

CLIMATE TALKS DELIVER 'RULE BOOK'

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Show of relief: COP24 president Michal Kurtyka jumping at the end of the final session of the Katowice climate summit on Saturday. AFP/JANEK SKARZYNSKI

Nations on Sunday struck a deal to breathe life into the landmark 2015 Paris climate treaty after marathon UN talks that failed to match the ambition the most vulnerable countries need to avert dangerous global warming.

Delegates from nearly 200 states finalised a common rule book designed to deliver on the Paris goals of limiting global temperature rises to well below 2°Celsius.

"Putting together the Paris agreement work programme is a big responsibility," said COP24 president Michal Kurtyka as he gavelled through the deal after talks in Poland that ran deep into overtime. "It has been a long road. We did our best to leave no one behind."

'Lacking ambition'

But states already dealing with devastating floods, droughts and extreme weather made worse by climate change said the package agreed in the mining city of Katowice lacked the bold ambition to cut emissions the world needed. Egyptian Ambassador Wael Aboulmagd, chair of the developing nations G77 plus China negotiating bloc, said the rule book saw the "urgent adaptation needs of developing countries relegated to a second-class status".

The final decision text was repeatedly delayed as negotiators sought guidelines that could ward off the worst threats posed by the heating planet while protecting the economies of rich and poor nations alike. "Without a clear rulebook, we won't see how countries are tracking, whether they are actually doing what they say they are doing," Canada's Environment Minister Catherine McKenna said.

At their heart, negotiations were about how each nation funds action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as how those actions are reported.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has recently backed down on anti-pollution fuel tax hikes in the face of countrywide protests, said France must "show the way" as he welcomed the progress made at the talks.

Developing nations had wanted more clarity from richer ones over how the future climate fight will be funded and pushed for so-called "loss and damage" measures. This would see richer countries giving money now to help deal with the effects of climate change many vulnerable states are already experiencing.

Another contentious issue was the integrity of carbon markets, looking ahead to the day when the patchwork of distinct exchanges — in China, the Europe Union, parts of the U.S. — may be joined up in a global system.

The Paris Agreement calls for setting up a mechanism to guard against practices such as double counting emissions savings, which could undermine such a market. Delegates eventually agreed on Saturday to kick the issue down the road until next year.

One of the largest disappointments for countries of all wealths and sizes was the lack of ambition to reduce emissions shown in the final COP24 text.

IPCC report

Most nations wanted the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to form a key part of future planning. It had highlighted the need to slash carbon pollution by nearly half before 2030 in order to hit the 1.5°C target. But the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait objected, leading to watered-down wording.

The final statement from the Polish COP24 presidency welcomed “the timely conclusion” of the report and invited “parties to make use of it” — hardly the ringing endorsement many nations had called for.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who made three trips to Katowice over the course of the talks, said the world’s climate fight was just beginning.

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