

# **What is it like to be here at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Poznan?**

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In previous articles in this series, I have written about some of the substantive issues which are being discussed here at the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan. The purpose of this article, however, is not to deal with these matters but to give you a feel for what it is like to be participating in this event.

## From Bali to Poznan

There are some striking differences between the UN Conference on Climate Change in Bali, 2007 and the same event here in Poznan in Poland this year. In Bali, it was warm and bright: Here in Poznan, it is cold, damp and gets dark at around 4 pm. In Bali, I stayed with an indigenous congregation of Franciscan Sisters: Here in Poznan I am billeted with the OFM (Cap). Our hosts have been hospitable, each in their own way. In Bali, we were about one hour distance away from the site of the conference: Here in Poznan, the Friary is about 20 minutes walk, or 5 minutes by tram to the Conference Centre, so moving around here is much easier. In terms of security: In Bali, the Indonesian army was highly visible: I have not seen any Polish Army personnel. The police are visible, but keeping a low profile. This might change when the Government Ministers arrive next week. But the goal of all the Climate Change Conference since Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases which are causing climate change and to

help countries which are financially poor to adapt to the negative consequences of climate change.

To get a sense of what is happening here I would encourage you to visit the conference website, < [www.unfccc.int/2826.php](http://www.unfccc.int/2826.php) >. Underneath the heading of the homepage you will see a photo of the main conference hall. Below that the text will tell you that:

*The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poznań opened on Monday, 1 December. The Conference is a milestone on the road to success for the processes which were launched under the Bali Road Map. The meeting comes midway between COP 13 in Bali, which saw the launch of negotiations on strengthened international action on climate change, and COP 15 Copenhagen, at which the negotiations are set to conclude.*

*The Conference includes the 29th sessions of the Convention's subsidiary bodies - SBSTA and SBI – as well as the 4th session of the AWG-LCA and the 2nd part of the 6th session of the AWG-KP. Almost eleven thousand participants are attending the Poznań meeting, which will both advance international cooperation on a future climate change regime and ensure progress on key issues.*

You can spot one of the major problems in the second paragraph. The various texts and talks at the Conference are full of acronyms such as

SBSTA, SBI and AWG-LCA<sup>1</sup>. What do these acronyms mean? Even though this is my third UN Conference on Climate Change, I sometimes have to check my notes to find out what the acronyms mean.

### Read the Daily Programme

I normally take the tram from the Franciscan Friary at about 08.40 each morning. On arrival at the Conference Centre, my bags are X-rayed and my identity card is checked. Once this routine is completed, I head immediately to the main desk and pick up the Daily Programme. This document is vital as it will tell you what is going on during the day, both in the official negotiation sessions and also the event that are happening on the fringes. These latter events include presentations by Non-Government Organizations and others. The document will indicate the Room in which the event is taking place, the title of the presentation and the speakers.

For example, on yesterday's December 3, 2008, the Daily Programme a Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change) serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) was scheduled to take place from 10.00 to 13.00. Four items were on the agenda. The two which interested me, as a missionary, were:

1. *Issues relating to clean development mechanisms (CDM) and;*
2. *Report of the Adaptation Board.*

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<sup>1</sup> SBSTA stands for Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice. SBI stands for Subsidiary Body for Implementation. AWG-LGA stands for Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention).

Having read the Daily Programme I might decide to attend a particular plenary session. However, these can be quite boring because representatives from the various countries are reading out their positions/comments on the listed agenda item. Once you are familiar with the process you can expect a particular line of argument from, for example, Saudi Arabia. The Saudis will not be calling for a moratorium on oil production. Unfortunately, one can also predict the U.S's. line since the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency. The U.S. is almost invisible at this Conference. The delegates represent the Bush administration. Their mantra is that they will not say or do anything which will commit the Obama administration to take any particular course of action. Today a member of the Chinese Delegation, He Jiankun of Tsinghua University said that even President-elect Obama's targets were not sufficient.<sup>2</sup>

One other reason why the plenary sessions can be long and boring is that the delegates often repeat what has been said by a previous speaker. Sometimes, if the chair is competent, the debate can be moved along at a reasonable pace.

Another useful document to peruse each morning is the Earth Negotiations Bulletin. It is just a single page with writing on both sides in small script. Its value is that it gives a brief summary about where the discussions, on a particular item, or in a particular working group, are at each day. (For readers in the Columban world it reminds me of documents produced by

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<sup>2</sup> Gerard Wynn and Alister Doyle, "Obama climate goals not enough – China, India", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 4, 2008, page 2.

Paric Digan down through the years. It is chock-full of information, but you almost have to reach for the magnifying glass to decipher the text.) Another difficulty with this document is that to make sense of it you need a working knowledge of the Conference acronyms. To give you a flavour of the text: The December 2 edition had this item: *The EU highlighted progress on technology transfer und the SBI and SBSTA. The UMBRELLA GROUP<sup>3</sup> emphasized agenda item on national communication and guidance to the GEF<sup>4</sup>.* (See what I mean!).

