

Decisions made at conference address Kyoto and beyond

Well, with a flurry of last minute visitors and negotiations running all night, it certainly was an interesting final few days at the Climate Change Conference in Montreal. The ‘Shelburne Delegation’ arrived late on Monday night to take in various displays and side-events associated with the CCC. This ‘delegation’ was made up of a group of 7 young concerned environmentalists from Shelburne. I took it upon myself to make sure that they saw the sights of both the conference and the city during their 4-day stay. As a large group of young people at the conference we tended to attract a bit of attention, and so it was not surprising we made the CBC Evening News with our clean sweep of the One-Tonne Challenge in the Canada Pavilion. Although they were not able to participate in the formal proceedings, the delegation was still able to pick up some very important information about climate adaptation while having some fun time doing it.

Meanwhile inside the conference Dec 6th marked the first day of the high level meetings in which we heard short statements from representatives from the 115 countries that were in attendance. It was very interesting to hear the concerns of such a diverse group. Although they all have a common goal of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions every country has a different approach and different concerns dealing with the problem of climate change. It is easy to see why the decision making process at events like the CCC is so complex and time consuming and why some decisions are not made until the last possible moment.

One of the most important issues on the table at the CCC was to get countries to commit to making deeper greenhouse gas emission reductions after the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. Global emission reduction targets are expected to be of the order of 30% by 2030, 50% by 2050 and 90% by the end of the century if we are to stick within reasonable limits for natural systems to adapt. With so many countries involved in the conference and so many issues to be discussed, the delegates divided up into ‘contact groups’ to debate and create papers to be submitted to the President of the Conference. This issue proved to be one of the more difficult to assess with long hours spent debating throughout the two weeks of the conference. There was much speculation as to whether they would even have a paper to submit by the end. It was really exciting to sit in on the contact group session the night before the end of the conference when all of the countries finally came to an agreement.

Although a lot of issues were resolved in the contact groups that didn’t stop the negotiations from going down to the wire. After an overnight debate, the conference officially closed at 6am Saturday morning just in time for all of the delegates to catch their flights home. A dramatic conclusion, but necessary to get closure on the many issues. A lot of important things came out of the conference, including adoption of the Marrakech Accords which guide implementation of the Kyoto Accord, the strengthening of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which will encourage sustainable development in developing countries and the establishment of the Adaptation Fund which will help the most vulnerable countries to adapt to environmental changes – those

changes that are beyond their natural capacity to absorb, such as desertification in Africa and the disappearance of island states in the Pacific with rising sea levels.

The most memorable speeches for me were not delivered by state delegates but rather by individuals and those from non-governmental representatives

I was fortunate enough to be able to hear both the Prime Minister and Bill Clinton speak, but my favorite speech was presented by a group of 5 youth representatives. Young people from all over the world (including Dufferin County) were present both inside and outside the conference. There was even a parallel youth conference, which produced its own declaration to the delegates.

As a young person I think that it is important for us to be involved in conferences like the CCC so that we can have a say on things. It is also important for us to learn about climate change and work to take action against it by teaching what we learn to the older folks in our lives and getting them into take action with us, because ultimately we know it is going to be our problem and we are going to have to deal with most of the adaptation effects.

I want to thank the Climate Action Network for giving me my badge and Theresa Sauren from PURE – The Reduce the Juice Project for giving me the opportunity to attend the CCC. Attending the conference gave me a lot of things: a greater sense of understanding of the issues, a greater sense of urgency to solve the problems and also a greater sense of hope that there are people around the world who are working to solve the problem and that we all share a common goal.

To learn more about the science of Climate Change, visit Environment Canada for the report “An Introduction to Climate Change”

http://www.msc.ec.gc.ca/education/scienceofclimatechange/understanding/icc/icc_e.pdf,

for health impacts visit Health Canada, “Vulnerability: Who’s Most at Risk”, Health Policy Research Issue 11

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/sr-sr/alt_formats/hpb-dgps/pdf/pubs/hpr-rps/bull/2005-climat/2005-climat_e.pdf

and what you can do to reduce green house gas emissions and adaptation measures visit the general web-site www.climatechange.gc.ca

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