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## **From Paris to Marrakesh: Hopes High for Carbon Emissions Reduction**

*By Rini Astuti*

### **Synopsis**

*Marrakesh will host the 22nd Climate Change Convention. Hopes are high that the negotiation will succeed in discussing ways of transforming parties' ambitions into actions including for countries in Southeast Asia.*

### **Commentary**

MARRAKESH IS hosting the 22nd session of the United Nations' Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), on 7-24 November 2016. It will be the first testament on the success or failure of how the climate-constrained world will be governed post-Kyoto Protocol. Does the global community have a strong reason to be hopeful about the next climate change negotiation in Marrakesh?

Building on the Paris Agreement of December 2015 the summit will discuss ways of implementing the pledges countries have expressed in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The previous convention held in Paris in 2015 was widely acclaimed as a pivotal point for a global effort to limit the earth's temperature increase to less than 2 degrees above the pre-industrial level by 2100. Employing the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, countries individually committed to various degrees of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions reduction levels submitted in advance to the Paris negotiation.

### **Critiques**

However, there have been critiques over the concern that the current pledges are too political and insufficient to achieve the necessary carbon reductions. Scientists highlight that the submitted initial NDCs will lead the world to a temperature increase

of around 2.6 - 3 degrees Celsius by 2100. In an article published in Nature (2016), Rogelj et al emphasise that two-thirds of global carbon budget have been emitted, leaving only a narrow room for the world economy to grow while preventing dangerous interference with the climate system.

Scientists and civil society are pressuring parties to take further actions to increase their ambitions under the Paris Agreement's principle of "progression". As of 5 October 2016, 87 out of 197 parties to the UNFCCC have ratified the agreement, representing more than 55% global GHG emissions. The agreement will take effect on 4 November 2016.

Hopes are high that more parties will ratify it and negotiations will be directed toward putting ambitions into actions. Otherwise Paris and Marrakech will be remembered as leaving our generation down and out in the race of averting irreversible climate catastrophe.

As the region with fast economic growth, a steep rise in energy consumption and massive land use changes, Southeast Asia has strategic positions in both playing the role of climate mitigation efforts and becoming the beneficiaries of climate adaptation programmes and finance. Contributing to around 4% of global GHG emissions reductions, all Southeast Asian countries have signed the Paris Agreement.

### **Southeast Asia's Role and Challenges**

The Philippines' INDC (Intended NDC) outlines plan to reduce carbon emissions by 70% by 2030 relative to its Business as Usual (BAU) scenario. The commitment is conditional on international support and will heavily rely on energy, waste, transport and forestry sectors. Laos' NDC drew on the pledge to increase its forest cover up to 70% compared to the country's total land area by 2020. It will be achieved by joining several international mechanisms, such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme to orchestrate necessary international support.

Thailand emphasises its intention to reduce carbon emissions by 20% by 2030 from its projected BAU in its NDC. Based on its INDC, Singapore commits to reduce its emissions intensity by 36% from 2005 levels by 2030 and to stabilise its emissions with the aim of peaking around 2030. Earlier in 2009 Singapore pledged unconditionally to reduce GHG emissions from 7% to 11% below its BAU level by 2020.

As the biggest emitter in Southeast Asia, Indonesia intends to unconditionally reduce GHG emissions by 29% by 2030 against its BAU level while also pledging to reduce up to 41% with international support. The commitment relies heavily on land use sector with emphasise on reducing forest and peatland fires and avoiding deforestation and forest degradation.

Myanmar commits to protecting its rainforests to keep its status as net GHG emitter. Conditional on the availability of international support, Cambodia intends, among other measures, to reduce 27% of its GHG emissions, compared to the baseline,

from energy, manufacturing and transport sectors by 2030. Vietnam promises to unconditionally lower its carbon emissions by 8% by 2030 and will reduce further 25% with adequate international support.

### **Some Concerns**

Delving deeper into Southeast Asian countries' initial NDCs, some concerns require further discussion. Firstly, on mitigation aspect, the most immediate issue is in ensuring countries move forward with their conditional commitments. It means there should be adequate international support covering essential aspects, such as capacity building, technology transfer, and financial aid. Countries such as the Philippines, Myanmar, Lao and Cambodia will only contribute to GHG emissions reduction with such assistances.

Secondly, on adaptation to the impact of climate change, almost all ASEAN members highlight their position as baskets of climate-related disasters. Hence, adaptation programme must be specifically designed to address the ramification of climate disaster and strengthen the social and infrastructural need of the countries.

Thailand, for example, has highlighted its vulnerability to floods. Hence, the most suitable adaptation program will have to address the direct political-economic causes of the floods as well as to facilitate the most affected communities in coping with the impacts of the disaster while strengthen their socio-economic resilience.

Lastly, the Paris Agreement requires its parties to submit regular updates every five years as the basis for global stocktaking on what has been achieved and how to progress with parties' ambitions. The Agreement's effectiveness lies in its parties' capacity to govern themselves through transparency and monitoring apparatuses. Consequently, strengthening ASEAN members' capacity to develop information systems (covering aspects of monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon emissions reduction) has to become a crucial agenda for the ASEAN Secretariat.

### **North's Responsibilities, South-South Cooperation**

Needless to say, to keep the ball rolling for countries in Southeast Asia both state and non-state actors have to collaborate in confirming the existence of international support. While it is essential to demand the North's responsibilities in assisting the global South, it is imperative to foster South-South cooperation.

ASEAN has provided various platforms for its members to share experience and knowledge concerning climate change. Maximising the current ASEAN initiatives while tending to specific elements required for successful implementation of the Paris Agreement will be the best and fastest option to keep the momentum going.

Contributions from the private sector, donors, philanthropy foundations, and influential public figures will be essential in augmenting countries' commitments in Southeast Asia. Not only do we ask the business sectors to contribute financially but to be held responsible and accountable for the environmental damages they have caused.

As hundreds of negotiators and thousands of observers make their way to Marrakesh, it is hoped the convention is not going to be the representation of a not-too distant Orwellian world where ignorance and inaction are the universal norms. Instead, negotiations need to dive deeper into the revolutionary way of securing the rights of the commons rather than the select few.

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