might mean agreement in Cancun on those issues that are well advanced such as REDD, with the final, comprehensive package negotiated at the 2011 summit in South Africa.

THE OUTCOME OF COPENHAGEN

For the first time the world has a high-level political roadmap for accelerating action on climate change. The Copenhagen Accord has been endorsed by over 110 countries, representing at least 80 per cent of world emissions and a similar percentage of GDP. (The Kyoto Protocol by contrast covers less than 40 per cent of global emissions).

Collectively, the Accord commits countries to keeping the rise in global temperature to less than 2°C. It secures measurable, reportable and verifiable

emission cuts and actions from developed and developing countries respectively. It establishes “fast-start” finance for developing countries worth US\$30 billion through to 2012, and commitments to raise US\$100 billion per annum by 2020. These and other commitments are both progressive and substantive.

But let us be clear. The Accord is a foundation for a global deal, not the final structure. To get to our ultimate goal a range of obstacles still need to be removed or negotiated over the coming year.

First and foremost, countries need to settle the ambiguous status of the Accord in order to realise its full potential. Failure to reach consensus in Copenhagen meant that the Accord was “noted” rather than “agreed” in the official UN decision. Consequently, the Accord (as of May 2010) has no official standing in the ongoing negotiation process, making it difficult to incorporate the many positive elements endorsed by numerous world leaders.

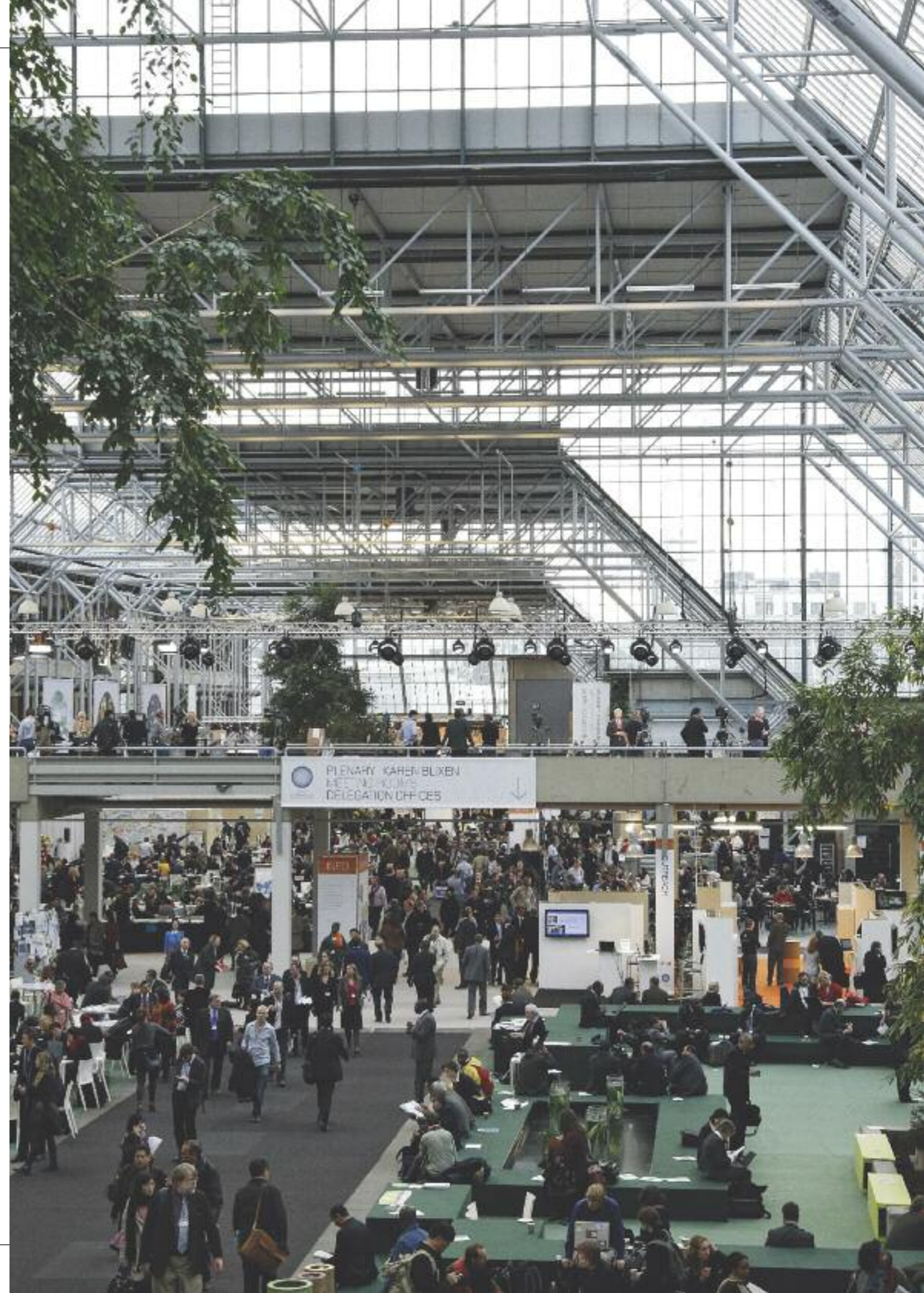
Rebuilding trust between countries would go a long way in creating a consensus on the Accord. Transparency and inclusiveness are the key words here. Much of the criticism associated with the Accord has been due to the way it was negotiated. Many developing countries felt excluded from the process. Repeating this mistake in the lead-up to Cancun would be fatal to the UN process.

