
[The 13th round of the climate game in Bali](#)

In 1992, governments acknowledged that climate change was real and that something needed to be done to avoid a major catastrophe. As a result, they signed and ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Fifteen years have passed and the Convention's Conference of the Parties will meet for its 13th time in Bali, Indonesia, from 3-14 December 2007.

How much has this convention achieved to counter the problem it was created to address? Have the main emitters reduced their emissions? The press release prepared for this event by the Convention's secretariat gives a clear answer to both questions, when it says:

“According to data submitted to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the total greenhouse gas emissions of 40 industrialized countries rose to an all-time high in 2005, continuing the upward trend of the year before.”

This means that the countries that bear most of the responsibility for destroying the Earth's climate are continuing to do so. In spite of that, they will again attend the Climate Change Convention and will put forward new proposals ... for continuing business as usual.

Business: this is the best way to describe this Convention. It's all about saving and making money. Paraphrasing former president Clinton, during his 1992 presidential campaign, it's not the climate: it's the economy, stupid!

Again the Convention secretariat's press release provides evidence on the above by saying that “The Kyoto Protocol has spawned international emissions trading worth 30 billion dollars in 2006, with the bulk of emissions trading taking place within the European Union's emissions trading scheme (EU ETS). The EU ETS will be linked to trading under the Kyoto Protocol next year. The Protocol's CDM is already enjoying rapid growth.”

It is access to those billions of dollars –and not climate– that matters. New clever schemes are being invented all the time, hidden under obscure acronyms that the general public is unable to decipher: CDM, JI, PCF and many others. In Bali there will now be discussions on two new acronyms –RED and REDD– which stand for “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation”, and for “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation”.

The RED/REDD game is about to start in Bali. Southern government players, actively destroying forests in their countries –and thereby releasing enormous amounts of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere– will declare that they need to be “compensated” in order to conserve forests and the carbon stored therein. Northern government players, actively contributing to the destruction of those same forests through investments and trade will declare that they are willing to pay if their own releases of enormous amounts of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere are “compensated” through carbon trading.

Of course those forests need to be conserved, but not simply because of their carbon storage capacity. Among many other reasons, because they help to regulate the water cycle and contain most of terrestrial biodiversity. Even more importantly, because they are home to countless peoples and cultures that depend on them. In that respect, Southern governments need to be reminded that forest conservation is an obligation towards their own peoples and not a negotiable market commodity. For their part, Northern governments need to be reminded –by the world at large– that their fossil fuel-related emissions are destroying the planet’s climate and cannot be “compensated” by paying for forest conservation or by buying carbon credits from others.

The question is: can we expect something positive from the Bali meeting? The sad answer is that we very much doubt it. To make matters worse, the World Bank will use the opportunity to try to sell its more recent invention –the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility– while carbon brokers, nuclear energy companies, agrofuel proponents, hydroelectric corporations, biotechnology firms, assorted consultants, will all try to sell their goods and services in what has become something more akin to a market than to a UN Convention.

Of course NGO participants in Bali will be able to do some damage control regarding some of the more damaging proposals put forward by governments, but their main responsibility will be to later inform people about what their governments are NOT doing to address climate change. It is people –and particularly the more vulnerable groups such as poor women, men and children– who will suffer the most and who therefore need to be well informed, because only informed peoples will be able to force governments into real action before it is too late. It’s not the economy: it’s humanity, stupid!