

<STUDENT CONFERENCE REPORT>

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties-17 Observation Report

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I. The Model United Nations Climate Change Conference 2011¹⁾

“The meeting and the conference for this plenary session will be adjourned. Thank you.” With this final phrase, the half year long journey as the Secretary General for the Model United Nations Climate Change Conference 2011 (MUNCCC 2011) has reached the end. This was the first Model United Nations <MUN> conference that was specially dedicated on the issue of climate change. Half a year before the conference, the secretariat was formed under the direction of professor, Suh-Young Chung. As he is an expert and frontier in the climate change issue, it was an honor to be given a chance to work with him as a secretariat member for this conference. Thanks to the experience of participating in various MUN conferences, as both delegates and student officers; and moreover being a Deputy Secretary General in a preceding conference, I was directed as the Secretary General in the MUNCCC 2011. As a student who has been very interested in the climate change issue, it was a privilege and honor to be given a chance to serve as the Secretary General in the conference. The secretariat tried its best to give the participants a fruitful experience, and furthermore draw their attention in the urgency of the ongoing global phenomenon.

1)The Model United Nations Climate Change Conference 2011 was hosted by Korea University and YTN, and organized by Center for Climate Change and Sustainable Development Law and Policy and Division of International Studies of Korea University.

II. Selection of Observers to the COP-17

After the conference ended, two people were to be chosen to go to Durban, Republic of South Africa to visit the COP-17 meeting. One was to be chosen out of the awardees, and one was to be chosen out of the secretariat and student officers. Having a dream of becoming a climate negotiator, this was one of the life time experiences that I could have. Without hesitation I participated in the written exam and interview Korea University and YTN News Agency provided. The exam was not easy, as it asked us to read the first chapter of the “Gaia Theory”, summarize it and write our opinions on it within fifteen minutes. Having dealt about the Gaia theory in the environmental science class I took last semester, it was not a completely unknown subject to me. However doing three tasks at the same time was certainly not an easy task. After the written exam, there was an interview, and it was consisted of two questions. It asked about the differences between mitigation and adaptation, and asked us to choose which one was more important. The second question asked about the similarities and differences and specifications of the Copenhagen Accord and Cancun Agreement. I answered both of the question the best I could. With that, the process for nominating the participants to the COP-17 meeting was over. Within a short period of time, fortunate news reached me that I, TaeYoon Kim was selected as the representative from the secretariat/student officers pool, along with SungJae Park, the representative selected from the highschool/university division. For the whole semester did I wait with excitement, and finally on the 6th of December, I took the plane to Durban, with a transfer at Dubai.

III. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties 17 (COP 17) was an event that took place in Durban, Republic of South Africa as the 17th official meeting for the UNFCCC COP. The president for this conference was Ms. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the South African Minister of

International Relations and Cooperation. The official conference meeting was from the 28th of November to the 9th of December; however, due to failure in achieving a consensus in the given time, a marathon negotiation was held until the 11th of December and finally the parties have reached an agreement.

Compared to the importance of the COP-18 meeting to be held in Qatar in 2012, the significance of COP-17 was rather small. However it was definitely important in that it can be a meeting that will help keep the engine running for the Post-Kyoto system. The first commitment period ends in the year 2012, and there is no clear vision of what will happen after that. Moreover with the world-wide economic crisis the states have faced since the year of 2008, the attention was directed more towards the stabilization and re-growth of economies. There were differences in opinions in whether to continue with the Kyoto Protocol or to come up with a new regime, but eventually the parties agreed upon matters and came up with the ‘Durban Platform’. There are four main outcomes in the Durban Platform.

First of all, it has set the second commitment period. Although the obligations that the Annex-1 states have to keep have not been set yet, it is a great accomplishment to not discard the Kyoto Protocol that we had for over a decade. The Annex-1 states will submit their GHG reduction goal until May of 2012, and the specifics will be derived out in COP-18. Secondly, the parties have agreed to launch a process starting from the year of 2012 to derive out a legally binding agreement by 2020 which all the states will be abiding by. The parties will start their negotiations starting from 2012, and have promised to derive out a result by the year of 2015. Thirdly, the parties have agreed to carry out the Cancun Agreement. Specifics regarding the Adaptation Committee and Technology Committee has been dealt with, and the parties has reached certain agreements. Lastly, the parties have agreed upon establishing the Green Climate Fund (GCF). This fund is designed to work as the financial mechanism of the UNFCCC. This is expected to have a funding of a hundred billion dollars per year by 2020.²⁾

