

African Leaders Pledge to “Speak with One Voice” at Durban Climate Change Talks

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- African leaders pledged to speak with one voice at the upcoming climate change talks in Durban
- In shaping a new framework on global warming, governments must work with business and civil society
- The social impact of climate change, particularly on women and children, must be a focus of the talks
- For more on the meeting, visit: www.weforum.org/africa2011

Cape Town, South Africa – At the World Economic Forum on Africa, the leaders of South Africa, Gabon and Kenya pledged to work together and take a united stance at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP 17) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Durban, South Africa, in November. “The question for us leaders is how committed we are to be a little less selfish and to think of the community as a whole,” said Gabon’s President Ali Bongo Ondimba, in a session on the second day of the meeting. “It is important for us as Africans to get together. We will be determined to speak with one voice.” COP 17 will aim to shape a legally binding agreement on global warming to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which is set to end next year.

“There are parts of the world where the challenge [of climate change] is very severe,” explained South African President Jacob G. Zuma. “For some, it is a question of life or death. The question that faces all of us is how we respond: Are we ready to have a legally binding agreement that would try to accommodate all of us?”

Failure at Durban is not an option, warned Raila Amolo Odinga, Prime Minister of Kenya. Rising food and energy prices due in part to climate conditions are adding to the urgency. “There is a need to act now; there is no need to wait,” Odinga declared.

To succeed in Durban and in the broader fight against global warming, governments must work with both business and civil society, the leaders agreed. “It is important to get the business community on board because financing is important,” Ondimba observed. “Government cannot shoulder the whole burden.”

The business community is prepared to play its part, said Pat Davies, Chief Executive of Sasol. “We need a Team Africa approach to make this a success.” But, he added, “Whatever agreement is reached by governments must not compromise competitiveness, growth and the alleviation of unemployment and poverty.” It is important to balance mitigation and adaptation efforts with economic development and growth, he said, warning against setting hard targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions without a clear understanding of their impact.

South Africa should lead the talks in Durban with the principle of putting people first. “We have to look at the social dimensions of climate change,” Sheila Sisulu, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), stressed, underscoring the need to address the impact of global warming on women and children.

“If Team Africa fails to fight for the inclusion of people, it would be more than unfortunate.” Said Sisulu, “The point is to act now – not to act after Durban and an agreement is reached. This is not about what will happen. It *is* happening now.”

Noting that Africa’s potential as a global breadbasket could be compromised by climate change, Anand Sharma, India’s Minister of Commerce and Industry, told participants that, as the international community aims to agree on a post-Kyoto framework, “equity is vitally important.” There must be equitable sharing of technology and resources, he declared. “Responsibilities cannot be compartmentalized. It has to be a team effort, a global partnership. No country or group of countries can address a problem of this magnitude.” He concluded: “Those with the technology must share them with the rest of humankind.”

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