

Climate talks offer no help to poor nations

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United Nations climate talks achieved minimal success in late 2011, say Christian leaders and activists, agreeing with environmentalists and other experts who claim the outcome at Durban, South Africa, did too little to respond to the impact of climate change on poor countries.

The 17th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to retain the Kyoto Protocol—though Canada withdrew from it—and start negotiations in 2015 for a new legally binding deal to take effect in 2020. A fund for climate aid to poor countries was also agreed upon at the conference, which ran November 29 to December 9.

"We need to listen to vulnerable countries and populations, and think of the legacy we are leaving to our children. Churches should continue to act and pray," said Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in a December 13 statement.

According to observers from faith groups, climate change has severely affected African countries, Pacific Island states and South American and Asian peoples despite the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted eight years ago to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Religious leaders say the problem should be addressed as a moral, ethical and spiritual issue.

In Nairobi, Jesse Mugambi, a professor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Nairobi who attended the talks, cautiously welcomed the outcome, but observed that developed nations were not keen to commit to a binding agreement for cutting the emissions.

"It appears, for the poor and powerless, it is between them and their God. They should not count on the rich nations to help them. Justice and equity have been left out for profits," said Mugambi in a telephone interview.

"In 2020, it will be 50 years since the first conference was held in Stockholm. Regional leaders will have abdicated their responsibility [over rescuing the planet] to the next generation by then, and that is unethical." —ENInews