However, this does not mean that COP-17 does not have any flaws. The biggest problem is that it takes too long of a time to come up with a legally binding treaty. The Durban Platform has agreed to come up with a legally binding treaty by the year of

2) Ministry of Environment Broadcasting Material, *Ministry of Environment*, Dec. 10, 2011

2015 which will start off in 2020. This means that at least eight years or more is needed to have the global community be abiding by an international standard. As one of the small island state representative has mentioned in the plenary session, the climate change issue is not something to negotiate about. It is directly linked with their survival, and rapid results are crucial for them. Also another problem regarding the Durban Platform is that the wordings are too weak. The European Union pushed for a use of strong wording; however, as the set time for negotiation until the 9th of December has passed and a consensus was not reached, big concessions were made, and the overall strength of wording became weak.

With all these drawbacks however, I still believe that the COP-17 was not a failure. There are many achievements that can be seen as ‘successful’, and this will help run the big engine of global environmental scheme.

IV. Overall Schedule

On December 7th late afternoon, we arrived at Durban. The time difference between Korea and South Africa is seven hours, but on the first day I did not feel any jetlag. Maybe it was due to the high excitement I had. We met Professor Chung at the airport, and by listening to the progress in Durban so far we headed for a nicely prepared meal. It was sad to hear that the Republic of Korea did not get nominated as the next conference site. Instead Qatar got the privilege to host the next UNFCCC COP meeting. However I believe that this is not a big loss at all, because by showing the humbleness of conceding the COP18/ CMP8 meetings to Qatar we showed our flexibility and collaborative ability. Moreover by conceding the main COP meeting to the Qatar government, we have been given the right to host all the pre-COP 18 meetings and activities. This includes all the ministerial pre-meetings that are held, and in my opinion being able to host all these events is maybe a better chance for us. By not having to care about the duties which need to be carried out by a hosting country, we have been given time and energy to concentrate on the climate change issue and agenda. This will enable us to penetrate our opinion better. After the meal, we headed straight to our hotel and got to spend the first night in Africa. There was a tight schedule

ahead of me, but I could not fall into sleep that easily due to the excitement full inside me.

December 8th, the first full day in Durban started. Our first official schedule was an interview with the head of the Korea Energy Economics Institute(KEEI). It was an honor to be able to interview Mr. JinWoo Kim, the president of KEEI. I was given a chance to ask various questions that I had regarding the carbon trade system that was being discussed in the National Assembly. One of the questions that was in my head many of the times was on what the policy would start out when the carbon exchange system is implemented in Korea. The president gave the highest possible scenario to us. In order to have the system adjust well in the beginning, he said that it is most possible that the government will have most of the carbon emission allowance consisted of the grandfathering system. When the percentage of paid carbon emission is high, this will burden the industries too much, and he said this might deteriorate the morale. With some more questions, the precious interview time with president Kim ended. Before lunch, I had a chance to briefly go into the plenary session that was going on. It was sad to hear that non-state personnel were only allowed to enter plenary sessions. Except for those, none of the formal sessions were allowed to us. When I entered the plenary session, the Philippines delegation was making a speech on the podium regarding the cooperation that is needed between the developed countries and developing ones. After lunch, I went to watch the side events, which continued until the end of the day. Time was allowed for me to watch three side events in total, and I would like to write about the two most interesting ones later on in this report.

December 9th, there was a meeting with the Minister of Environment, Young-Sook Yoo in the morning. We could hear about the policies that the ministry is working on. She emphasized the importance of the citizens having interest in climate change, as this problem cannot be solved by the government alone. It was an honor and pleasure to meet a current minister. After the meeting we have been invited to lunch by Korea's Ambassador for Climate Change, Mr. Sung-Hwan Son. As a student with a future dream of becoming a climate negotiator, the knowledge and experience he told us during lunch was very precious. We could hear about the current situation in the negotiation, the stance of Republic of Korea, and more on. In the afternoon, I

have participated in some plenary sessions that were going on, and most of them were focused in reading out the individual clauses in the treaty and reaching a consensus in every single one. In the evening, because it was the last day of the official conference, the parties were still negotiating because there was no outcome. We waited for Professor Chung, and found out that the negotiations will probably proceed throughout the night. I have heard about the marathon negotiations before, but it was my first time witnessing one happen. My hope was to watch the last plenary session before I leave Durban, but unfortunately that could not happen.

