



## **Copenhagen December 09 Notes**

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Arriving in Copenhagen, I was immediately struck by the welcome offered by our Danish hosts at information desks and ticket booths and by the smooth and efficient transition through the airport on to the Metro system which took me to the heart of the city quickly. In a city of over 1 million people, there is a sense of modernity and economic efficiency from the outset. Green technology is obviously in use and of importance. Perhaps most striking are the thousands of cyclists on the streets, the pedal cycle being the primary mode of transport. And very few wear a helmet.

Copenhagen was bustling with sideshows and events, all focussing on aspects of climate change. In many ways, this seemed to be the moment when the people found a voice and sought to express it.

In reading up on the summit en route, I realised how little I knew about the intricacies of the negotiations, the number of different treaties being discussed, the vast range of interests and issues being addressed and the downright complexity of it all, regardless of the politics and scepticism about the science.

It was the seriousness of the issue which finally struck me. Much attention has been paid to those who deny or question the very existence of climate change or who question whether the scientists are correct. I wished that they could hear and read the stories of those who are affected now. The evidence of the current impact on many parts of the world of climate change is clear and being pressed upon us by those who are already suffering, if we would only listen. Maldives, Mali, Darfur, Bolivia, and so on. This is not something which is coming in 2050 but which is with many hundreds of millions of people now. It seemed that climate scepticism is a profoundly ignorant stance to take. But the challenge lies in appreciating that there are differences of view.....and how to deal with these.

It may be that most of the sceptics emanate from the industrialised countries least affected now and likely to be least affected in the future. I was also struck by the fact that, whatever may be its cause (human or not), the increase in CO<sub>2</sub> is only one of the problems we face; CO<sub>2</sub> is not the only green house gas which plays a part in global warming. Indeed it accounts for only 43% of emissions, we are told; black carbon, methane and other emissions account, according to one report, for at least 50% of emissions. And acidification of the oceans is another huge issue, with serious long term consequences. The inter-play of all of these changes is a dangerous cocktail.

The starkest analysis came from Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who spoke at Scotland's Towards a Low Carbon Future event. If we don't act radically now, she told us, by 2030 it will be too late to avert catastrophic



changes which will begin to affect us even more deeply by around 2050. Temperature rises of 2 degrees C are locked in and there is little we can do to affect that. But this is not experienced equally across the globe, which means a 3 degree increase in Africa, already a devastating figure. As one observer put it, hundreds of millions will die whatever we do. If we don't act now, global increases to 3 degrees and above seem inevitable, and the problem with this is that the progression may not be linear but exponential.

I was fortunate to gain entry to the Bella Center, the main venue for the negotiations. Fortunate in that, just a day later, the organisers realised that they had granted access to far more people (30,000 I was advised) than the venue could hold, with the result that many officials and delegates were turned away. Some queued for 8 hours. The Center itself was a huge conference complex, like the SECC, and I was struck by the sheer number of events, interest groups, lobbyists, press, activists, all milling around with lap tops and screens, cameras and petitions, thousands of people vying for an opportunity to connect with someone who might have influence.

The plenary room where delegates met was spartan, and one could be overwhelmed by the sheer number of nations and different organisations, each with a table and 2 chairs from which to seek to conduct the most important negotiations in human history. It seemed unmanageable. Indeed, many officials were rearranging meetings away from this venue, and there was a rumour that the heads of state, meeting towards the end of the week, would be whisked away from Copenhagen altogether. Could the talks extend into the weekend if necessary to get a deal? Not at the Bella Center – it was booked for another event on the Saturday!

There was a sense that, for all the preparation, this was in many ways seat-of-the-pants stuff, with last minute arrangements being made and well thought through negotiation strategies scrapped at a moment's notice. This was confirmed by the impressive Mary Robinson. She told us that there had been months of painstaking work to ensure that appropriate reference was made to gender issues – and that had all been omitted in current drafts.

What we saw on the outside was probably very different to what was going on behind the scenes. The leaking of drafts, the making of political statements, the threats of a walk out, all were carefully orchestrated moves in a game of chess where much else was happening. What became clear is that politicians are much more concerned about the issue of climate change than the man on the street. The work done to get to Copenhagen was clearly immense and my impression was that the UK government had played a leading part. My impression was also of close liaison between the UK officials and Scottish civil servants who have piloted through legislation and a framework in Scotland which is world-leading. There was no doubting the commitment of the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson, and indeed of the First Minister, whose appearance in Copenhagen underlined his oft-repeated warning that climate change is the most serious environmental challenge we face.



But, as became clear towards the end of the summit, politicians will not solve this crisis. We are all bound to act: business, civic society, individuals. Only together can we achieve the necessary breakthrough. That the conference failed to deliver a binding agreement could be viewed as abject failure. On the other hand, it serves as a stepping stone. In reality, it is probably both – underscoring our individual and collective ambiguity towards this defining issue.

So, how should we deal with the psychological impact of understanding that our species, the only conscious creatures in the universe so far as we know, could face mass extinction? Firstly, by facing up to it. Secondly, by acknowledging that we need to change. (This will include adapting the way we approach complex negotiations – mediation skills will be critical as we go forward and realise that old-fashioned positional bargaining doesn't work in this context, anymore than elsewhere). Thirdly, by retaining hope. (The technology and finance is apparently available now to tackle this, all we need is the will.) Finally, by reaching a new stage in our conscious awareness of what it means to be human in a world of limited resources. It's quite a challenge!