

## Copenhagen deal will require more than a little give and take

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LAST week, I found myself in the Bella Centre in Copenhagen, the location for the negotiations on climate change.

It is a vast cavern, with scores of rooms serving as the location for talks, presentations, media activity and lobbying. I was struck by the sheer mass of people, with laptops, leaflets, cameras and TV screens, milling around in the hope of influencing discussions.

That image has stayed with me as we hear daily of the difficulties facing negotiations. The sheer complexity of the treaty arrangements under discussion, the fact that nearly 200 countries are participating, and the energetic presence of hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international bodies, must make the talks almost unmanageable. Add to that the diversity of positions on the main issues and the challenge is great indeed.

Senior diplomats would acknowledge that the process could be done differently. In conventional negotiations, with a large number of participants, efforts would probably be made to create smaller working groups to report back to a larger body. The trouble in Copenhagen seems to be that small groups are working in secret, and exclusion creates hostility and fear. In the absence of trust, nations fear being taken advantage of by those whose interests they perceive to be different.

Lack of trust at international level is not surprising, but it makes negotiation difficult. It leads to the leaking of drafts, a more hectoring tone, hardening into threats and walkouts. Often, these are carefully orchestrated moves in a game of chess where much else is happening. It is understandable in negotiation to hear people say: "If you do this, we'll do that..." or "If you don't give us X, we will not agree to Y". But parties can then find themselves with much less room for manoeuvre than they need when negotiations reach crisis point. Backing yourself or the other party into a corner makes it more difficult for crucial concessions to be made.

In Copenhagen, the risk is that some countries will fear losing face even when they know that, to get an overall deal, they should move. Whatever diplomatic skills leaders such as Gordon Brown and Barack Obama can bring could be crucial. Can they help others to change position with dignity and make concessions themselves which are game-changing? A heroic move to break the impasse may be needed.

In difficult negotiations, all can seem lost until very late in the day. Sometimes, it needs people to go to look over the precipice and consider again the Big Picture, to realise that the alternative to a deal is worse than what is on the table. For the rich nations, this may be the knowledge that, if they don't help the developing nations to tackle climate change seriously now, emissions will spin out of control so that by 2030 there will be no way back – for anyone. For the developing countries, the knowledge that, unless global warming is controlled, the Himalayan glaciers will recede still further, threatening water supplies to billions of people, and the desertification of large parts of Africa will be hastened, should provide a strong incentive to reach a conclusion.

While we cannot escape responsibility for what we have done, there may be a time when letting go of the past is essential if we are to grasp a workable future. Forgiveness is a sensitive subject with which we may need to wrestle. We can now see that human progress has come at a great cost. Mistakes have been made. There comes a point when it is futile to seek to find fault. The reality is that we are all in this together and the only way forward is to recognise the mutuality of our interests. If we don't, there is a very serious risk that by 2050, we will have deep regrets.