After the end of the official conference schedule, we had a fun day at the Durban Safari, and World Cup stadium on the 10th of December, and a Dubai tour on the 11th of December, and finally arrived at Incheon International Airport on the 12th of December. This trip I had was definitely the one with the tightest schedule ever, but also at the same time the most fruitful and enjoyable one. I am sure that this experience will guide become one of my pillar-stones in achieving my dream.

V. Side Events

The first side event I have participated was ‘Impacts and Vulnerabilities in Developing Countries and Small Islands: Attribution and Analysis’ hosted by University of Oxford, Environmental Change Institute (ECI)/ CARIBSAVE. There were four presenters in total, and I found this symposium quite interesting. This summer vacation, I participated in a Model United Nations, in which I represented Tuvalu, a small island state located in Oceania. When climate change were to continuously raise sea level, it would be one of the first countries to sink. When doing research about Tuvalu, I had learned about the urgency of climate change to these people. For them resolving climate change was not something to negotiate with other countries. It was their survival itself. The presentations given were mainly related to the states located in the Caribbean areas in a similar situation as Tuvalu. In order to look into this issue further, modeling of the sea level rise was done, especially the countries in which the damage and loss is occurring fast. It was emphasized that the calculations

must be carried out fast to cope with the issue, and this urgency needs to be realized to many people as without attention the issue will lose its alarm power.

Besides the sea level rise, many other types of hazards that the coastal areas are vulnerable to were mentioned, and to reduce the damages that are given, the types of hazards need to be identified and people need be prepared to face. Something that the second presenter had mentioned sounded very idealistic and important. She said that evidence-based pragmatic strategies need to be established, inter-sectoral capacity between the communities, private sector, and the public sector needs to be built. It is true that climate change is not something easy an individual can cope with, and every single thing she asserted made great sense. However the presentation was lacking specific methods and ways in how to do this. I was hoping to hear realistic suggestions and opinions made by the experts, as inter-sectoral cooperation does not always work in the way it should. In many of the classes I take, the triangle between actors in the society is stressed out. We all know the importance; it is just how to 'do' it.

The second side event that I have participated in is 'Understanding the real impact of GHG reduction actions' presented by The Climate Registry/ National Association of Clean Air Agencies. In this symposium, experts from various fields have gathered to give presentations. The first presenter was Mr. Terry Lake, who had worked as an official in Canada. He has given various policies that the Canadian government has implemented, especially the British-Columbian state government. For example, The state of British-Columbia has promised to reduce 33% of its GHG emission compared to 2007 level until the year of 2020. The government has implemented carbon tax to all economy to achieve this. As a result, the British-Columbian government is the first government to achieve a carbon neutral government. Moreover the government has implemented a state-government wide propaganda of establishing the carbon footprint, which is very important in measuring the virtual water and the actual water consumption by the public. By doing this the government plans to alert the public and private sectors on the importance of GHG emission reduction. By listening to this, I have thought about the policies the Korean government is implementing. Compared to what Canada is doing, we are very slow. The implementation of energy saving in major school campuses and corporations has just begun. When Korea wants to emphasize the

image of a state caring about environment, we have a lot to learn from other leading countries in the field.

When the second speaker came out and gave the presentation, it was interesting in a sense that what she said was not very different from what the presenter from the first side event had said. The main point the second presenter asserted was about the efforts the public and private sector can make together to reduce green house gases. She mentioned that the biggest actors were multi-national corporations, state governments, and the related agencies. This presentation was better than the one in the first side event in that this speaker mentioned about the methods that actually have worked, and what can be done more. One of the affective methods that the presenter mentioned was opening workshops in which the various actors can meet and form an alliance. When this goes well, there is a high possibility that a standardized reporting structure will be created. By listening to these experts, I learned what 'real knowledge' actually is. The presenters all from different fields (government, car industry, science lab) enabled me to see the actual aspects regarding GHG reduction, and made me feel how much more the Korean government would have to try to achieve the level of developed countries.