

U.N. CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE ENVIRONMENT


U.S. to oppose mechanism to fund climate change adaptation in poor nations

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In an internal briefing paper, accessed by “The Hindu”, U.S. tells negotiators to delay emission cut commitments and not to agree on any time line for funds

In an internal briefing paper prepared for its diplomats across the world ahead of the Warsaw climate negotiations, which *The Hindu* has accessed, the U.S. has opposed the setting up of a separate process on ‘loss and damage’, pushed primarily for the role of private investments and finance in providing the promised money to the poor countries to adapt to climate change and have a 2015 climate agreement where no country is forced to take higher emission reduction pledges than the ones they initially volunteer. It also informed its diplomats to keep pushing the line with other countries that the U.S. was ng enough domestically on the climate change front and these were priorities for President Barack Obama and John Kerry.

The cabled message drafted by senior State Department of officials sets not only the content for what is to be done internally by the U.S. delegation at the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change but also how the diplomats should posture publicly to help the delegation that would negotiate at Warsaw.

On setting the emission targets under the new agreement to be signed in 2015, the note informs, "In Warsaw we seek to establish an expectation that parties will submit their commitments by early 2015 so as to finalise an agreement in Paris (in 2015 itself)".

Under the 2015 agreement which is to become operational in 2020 the U.S. government has been pushing that all countries volunteer to pledge their commitments. The note says, "Specifically we're advocating an approach under which countries – both developed and developing – will put forth nationally determined mitigation commitments, followed by a transparent consultative process that will give other countries and civil society the opportunity to analyse and comment upon such commitments."

In a revealing line it adds, "The idea is that sunshine will provide an incentive for countries to put forth ambitious commitments in the first instance and, even if not, there will be an opportunity for countries to decide to enhance their commitments before they are finalised."

The U.S. stance differs radically from the demand of groups such as those of the small island states, the E.U. and others which require that the volunteered targets be increased after a review to see if they add up to the effort required to keep global temperatures under control.

The Hindu contacted senior U.S. negotiators and their spokesperson at Warsaw personally and through email with specific questions about the briefing paper and its content. The delegation responded with the statement, "The U.S. is dedicated to achieving an ambitious, effective and workable outcome in the UNFCCC and in Warsaw, and our positions are designed to further this goal. We are engaging with all countries to find solutions that will give momentum to the effort to tackle climate change."

INVESTMENTS NOT FUNDS FOR CLIMATE

That the U.S. sees climate change as an opportunity to also leverage and open economies of developing countries to clean-tech investments is also revealed in the paper. "The work we have undertaken in 2013 has begun to lay the groundwork for an ambitious and wide ranging efforts aimed at catalysing low-emission, climate resilient investment in developing countries, though of course we recognise that much work remains to develop the tools necessary to shift the global economy in this direction."

The poor countries have consistently warned that public investments can neither be adequate nor predictable and can work merely as complementary source of finance. They also warn that private investment does not move towards the priority of adaptation activities where the

returns are negligible but the monies important to save lives. The U.N. climate convention imposes the obligation on the developed world to provide funds and technologies to the poor countries to “enable” the latter to undertake climate action but the U.S. position in the briefing paper talks of pushing in investments instead.

The U.S. has in public domain too said that it sees public funding in the climate change arena more as a tool to leverage private investments. The entire set of developing countries have demanded that the U.S. and other developed countries put forth a clear timeline for when and how they shall conjure up the \$100 billion annual fund by 2020 they had earlier promised. But the briefing paper remains silent on the U.S. committing to any such time line in Warsaw. It instead says, “The U.S. is doing all we can to make climate finance work on the ground.” The talk of any scaling up funds between now and 2020, as the developing countries have collectively demanded is ignored.

It instead says, “We’re also working to intensify our coordination in the context of the Green Climate Fund board to shape an institution that could leverage private investment more effectively than any other multilateral climate fund.”

The U.S. acknowledges in the cabled briefing to its diplomats that “finance is another contentious issue, with many developing countries feeling that there is lack of clarity on climate finance between now and 2020”. But the U.S. strategy is to work outside the UNFCCC to leverage private funds and it plans to talk of this through the Warsaw talks too.

LOSS AND DAMAGE

On the controversial issue of loss and damage, which has united the developing countries since last two years in demanding that developed countries pay compensation for the damage to life and property that cannot be avoided despite the best of adaptation and emission reduction efforts, the U.S. plans to not let the idea become a full fledged separate mechanism at Warsaw. The U.S. has previously very strongly opposed any separate mechanism on loss and damage that sets up a process of charging “compensation or reparation” on the developed world for their historic emissions. But it had to give in last year at the talks to permit the talks on such a mechanism start off. At Warsaw, the briefing paper shows, it plans to ensure that while the issue is called “Loss and Damage” it does not get a life of its own but is swallowed by the existing track which would ensure the issues of ‘liability’ and ‘compensation’ are thrown out.

The document says, “It’s our sense that the longer countries look at issues like compensation and liability, the more they will realise this isn’t productive avenue for the UNFCCC to go down.”

“We are strongly in favour of creating an institutional arrangement on loss and damage that is under the Convention’s adaptation track, rather than creating a third stream of action that’s separate from mitigation and adaptation,” it adds.

“The U.S. supports pragmatic approaches to address the substantive issues raised in loss and damage discussions and supports the establishment in Warsaw of a loss and damage ‘task force’ under the Adaptation committee of the UNFCCC. A central issue will be whether loss and damage continues to fall within adaptation or whether it becomes a separate, third pillar (alongside adaptation and mitigation), which we believe would lead the UNFCCC to focus increasingly on blame and liability, which in turn would be counterproductive from the standpoint of public support for the convention,” it further reads.

It adds, “We want to be responsive to the very legitimate concerns of vulnerable people countries about impacts of climate change, without creating approaches that could make it harder for the UNFCCC to focus on the very challenging mitigation and adaptation efforts we will have over time.”

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