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Climate experts' forum: who is responsible for the chaos?

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FT Energy Source is posting a daily question for our [panel of expert commentators](#). Below are replies from [Kyoto carbon markets architect Graciela Chichilnisky](#), [Jeremy Leggett of Solarcentury](#), [Julian Morris of the International Policy Network](#) and [Robert Stavins of Harvard University](#).

Who is responsible for today's summit in Copenhagen being as chaotic and uncertain as it is?



Graciela Chichilnisky: The chaos in Copenhagen had three contributing causes that amplified what is always a difficult process – the process of reaching an agreement among almost 200 nations on a crucial issue.

The first cause is that the US was out of the process for the eight years of the Bush administration. The US is the main emitter (together with China) and did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This meeting was partly about bringing the US into the fold – a challenging task at best.

President Obama is changing the US stance, but the way this was handled from the UN negotiations angle was by creating two separate negotiation tracks. One is the “Kyoto Protocol track” the other is “Long Term Co-operative Agreements” under the 1992 UN Convention.

Having two tracks made everything twice more difficult than ever. Almost impossible I would say.

In addition global warming is considered now the major risk facing humankind. A lot of demonstrators representing global public opinion were here to make that point – at some point the number mentioned was 35,000 in a relatively small city such as Copenhagen. The demonstrators were important to the small emitting nations of Africa, Latin America and the small island states to make a point to the large emitters. They played an important role.

However, I do not think the Copenhagen police did a good job in handling the demonstrations. There were more than a thousand of people arrested. In reality, the Danish police borrowed police from Germany and Sweden for the task – and I know they were somewhat dissatisfied themselves with a process that was difficult and not always as respectful for the people involved as the Danish culture would lead us to expect.

Graciela Chichilnisky is the architect of the carbon market of the Kyoto Protocol and the co-author of 'Saving Kyoto'.



Jeremy Leggett: Let's start with the two biggest emitters. President



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Barack Obama said nothing this morning to advance the limp formulation tabled by Hillary Clinton yesterday. The world needed him to seize his moment and show the political will of Winston Churchill, taking the summit to a new place, shaming the pessimists and foot-draggers into silence, assuming greatness as a global leader forever. Instead he gave us a dose of Neville Chamberlain. He wants to wave a piece of paper that will not get us on course for keeping the carbon enemy caged.

“I am sure many would consider this an imperfect framework,” Mr Obama said. But we can either take a “historic step forward”, or we can choose delay and repeats of the “stale” arguments “until climate change becomes irreversible”.

The arguments from the US, let it be recalled, have been staler than those of most governments in these negotiations, and for longer.

As for China, how its cautious leaders have let their people down. The Chinese economy is essentially resident on its coastal plain. Every percentage point of GDP the leadership proudly post will end up destroyed by the march of irreversible climate change, and much more besides. The Chinese leaders know this. The Chinese Academy of Sciences tells them so. They could have shamed the Americans into meaningful action by committing to a cap on emissions within a few years, with steady reductions thereafter: the measure needed from them if we are to have a realistic crack at capping global warming at 2 degrees C. They could have scared the climate-denying American heartland into low-carbon action by showing them, whatever their beliefs, that they will be buried economically by a tsunami of Chinese clean-technology industries unless they act.

Beyond these two countries, and their 40 per cent share of global emissions, there is a general shared responsibility of course. Picture this convention of world leaders as the board meeting of a giant corporation. The board has known they had to deliver a master plan for many years, with the very survival of the corporation at stake. And they turn up with no plan, bickering among themselves over trifling matters. Just imagine the shareholder reaction.

Finally there are the hosts. The Danes and the UN have made a dog’s dinner of the logistics, from beginning to end, despite the long lead time they have had to prepare. They have treated negotiators, the press and NGOs unforgivably. Ambassadors, correspondents, CEOs and campaigners alike have had to queue for hours in the freezing cold. Civil society has been shut out of the endgame with no meaningful representation. The paramilitary Danish police are already under investigation for excess in their treatment of the anguished youthful protestors, and the final day is far from over. The very cause of democracy has been set back back at the Copenhagen summit.

Jeremy Leggett is an author, founder and executive chairman of Solarcentury, a solar energy company, and ambassador to the Global Observatory at Copenhagen.



