Despair not: African Group of negotiators strives to calm jittery Africans

Glasgow, November 9: The Chair of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) has urged the citizens of Africa not to despair about the happenings at the 26th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change currently taking place in Glasgow, Scotland. By all accounts, keen observers have noted that things are not going the African way, raising jitters in some quarters.

Speaking at a meeting with the African CSOs, Mr Tanguy Gahouma from Gabon said from the outset, COP26 was not going to be an easy one, given that it is a COP that is to handle issues that have been pending over the last two years due to the COVID-19 global pandemic whose outbreak last year led to the postponement of the meeting in 2020. “We have spent this first week handling issues that had been pending since last year,” he said

Gahouma noted that the risk of infection with COVID-19 is still real even at this event, disclosing that even a Gabonese delegate got infected leading to the quarantining of the entire team from Gabon.

The African CSOs had sought a meeting with the Chair to get assurance that things were moving in the right direction for the continent and that matters concerning Africa were being taken care of.

However, all that the AGN Chair could do was to lament. ‘We have tried all we could,” he said resignedly.

Gahouma disclosed that long before the COP, the AGN had tried to have needs of Africa, namely; adaptation, climate finance and the need to consider Africa as a special needs and circumstances region integrated in the texts of the COP.

“Before we started the COP, engagements had been started and had pushed to have these issues in the agenda,” he noted. However, major opposition to the African group had come from major regional groups from Latin America, the US and the EU who had objected to have these matters in the agenda, forcing the AGN to change its strategy and engage individual key countries with the hope of pushing on to ensure Africa’s agenda gets into COP agenda.

That notwithstanding, it appears that the West had decided to prioritise achieving he 1.5°c, an issue the AGN Chair said Africa is not opposed to. According to the AGN chair, it is the African group that had first recommended that to be a priority during the 2018 Paris meeting.

Mwanahamisi Singano, Progamme Manager at the African Women’s Development and Communciation Network (FEMNET) said from the outset, the global north came to COP 26 with the desire for technical conclusions. “While on the contrary, Africa had expected to see COP 26 make strong decisions on agenda that favours it.”

This, notes Singano, explains why the developed countries are out to reject such agenda items as decisions on adaptation which they allege is complicated.

On finance, COP26 President Alok Ssharma had released a report through which he did not commit on the issue of concluding on USD100 billion climate financing for Africa, promising instead to have it as an agenda for COP27.

The chair of the AGN tried to consult the EU on this but was blatantly told that the USSD100 billion is a matter of the past which cannot be repaid.

However, to save face, some remain sympathetic but are non-committal as to when the USD100 billion would be released; a surprise to the AGN chair who said that the attitude he is getting is that the west wants to take time which Africa does not have.

Seyni Nafo (Mali and former AGN Chair) presented key findings on the global climate finance flows, capturing flows from developed to developing countries. He also gave an assessment of climate finance, all of which are shrouded in lack of transparency.

Akinwumi Adesina, the President of the African Development Bank cautioned Africans from clinging to USD 100 billion, which he termed as political figure not worth quoting. He noted that the real cost of climate change impact to Africa is in the range of USD 1-2 trillion per year.

On special needs and circumstances, the AGN Chair revealed that the issue continued to raise opposition and the Paris Agreement has no reference to Africa. Instead, the Least Developed countries and SIDs have more prominence. The AGN Chair called for some language in thte text to include Africa.

“What is needed is flexibility to access the climate finances that exists, which is also difficult to know due to lack of transparency.

Robert Muthami, a climate policy analyst and a Programme Coordinator at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kenya Office stressed that, its important to hold leaders accountable for what they say on their climate change commitments.

“The first two days of COP 26 were marked with very colorful and promising statements from world leaders in what was dubbed “World Leaders Climate Summit” but what is being witnessed by the negotiators from some of those countries especially from developed countries is totally contradictory of what their leaders said and promised,” noted Muthami.

According to Muthami, the real signals on what the world leaders mean on their climate commitments is in the negotiation rooms which is now evident that, what they say and what their delegations pursue in the negotiation rooms are totally different things. COP 26 must deliver new, additional and predictable means of implementation; climate finance, capacity building and technology for developing countries which are struggling even to provide the much-needed public goods (healthcare, education, housing, public transport, food) to their citizens as their domestic resources have been channeled to respond to climate related security risks and adaptation efforts.

A Ugandan delegation stressed on effectiveness of climate finance saying that the mechanisms in place have not delivered at the grassroots level, expressing the need to ensure that the bottlenecks be addressed so that "70-80 per cent of funds gets to the grassroots". It underlined the difficulty of "access", calling for "simplified mechanisms" and also highlighted that "some of us cannot even borrow so the issue of social bonds should be given priority for such countries".

Mithika mwenda wondered why the African agenda get so easily thrown out key agenda items. It is that Africa is not being taken serious? Is it that the continent is not mobilizing? Why is the global north suppressing the voices of Africa? It is time for Africa to begin mobilizing to show case its strength and have its issues are taken seriously.

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About PACJA

The Pan African Climate Justice Alliance is a coalition of over 1000 Civil Society organisaitons, faith based and community based groups in 48 African countries who are calling for just and fair climate regimes for the African people

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