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## Climate change conference: 'How did it come to this?'

By Guest Columnist

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By **BOB DOPPELT**

As the climate summit in Copenhagen headed toward conclusion, United Nations climate officials were asked, "How did it come to this?"

Scientists have known about the physics of global warming for well over one hundred years. A bevy of reports from scientists worldwide have described the growing trends and risks. U.N. international climate negotiations have been occurring for years. And yet, a mountain of major issues and complex details remained unresolved just days before the summit was due to end.

One of the biggest obstacles has been trust, or the lack of it, between poor and rich nations. Poor nations don't trust the United States and other wealthy nations to make -- or stick with -- serious commitments to reduce climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S., the European Union and other developed nations have pegged their emission plans on limiting mean global temperature increases to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (20 Celsius). Poor nations, many of which are located in Africa and the Pacific, believe that allowing temperatures to rise that high will place their very survival at risk.

To protect their interests, more than half of the world's nations have demanded that a new agreement include binding assurances that emissions will be slashed far enough to limit the rise of global temperatures to no more than 2.70 F (1.50 C).

Poor nations also fear that the rich will fail to adequately fund climate adaptation programs over the long term. They see funding as fair and essential because the rich nations are responsible for the majority of the emissions that now threaten their well-being.

For their part, the U.S. and other wealthy nations don't trust that China, India and other developing nations, which are now major polluters, will actually constrain their emissions. The Kyoto agreement does not require major commitments from developing nations. The U.S. wants developing nations to formally commit to emission reductions.

Many developed nations are also concerned that the billions in adaptation funding they are being asked to provide will be inappropriately used by poor nations. They want robust governance systems adopted before making long-term commitments.

Lack of trust is not the only reason for the current rough sledding. When asked why so many key issues remained unresolved just days before the summit ended, Connie Hedegaar, Denmark's first climate minister who serves as president of the event, pointedly said that the negotiations were set back by the eight years of stonewalling by the Bush administration.

At the same time, almost every party I've spoken with said that the Obama administration has played a very positive role in the current deliberations. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Energy Secretary Stephen Chu, and other cabinet members have given presentations at the summit describing U.S. activities underway to address climate change.

Most importantly, just before the summit President Barack Obama said the U.S. would reduce its emissions by 17 percent by 2020 compared to 2005.

This is seen as a modest pledge, however, by many poor nations. It amounts to just a 4 percent emission reduction compared to 1990 levels. The Kyoto accord, which only the U.S. failed to sign, requires a 7 percent reduction

measured against 1990.

Further, the Energy Information Administration recently announced that emissions from fossil fuels in the U.S. dropped by 5.9 percent between 2008-09, primarily due to the recession. Many developing nations see this as a sign that cutting emissions by 17 percent by 2020 would not be difficult.

Failure to resolve these issues and develop a legally binding international climate accord increases the risks of global warming.

Let's hope the delegates can find the courage to overcome their lack of trust and agree on a new accord that protects the rich and poor alike.

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