Julian Morris: The chaos – and possible failure – of the Copenhagen summit is largely a consequence of the narrow focus on carbon control as the main instrument to address climate change. This in turn has been driven by five groups: NGOs, business interests, climate scientists, government officials and intergovernmental agencies.

Each group has a financial interest in promoting carbon control: NGOs derive their revenue from donors whom they must keep in a state of constant fear concerning the future state of the planet and thereby clamorous to be led to safety by those very same NGOs. Business interests, such as steel producers and oil companies that hold hundreds of billions of dollars worth of carbon credits, plus carbon traders, “renewable” energy companies, Nuclear power companies, and ethanol producers,

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« Nov		December 2009					Jan »
M	T	W	T	F	S	S	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
28	29	30	31				

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all stand to benefit from future restrictions on carbon. Climate scientists have an interest in perpetuating the concern that carbon emissions are causing potentially catastrophic global warming – because it is easier to justify funding research into phenomena that might imperil humanity.

Last but by no means least, government officials see combating climate change as a justification for their own existence, as well as for the imposition of revenue raising measures (such as taxes on fuel). Finally, intergovernmental agencies, especially the World Meteorological Organisation, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (a joint project of the WMO and UNEP), and the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, each have an interest in promoting carbon control because it suits their bureaucratic interests in a way that, say, decentralised adaptation through market processes would not.

Julian Morris is an economist, author and director of The International Policy Network.



Robert Stavins: I'm not sure "chaos and uncertainty" are the words I would have chosen to characterise the situation at the climate negotiations in the Danish capital, but my response is that there are two aspects to what has been characterised as the "chaotic and uncertain" nature of the COP-15 conference at the Bella Center in Copenhagen. One is the substantive process and eventual outcome, which remains uncertain as of this hour, and the other is the shocking logistical failure.

An uncertain outcome for the negotiations

It should not be surprising that the outcome remains in doubt, because of some basic economic realities. First of all, keep in mind that climate change is the ultimate common global problem, because greenhouse gases uniformly mix in the atmosphere. Therefore, each country incurs the costs of its emission-reduction actions, but the benefits of its actions are spread worldwide. Hence, for any individual nation, the benefits it receives from its actions are inevitably less than the costs it incurs, despite the fact that globally the total benefits of appropriate co-ordinated international action would exceed the total costs (and for many countries the national benefits of co-ordinated international action would exceed their national costs of action).

This creates a classic free-rider problem, and is the reason why international co-operation – whether through an agreement under the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) or through some other multilateral or bilateral arrangements – is necessary.

Second, addressing global climate change will be costly and it raises profound distributional implications for the countries of the world. In particular, addressing climate change at minimum cost (i.e. cost-effectively) requires that all countries take responsibility for their emissions going forward, and indeed necessitates that all countries control at the same marginal abatement cost.

On the other hand, addressing climate change in an equitable fashion clearly requires taking account of the dramatically different economic circumstances of the countries of the world, and may also involve looking backwards at historic responsibility for the anthropogenic greenhouse gases which have already accumulated in the atmosphere. These are profound issues of distributional equity.

This classic trade-off between cost-effectiveness (or efficiency), on the one hand, and distributional equity, on the other, raises significant obstacles to reaching an agreement.

So, I place the fault for the substantive uncertainty in the negotiations neither on the industrialised countries (including the United States, for insisting that China and

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other key emerging economies participate in meaningful and transparent ways), nor on the developing countries (for insisting that the industrialised world pay much of the bill).

The key question going forward is whether negotiators in Copenhagen today and tonight, or in Bonn several months from now, or in Mexico City a year from now, can identify a policy architecture that is both reasonably cost-effective and sufficiently equitable, and thereby can assemble support from the key countries of the world, and thus do something truly meaningful about the long-term path of global greenhouse gas emissions. There are promising paths forward, and – if you’ll forgive me – I will remind readers that many have been identified by the Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements.

Rather than pointing fingers at who is to blame for the current uncertainty at this hour, I can attribute credit to a number of countries and institutions for having brought the negotiations to the point where it appears at least possible that a successful outcome will be achieved in Copenhagen or subsequently.

First of all, tremendous credit must be given to the national leaders and the negotiating teams of the 17 major economies of the world who together represent about 90 per cent of global emissions, because these countries have worked hard to produce what each considers a sensible outcome over the months and years leading up to COP-15.

