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A messy compromise was struck on climate change to save the recently held Group of 8 Summit from major failure.

The leaders of the developed countries signed a Declaration that gives a target for reducing global level of Greenhouse Gas emissions, which cause global warming, by at least half by 2050.

But it only mentions only the European Union, Japan and Canada as accepting this target. The United States and Russia will only 'seriously consider' it.

This will allow enough 'wriggle room' for the US government not to commit itself to a time-table (or at least the same time-table) for emission reduction. However, Europe, Canada and Japan have for the first time signaled a self-set target to cut their emissions.

Before and at the Summit, there was a clash between German Chancellor Angela Merkel (who chaired the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm from 6-8 June 2007) and US President George W. Bush.

Merkel wanted the Declaration to agree to a global target that global warming be limited to two degrees Celsius (compared to pre-industrial levels), and that global Greenhouse Gas emissions be reduced by 50% by 2050. She also wanted a G8 commitment to a post-Kyoto Protocol framework within the United Nations (UN).

Before the Summit, Bush opposed the German strategy. He was against having G8 targets, and announced his own initiative to invite 15 top emitting countries to meetings to work out a global plan based on non-binding national emission-reducing targets, outside the UN framework.

At the Summit, the compromise worked out was that the 2 degree target was eliminated, and the 50% cut in emissions was mentioned as only as something that would be considered by the US and Russia, though accepted as a target by the others.

On the institutional framework to tackle the climate issue, the G8 had it both ways - within and outside the UN.

The G8 countries committed to a UN process to seek a post-Kyoto framework, but also 'welcomed' the Bush initiative to host a meeting of major emitters. And there was also prominent mention of involving major developing countries in making obligations.

Since Bush had been such a 'denier' of the climate crisis, and had seemed to oppose a UN approach, his agreement to the above compromise was hailed as 'a major step forward' by Merkel who said she can 'very well live with this compromise' while noting that 'none of these documents are binding'.

Environmental groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have decried the G8 Summit's failure to agree to the two targets.

Moreover, the 50% target agreed by some G8 countries is inadequate to meet the challenge. Many scientists now believe that if the global temperature increases by more than 2 degrees above the pre-industrial level, there would be

irreversible climate changes with very adverse effects. With changes above 3 degrees, the effects would be catastrophic.

The report of the inter-governmental panel on climate change (IPCC) in May says that to keep temperatures from rising more than 2-2.4 degrees, the Greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere has to be contained to 445-490 parts per million (ppm).

For that to happen, carbon dioxide emissions must be cut by 2050 to 50-80 percent below the year 2000 level. And to keep on track to this time-table, the emissions must peak by 2015. Thus the G8's reference to a 50% cut is hardly adequate.

Even more confusing is where the climate talks of the future will take place. The UN's Kyoto Protocol's targets end in 2012 and new commitments must be agreed to in a new protocol in the next few years.

While the G8 seemed to agree to the primacy of action within the UN framework, its Declaration also endorses Bush's non-UN process, which is likely to be used to push the burden onto developing countries.

That's because the UN process recognises that developing countries have per capita emissions far below the developed countries' levels, and thus the latter have to act first.

Bush however puts the focus on a country's total (rather than per capita) emissions. Thus developing countries with big populations and thus which have higher total emissions (although still having low per capita emission levels), will now be under even more pressure to take on obligations of various sorts to reduce emissions.

However countries like China, India and Brazil are expected to continue their strong stance that developing countries not be subjected to legally binding reduction commitments.

Global talks on climate change are accelerating, spurred by growing evidence of climate change and its devastating effects, and by the imminent expiry of the Kyoto Protocol. The next large meeting under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will be in Bali in early December, and negotiations will begin there on a post-Kyoto framework.

There will also be a one-day special discussion on climate change organised by the UN in September in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

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—*Third World Network Features*