“Shared vision” debate dominates Poznan’s opening plenary

Poznan, 2 December (Meena Raman) -- The Poznan climate talks got underway on 1 December with an opening ceremony and the opening session of the Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

This was followed by the opening plenary sessions of the various subsidiary bodies -- the ad hoc working group on long term cooperative action (AWG-LCA), the ad hoc working group on the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP), and the subsidiary bodies on implementation (SBI) and on scientific and technological advice (SBSTA).

There were differences of emphasis and priorities between parties, especially between developed and developing countries, on what they want to get out of the Poznan meetings. The European Union in various statements made clear their priority was to get acceptance of a shared vision focused on a "global goal" of emission reduction by 2050.

Several developing countries raised concerns about what they considered an over-emphasis at Poznan on the “shared vision” issue, which they said was getting too much time at the expense of other issues.

The G77 and China highlighted its proposal on setting up a new technology mechanism under the UNFCCC, as well as its separate proposal on an enhanced financial mechanism, also under the UNFCCC. It wanted the focus to be on implementation of the Convention, and it also raised serious concerns at the very tight schedule of meetings for 2009, which it said would overwhelm many developing countries.

At the start of the AWG LCA plenary, many developing countries raised concerns about how the shared vision issue was dominating the agenda and time of the Poznan meetings. “‘Shared vision’ is featured in a workshop, in a contact group, and most significantly as the sole theme in a Ministerial Roundtable.

Many developing countries asked that time given for shared vision be reduced, and several asked that the contact group on shared vision not meet in Poznan but only in March 2009. However, the EU said that what had been agreed to about contact groups at the AWG’s last meeting in Accra be adhered to.

The plenary was suspended so that the Chair of the AWG LCA, Luis Machado of Brazil, could consult. When the meeting resumed, he announced that the contact group on shared vision would meet for only an hour and a half, a compromise that was accepted.

In its opening speech at the AWG LCA, the G77 and China highlighted its proposals on finance and technology. Antigua and Barbuda, speaking for the group, said its proposal on enhanced financial mechanisms is geared at ensuring the effective implementation of the climate change Convention. The proposal calls for enhanced financial resources and investment to support action on mitigation and adaptation as well as the development and transfer of technology, as required by the Bali Action Plan.

The G77 and China added it had also proposed “the establishment of a new technology mechanism under the UNFCCC to accelerate the development and transfer of technology and to
support the effective implementation of the UNFCCC’s provisions relating to technology and finance. It seeks to address the shortfall in implementation by developed countries of their obligations to provide technology and associated finance and capacity building to developing countries to enable them to implement that Convention. The proposal also seeks to advance the work of the BAP, which calls for “enhanced action on technology development and transfer”.

It also stressed the significance of work on adaptation in the LCA, given the vulnerability of developing country members to the impacts of climate change, and hoped that there will be considerable progress on the issues.

“As we move past the mid-point of the scheduled time frame and we take stock of the work that has been completed thus far we must note that the schedule for climate change meetings is overwhelming to many delegations from developing countries. Therefore we must organise our work in 2009 in a manner that allows effective participation of all members. The full and effective participation of all parties is a prerequisite for a successful and positive outcome in this session. The green room experience in Bali is an experience that must not be repeated at this session,” it stressed.

The Group reiterated that the AWG LCA builds upon other processes under the Convention but does not replace them. In this regard, the clear mandate of the LCA is to work towards enabling the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action, now up to and beyond 2012.

Earlier, the AWG saw a debate on the treatment of the “shared vision”. Parties agreed in the Bali Action Plan to address the issue of a “shared vision” for long term cooperative action, including a long-term global goal for emission reductions, to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention. It is the issue of the long-term goal for emissions reductions that is the bone of contention among parties.

The EU, supported by others, has been advocating a long-term global goal of emissions reductions by 50% by 2050, which it referred to at the COP opening. Many developing countries believe that adoption of a global goal would also oblige them to have an emission-reduction target, and want to defer a discussion on this until they know whether the finance and technology commitments of developed countries will be fulfilled and to what extent.

Three contact groups were established in Accra under the AWG-LCA, dealing with adaptation; mitigation and on delivering finance and technology. It was agreed that a fourth contact group on shared vision is to be convened in Poznan.

The Chair, Luiz Machado, said that the shared vision contact group would meet following the shared vision workshop.

Several countries including Algeria, Philippines, Bolivia, Saudi Arabia, China, Malaysia and Egypt called for a more balanced treatment of all the issues under the BAP and some called for a deferment of the contact group to March next year so that parties may have more time to consider the issue, following inputs from the Pozan workshop and the Ministerial roundtable.

The Philippines expressed concern over why an inordinate amount of time was given to this issue as compared to the other issues. Algeria speaking for the Africa Group stressed the need for balance in the treatment of all the four building blocks under the BAP of mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology as well as the shared vision.

Algeria said that the shared vision is not just about the stabilisation of the climate but also about enabling sustainable development and adaptation. It called for emphasis on adaptation on the same scale as that given to mitigation. Malaysia supported the Algerian call to postpone the shared vision group meeting to next year.

Bolivia said shared vision is such an important issue that more time is needed to develop it,
since this issue had just arrived with Bali and we still don’t grasp it well, while other issues (adaptation, mitigation, finance and technology) have been discussed for years. Thus more time is needed before focusing on it in a contact group.

Japan, Australia, Barbados, Ghana, Costa Rica and Panama supported the Chair's proposal to convene the contact group in Poznan itself.

Following consultations, Macado announced the contact group on shared vision would meet in Poznan for one and half hours. He also assured parties that the outcome of the Ministerial roundtable would not have a bearing on the AWG LCA process. The Chair said that the discussions of the Ministerial roundtable would be reflected in the COP President's summary which would be noted by the COP.

In later statements, Barbados for the Alliance of Small Island States said that in Accra, it was agreed that parties would go into a full negotiating mode in 2009. It suggested that negotiations be based on an options paper prepared by the outgoing chair and the incoming chair of the AWG LCA. It said that there was a need for serious negotiations instead of a wait and see approach.

Maldives speaking for the Least Developing Countries said that the Chair's text should be the basis of negotiations. It also said that a shared vision is necessary and that targets should ensure that global temperature rise be limited to 1.5 degrees centigrade and GHG emissions be kept to 350 parts per million. It also stressed the need for full and equal treatment of all the BAP elements.

The EU, represented by France, said that negotiations next year should address essential questions such as how to strengthen cooperative actions on adaptation, create the right conditions so that investment will use the most efficient technologies, develop public policies that mobilise investment and financial flows for low greenhouse gas-emitting development.

“We have also talked about what the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities could mean for mitigation actions of different countries including in terms of levels of ambition, the nature of the actions undertaken and the tools available to support efforts,” it said.

It also said that the shared vision should be a clear statement of political will by all leaders, translating the ultimate objective of the Convention into a vision of sustainable development for all countries, putting the world on a pathway towards low carbon society that enables global average temperature increase to be limited to not more than 2 degree centigrade above pre-industrial levels and thereby avoids dangerous climate change, while allowing for sustained economic welfare.

Earlier, at the opening of the COP, the EU said that mitigation also involves restructuring our economies, including planning, development of cities and infrastructure, massive increase in energy efficiency and low carbon technologies. Reducing global emissions by at least 50% by 2050 could then cease to be a theoretical line on a chart.

The EU also referred to the common but differentiated responsibilities principles and respective capabilities and said the discussion will continue in Poznan on what this means to mitigation actions of different countries, including the levels of ambition, the nature of actions and the tools available to support efforts.