

The ongoing UN climate conference began its high-level talks on Tuesday, 4th December 2012, and COMESA heads of state and government were in the majority that addressed the opening session. Swaziland Prime minister DR Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini addressed the conference on behalf of the African group. Swaziland is the current Chair of the Africa group of negotiators. COMESA has over the year supported Swaziland participate in all post COP 10 preparatory meetings. COMESA has also supported about 20 negotiators to the 18th UN **Conference of Parties** (COP 18). Other COMESA Heads of State and government who are addressed the opening ceremony were: Djibouti president Ismail Omar Gelleh, *Ethiopia Prime Minister*, Hailemariam Desalegn and *Comoros Vice President* Nouridine Bourhane. The only African head of State to address the opening session out of the COMESA region was Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba.

Heads of states and governments and ministerial delegates from over 190 countries are participating in the second phase of talks which runs until Friday. Speaking on behalf of the Africa Group, the Swazi premier, without naming names, highlighted the efforts by certain quarter to “re-interpret” the concessions that had already been made in Durban, a possible reference to the emphasis of some negotiators, such as those from the United States, to place different meanings to the previously understood terms “equity”, “common but differentiated responsibilities” and “applicable to all Parties”. He called upon the conference not to backslide on earlier commitments.

While the COP in Durban recognizes the need to ensure aggregate emissions of greenhouse gases by parties included in Annex 1 by between 25 to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, this was not reflected in the pledges made by the same Parties, said Swaziland. Referring to declarations by some Annex 1 Parties for an eight-year second commitment period, Swaziland said it has been the position of the African Group that “significantly increased levels of ambition from Annex 1 countries over the period to 2020 is vital to save our continent from serious impacts due to climate change.” “The Africa group cannot consider locking such low levels of ambition in for such a long commitment period, which will result in disastrous consequences, especially on Africans, LDCs and small island states.” He emphasized. Annex 1 Parties include the industrialized countries that were members of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1992, plus countries with economies in transition (the EIT Parties), including the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, and several Central and Eastern European States.

The Comoro vice president warned that for the small island countries climate change,

particularly the rise of sea level ; threatened to wipe them off the world map. "We are in a situation where if nothing is seriously done citizens of the small island countries will have to literally migrate by the end of this century since they will no more be habitable".

The Djibouti president called upon the delegates to work together and not allow old divisions that have characterized past negotiations to "divide us" he added that Djibouti with only 150mm of rain per year, was working hard to reduce its emission despite the already negligible level. The Ethiopian Prime minister reminded the gathering the role played by his predecessor *Minister Meles Zenawi in advancing Africa position since Cop 15* that took place in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2009.

The Gabonese president summarized the task in a simple sentence "the fight against climate change is neither a choice nor an option. Unless we all engage there is no hope for success

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, speaking at the opening ceremony, urged participants to "sustain the momentum for change so painstakingly built in Bali, Poznan, Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban".

Pointing to water stress, land degradation, melting icecaps, Ban said "we are in a race against time to stay below the agreed threshold of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels that will avoid the worst impacts of Climate Change.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani attended the opening ceremony and highlighted the importance his country attaches to averting climate change and protecting the environment.

The emir also pledged Qatar's contribution to green technologies which can help strike an optimum equilibrium between the need for energy and emission reduction.

Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, reminded the delegates that "the eyes of the world" and "the urgency of the science" are upon them, encouraging them to improve long-term global adaptation and mitigation responses and chart the course of future efforts.

In the high-level segment, the delegates were expected to discuss the two thorny issues left unsolved at the lower level of talks -- the extension of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the implementation of developed countries' pledged finance support.

Talks on the KP track last week divided on the details of the accord's second commitment period, including its length and strength as well as the carry-over unused carbon permits to the extension.

The negotiators also disagreed on whether to allow countries that plan to retreat from KP to continue using its market mechanism to meet their national emission cut targets.

On the finance support front, the developing countries demand transparency on the rich

nations' contribution to the Fast Start program, whose target, 30 billion U.S. dollars, the donors claimed to have exceeded.

Also, more specific plans need to be set out for the long-term Green Climate Fund, whose aim is to ramp up annual provisions by 2020 to \$100 billion but now remains an empty shell.