This includes not only the European Union, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada, but also the United States, which at least since January of this year has been an enthusiastic and intelligent participant in this international process. It also includes many of the key emerging economies of the world – China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Korea, South Africa, and Indonesia, among them – as well as a considerable number of poor, developing countries, which likewise take the problem seriously and have been trying to find an acceptable path forward.

Finally, credit should be given to the Danish government and its leadership, the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, who have worked tirelessly for months, indeed years, to prepare for the substance of these negotiations at COP-15 in Copenhagen.

That’s the “good news,” but now I should turn to the other aspect of the “uncertainty and chaos” in Copenhagen.

Chaos at COP-15’s Bella Center

As I noted at the outset, there are two aspects of the “chaos” in Copenhagen, and for the second aspect it is (sadly) possible to identify the apparently responsible parties. I am referring to the fact that the organisers – the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the hosts, the Danish government – apparently approved a list of some 40,000 observers from 900 official, accredited organisations around the world, knowing that the Bella Center could accommodate at most 15,000 persons at any one time. The result is that thousands of people – including not only non-government organisation representatives, but also government negotiators – stood in line outside of the Bella Center in the bitter cold on Monday and Tuesday of this week waiting 8-10 hours to get inside to receive their credentials. Thousands of others never got inside to receive their credentials, despite having waited up to 8 hours, standing in the cold. These are not exaggerations. It is remarkable and very fortunate if no one died in the process.

Then, on Wednesday through Friday, the Bella Center was essentially closed to all representatives of civil society, despite the fact that side-events had been organised by them months in advance with the approval of the COP-15 organisers.

The result is that thousands of people, who had been informed by the COP-15 organisers many months ago that they were approved to attend, had flown to

Copenhagen from all over the world, incurred those costs and the costs of their accommodation, yet never were able to get inside the Bella Center to carry out any of the work they had planned, and flew back home having wasted their time and resources (and having contributed to the COP-15 carbon footprint in non-trivial ways).

Now, I have never been an enthusiast of what some people have described as the annual “circus” of the COPs, a circus – if it is that – which is largely due to the fact that the actual government negotiators are vastly outnumbered by the civil society representatives (“official observers” in the UNFCCC language) and the press. However, if the participation of civil society representatives is going to be encouraged (as required under the original UNFCCC agreement), and if the attendance of those representatives is going to be approved in advance, then surely they should not be denied admission when they arrive, nor forced to stand in line outside in the cold for eight hours waiting to be admitted.

No doubt, both the UNFCCC and the Danish government will point fingers at the other, but ultimately the responsibility must be shared. In 17 years of these annual conferences, going back to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, there has never been such a disastrous logistical failure. It could have been anticipated. And it should have been prevented.

A final word

Of course, as of this hour, I – along with millions of others – hope that the negotiators in Copenhagen will achieve agreement on some truly meaningful steps forward in this important process.

Robert N. Stavins is Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government at Harvard University.

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jeannick | December 18 7:59pm | [Permalink](#)

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This is the proper outcome of a wholly predictable train wreck

it get quite surrealist ,
from la Clinton waving a 100 billions dud check, payable in ten years by somebody, somehow to Obama suspending disbelief that any treaty could pass the U.S. senate

I love the 50% by 2050, a pie in the sky target located beyond the political horizon of all the participants politicians, for whom 50 months is an electoral eternity .

the usual useless African participation, mostly concern with wheedling money to steal for themselves, while playing the white (wo) man guilt on past emissions .

, I didn't see any of those leaders complaining about the invention of planes, modern medicine or (their all time favorite) machine guns .

mglen10287 | December 19 4:20am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Thank Mother Nature for halting the squander of the largest peacetime spending program in history . The sad reality is that public opinion is driven largely by recent temperatures, which are random. Had temperatures warmed over the last few years, the kleptocrats in Copenhagen might well have prevailed and the \$20 trillion sought by the warmists would be spent.