WHERE DO WE NEED TO GO?

Developed country leadership is a critical ingredient for success in Cancun. This is especially true of the US. Enactment of comprehensive and ambitious



Above: Climate Group founder Dr Stephen Howard
Right: The Bella Centre, Copenhagen, venue of last December's UN Climate Change Conference



climate and energy legislation in the US will be decisive. This would provide real momentum to the talks. It would demonstrate US commitment to action and increase pressure on other major emitters to lift their ambitions. It would also kick-start a clean-tech revolution that would accelerate the creation of new industries and green jobs in the US.

The importance to the negotiating process of “fast-start” finance cannot be overstated. Early delivery of the 2010-2012 financing commitments made in the Copenhagen Accord would significantly improve the atmosphere of the negotiations. Such action,

implemented transparently and equitably, would rapidly rebuild trust between developed and developing countries. It would also make it much harder for those opposing the Accord to block its incorporation into the formal negotiating process. Existing pledges from the EU, Japan and the US are encouraging, but need to be operationalised swiftly.

The actions of the major emerging economies will also have a major influence on negotiations through to Cancun. The unilateral commitments made prior to Copenhagen, such as China’s 40-45 per cent carbon intensity reduction target, are important milestones.

Main Picture: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon during the talks



“ THE ACCORD ESTABLISHES ‘FAST-START’ FINANCE FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WORTH US\$30 BILLION THROUGH TO 2012, AND COMMITMENTS TO RAISE US\$100 BILLION PER ANNUM BY 2020 ”

But these need to be built on.

One potentially game-changing gesture would be formal acknowledgement by the so-called “BASIC” countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – that they constituted a new “advanced developing” countries group within the negotiations. This would be a major political step, but commensurate with the emerging political and economic power of these key countries. It would also open space for a more mature debate about the respective needs, responsibilities and capabilities of different developing countries.

Parties also need to initiate a frank and honest debate about the legal nature of any new climate deal. This is the elephant in the room that continues to be ignored. Negotiations should focus on an outcome that delivers significant emission reductions in an efficient and effective manner. From the atmosphere’s perspective, whether this is under a single new agreement that builds on Kyoto, a new multilateral protocol to compliment Kyoto, or some other arrangement is irrelevant. Negotiators should seek an outcome that is administratively simple and politically implementable. This is likely to require many countries to move away from their current fixed positions.

Business also has a continuing role to play in ensuring the journey to Cancun (and beyond) is a successful one. Indeed, the views and ideas of progressive business are now more important than ever. Looking back on Copenhagen it is clear that many political leaders lacked the kind of positive vision that today’s clean-tech entrepreneurs have of the future. For many politicians and negotiators climate change is still about costs endured rather than opportunities seized. It is all about the “mean revolution” rather than the “clean revolution”. Bringing the entrepreneurial enthusiasm for climate action to the negotiating table is essential to transforming this glass half-empty mindset.

National leaders should also look to their regional colleagues for inspiration. In North America, Europe, India and Australia, some of the most progressive and effective climate policies are being developed and implemented at state and local level. These “bottom up” initiatives could do much to support ‘top-down’ international efforts.

PROVIDING CLIMATE LEADERSHIP: A KEY ROLE FOR THE G8

The G8 can do much to advance action on the various issues described above. Indeed, it is a matter of necessity if the forum wishes to retain its relevance in future years. As more representative forums such as the G20 develop in status and scope, the G8 needs to show where its value-add lies. Providing progressive

climate leadership is one obvious and potential area.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

For the summit in June it means clear and detailed plans on the delivery of “fast-track” finance. And a commitment to providing first funds by the year’s end.

It means early, broad and in-depth engagement with non-G8 countries in the lead up to the summit. BASIC countries, members of the newly formed ‘Progressive Group’ and the most vulnerable developing states should be priorities. Engagement should be transparent, inclusive and equitable, particularly with respect to “fast-track” finance discussions.

It means championing climate entrepreneurs, celebrating their successes and communicating to a wider audience the positive, can-do attitude they offer. A commitment to supporting the voice of progressive business in the UN negotiations should be a priority of all G8 members.

Perhaps most importantly, it means committing to the necessary domestic legislation that is ultimately needed to drive the clean revolution at home. In short, it is leading by doing.

With so many issues left to negotiate and differences to bridge in the lead-up to Cancun, it is essential that the June summit delivers credible actions and commitments that work for all countries. While the G8 might well be an exclusive club, its actions on climate change must not be.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr Steve Howard is co-founder and CEO of international NGO The Climate Group and chairs the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Climate Change. Dr Howard is a leading authority on climate change and believes politicians and business leaders must tackle environmental and economic challenges together to cut emissions, create new jobs and build a prosperous, clean, green economy. Since 2003, The Climate Group has established one of the world’s most powerful international coalitions of business and government leaders committed to advancing the low carbon policies and technologies necessary to make deep cuts in global emissions. Most recently, Dr Steve Howard led a joint initiative with former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair to accelerate political momentum required for international agreement on a global climate deal. Before founding The Climate Group, he spent 15 years advising major corporations, NGOs and UN bodies on the environment.