

At the recently concluded UN Climate Conference in Durban, the COMESA Heads of State and Government were in the majority that addressed the opening session and advocated for stronger adherence to the commitments set out in the past meetings and protocols.

Swaziland Prime Minister, Dr Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, addressed the conference as the current Chair of the Africa group of negotiators and decried attempts by certain quarters to re-interpret the concessions that had already been made in Durban, a possible reference to the emphasis of some negotiators to place different meanings to the previously understood terms: “equity”, “common but differentiated responsibilities” and “applicable to all.” He called upon the conference not to backslide on earlier commitments.

“While this meeting recognises 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 is not reflected in the pledges made by the same parties,” Dr Dlamini said.

Referring to declarations by some Annex 1 Parties for an eight-year second commitment period, he added that it is 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 added.

The Annex 1 Parties include the industrialised countries that were members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 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 Vice-President of Comoros, Nouridine Bourhane warned that for the small island states, 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 the (islands) will no longer be habitable”.

The President of Djibouti called upon the delegates to work together and not allow old divisions that have characterized past negotiations to divide them. He indicated that Djibouti, with only 150mm of rainfall per year was working hard to reduce its emissions despite the already having negligible levels.

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 and melting icecaps, Ban Ki-moon said that 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.

During the high-level discussions the delegates were expected to discuss the two thorny issues left unsolved at the lower level of talks: the extension of the Kyoto Protocol and the implementation of developed countries' pledged finance support. Talks on the Kyoto Protocol were, however, 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.

On the finance support front, the developing countries demanded for transparency on the rich nations' contribution to the Fast Start programme whose target of US \$30 billion the donors claimed to have exceeded. Also, more specific plans were required to be set out for the long-term Green Climate Fund, whose aim is to ramp up annual provisions by 2020 to US \$100 billion but now remains an empty shell.

COMESA has over the years supported negotiators to the UN Conference of Parties' meetings, intended at charting out sustainable climate management for the region and the world.

(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. held in December 2012.