David Brown | December 19 6:41am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Just like Johannesburg Summit but perhaps something more cogent. Path to alternatives shaped in the direction of vested interests as always. Human interests can hardly be served at gatherings of this kind. Jamborees for manipulative functions. Everyone is at least left thinking their own way out of this bottle and so it should be. Cogency is just that thinking about the future. A shadow of a greater kind lurks behind the debates and a tired Obama must have had his mind on that. This shadow is closely related to energy debates, it is the proliferation of nuclear weapons. India's joining the regulated nuclear forums is a positive sign. The very big fish that wants to fry us all or be fried is Iran its presence at a conference underpinned by debates about energy made me feel that the responsibilities taken on by Obama at this point in history may be larger than those taken on by Roosevelt in the 1930's. I think the world is lucky to have the current configuration of global leadership in India China and the West. Holding onto that luck is going to be a difficult thing in the next decade. We are capable of self destruction and the climate might not be the source of that. Its all about energy and playing with fire.

JPM, Zenium Limited | December 20 3:18am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

The international socialists and Marxists couldn't ratchet a deal no matter how much of taxpayers money (we haven't got) they threw at the bank accounts of Third World despots and tyrants. And no George Bush to blame for their miserable failure.

And of course socialism is a repeating historical failure (usually national bankruptcy), their true believers will just have to add another expensive clown show to their historical records.

And Democrat and Nobel Prize winner Al Gore was caught once again lying through his teeth about the Arctic melting (no it's adding ice actually).

The battered failed left will just have to return home with their tails between their legs and turn up the volume to "Totally ShriII" with more fabricated junk science from their Govt payroll crony scientists. 10 years of garbage from Govt, biased socialist media and the majority of the public still doesn't believe this crap. Siphoning off public money in another socialist Ponzi Scheme covered by green wash isn't working as the left planned. Ignoring public opinion while you commit political, financial and scientific fraud just proves the left has zero respect for democracy.

Socialist AGW RIP

JPM, Zenium Limited | December 20 3:45am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

Atn. Mr. Robert Stavins, Prof of Business and Government at Harvard University.

No mention of Climategate I (University of East Anglia CRU email scandal) or Climategate II (UK Met Office Hadley Centre bending Russian data) nor even Al Gores global gaff. Why not?

Both bankrupt Brown and bankrupt Obama felt pressurised by these scandals hanging over Cop-out-hagen to address (snidely not directly or in name) the science angle (Govt payroll crony scientists fabricating junk science), Brown by calling sceptics "flat Earthers" and Obama saying this AGW garbage was "REAL science, not FICTION".

They display the usual socialists lack of a cohesive argument with 'stick tactics' trying to shut out debate (the "debate is over" and "science is settled" usual crap). Whereas you take the other socialist debating tactic of an Ostrich sticking its head firmly in the sand (or somewhere!) trying to ignore the tide you hoped was coming in, is actually going out for your global socialist Ponzi Scheme.

And like all good (rotten) socialists you use the peoples name in vein when you conclude, "...along with millions of others — hope that the negotiators in Copenhagen will achieve agreement.."

The vast majority of our propaganda weary, taxed-to-death populations do not believe this Govt funded crony junk science. Copenhagen, like the EU and UN, was not about democracy or the will of the people. It was a private jet setting political elite completely out of touch with their peoples who have the economy the socialists bankrupted No.1 on their wish list and climate garbage way down their list of priorities. Your ivory tower at Harvard needs to get out a bit more

graham | December 20 10:49am | [Permalink](#)

[Report](#)

I have no employment interest in the Global Warming Circus. There is a schedule of questions that have NOT been answered to my satisfaction, nor indeed I suspect to the satisfaction of hundreds of millions of taxpayers in danger of being dragooned into paying the costs of all this.

1) Is the World really going through a significant warming phase in view of the fact that it has not warmed in the last decade.

- 2) If the world is going through a warming phase, is this outside the range of warming & cooling phases experienced over geological time, that is hundreds of millenia, not dozens of decades.
- 3) If the world is going through an extra-warming phase, what is the cause, is it external to the earth such as solar activity or earth bound and capable of being controlled by "Earthly" influences.
- 4) If it is driven by "Earthly" influences are these man made, and if so HOW ?
- 5) If manmade are they caused by CO2 emissions, methane from factory reared animals (methane 10 times more warming than CO2 we are told), reduction in CO2 absorbtion (clearance of rainforrest etc).
- 6) Most important of all, If warming is really man-made, what is the PROOF that retringing CO2 emissions will be the cure ? Simply proving that warming is happening (if proven) does NOT of itself prove that restricting CO2 on any achievable scale will achieve a cure.

I think that the public are becomming sceptical about the whole Global Warming Circus and the personal self interests of those making the noise.

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