### A Columban masquerading as a Franciscan

I am registered here under the aegis of Franciscans International. I remember years ago reading the late-Denis Carroll's book, *Towards a Story of the Earth: Essays in Creation Theology*. In the book he claimed that Francis's sensitivity towards the Earth was nurtured during the time he spent in northern Italy, where he came under the influence of monasteries which had been founded by Irish monks, especially Columban. Unfortunately, the reference was not listed in the footnotes. Still, I like to think that Francis did encounter some of the positive aspects of Celtic Christianity which helped him develop a new way of being a religious. If that is true, it means that today, eight centuries later, I am reaping the benefit of their good deeds and enjoying Franciscan hospitality in Poland.

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<sup>3</sup> The UMBRELLA GROUP stands for the group of nations that ought to Annex 1 but have not implemented the Kyoto Protocol. It covers the U.S, Australia, Canada etc.

<sup>4</sup> GEF stands for Global Environmental Facility. It refers to financial realities, but there is deep division whether it is an entity in itself or merely a mechanism for disbursing funds.

## CAN is invaluable

Coming under an NGO umbrella allows me to attend the daily meeting of the Climate Action Network (CAN). They hold a briefing/ updating session each day, from 14.00 to 13.00. Only people who have clearance from CAN are allowed to attend the daily session. There are regular spot-checks to see whether people are sporting their CAN sticker. (Getting one's hands on one of those coveted stickers could form the basis of a separate article).

The value of this meeting, in terms of understanding what is going on at different meetings and events throughout the conference complex, is that there are CAN members covering every one of the major negotiating platforms. For example, during the meeting the chair will ask those who have been monitoring the LULULCF (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry, negotiations to give their report. This kind of information is invaluable. It might mean that I can decide to attend a particular plenary the following day, as some breakthrough in negotiation might be about to take place. It also means I can use this information when speaking with delegates from Ireland and the EU, or if one gets a chance to talk to journalists who are covering the event. In such discussions I can draw on my experience of land use and changes in land use which I experienced in the Philippines during my time in Marawi and with the T'boli.

As I lived for over a decade with the T'boli, close to the rainforest in South-East Mindanao in the Philippines, I am more interested in REDDs, which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries. In my role here as Columban Researcher for JPIC issues, I pay particular

attention to any negotiation which involves decision which affect the peoples of the Majority World. (Regrettably, these are still referred to in much of the Conference discussions and literature as, Developing Countries). This why I am also interested in the Adaptation Fund as you will see from the article, *Prioritizing the Adaptation Fund*. What is at stake here is the fact that many Majority World countries such as Peru, need serious funding if they are to adapt in any way to climate change. Otherwise their future will be grim and the poor will suffer most. How large that Fund ought to be? Where should it located? And who should disburse it? Are all matters which are hotly debated at the various plenary sessions.

### Fossil of the Day

But the CAN daily meeting is not all – work, work, work. Towards the end of the meeting each day there is a lighter moment when members are given the opportunity to nominate a particular country to receive THE FOSSIL OF THE DAY AWARD. This “award” is given to a country or countries which have made specifically unhelpful comments during the negotiations on that particular day, or are attempting to block some positive developments. The award was given to the EU on December 2, 2008, for coming to Poznan without a serious or credible position on financing the Bali Roadmap which they had championed at Bali.

Continuity of presence at Climate Change Conferences is one of CAN’s strengths. CAN members remember what happened at Bali and previous conference and as a result can challenge the EU to live up to its commitments in Bali. The text in the CAN publication, ECO (December 4,

2008) reads, *With twelve months left to achieve a comprehensive post-2012 agreement on avoiding dangerous climate change, a critical negotiator has failed to come up with a substantial proposal.* The text goes on to poke fun at European politicians. It asks, *could it be that EU heads of delegations were too busy with the Obama campaign? Was Sarkozy too focused on promoting his wife's new album?* But, of course, it is not a joke, so the author continues in a more somber tone. *There might, however, be a more sobering explanation. ECO thinks that member states are just not ready and willing to commit to financing mitigation and adaptation in the South.* This could lead to run-away climate change. The Fossil of the Day award is normally given to a member for the offending country and attracts a lot of media attention. (I will outline what CAN is requesting the EU to do in tomorrow's article.)

On day One of the Conference, the Fossil of the Day was given to Poland. Though Poland is an official co-organizer of the Conference, it secured its fossil award because of its efforts to dilute the EU commitments on reducing greenhouse gas emission by 30% by 2002. Much of Poland's power comes from burning coal so there are many vested protecting his industry, as there are in the U.S., Australia and China. News of the award was carried by the *Financial Times*, under the heading, "Climate in Poznan Turns Foul for Poland." Polish government ministers didn't hide their annoyance. Minister Janusz Zaleski, Deputy Environment Minister said, *It's unfair and undeserved. It is sad that no one notices the effort we've put into organizing this summit. We'll be clearing this up with the NGOs.* And so it goes!!!



## Writing and networking in afternoon

After the CAN meeting I head for computer station and begin to write an article for the next day. The daily topic can vary enormously. A piece might stem from reading the Daily Programme, or from something which was said at the CAN meeting, or perhaps something I overheard while munching my sandwich, or saw in an article on in a particular stall.

This is the time I also check my emails. Often there is a news item from a Columban which is very helpful in terms of the discussions here. Charlie Meagher sent one yesterday, enclosing George Monbiot's recent article on climate change (George writes for the *Guardian*. This morning Paul McCartin sent this email about rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels in Japan which is worth quoting in full:

*The latest data regarding Japan's greenhouse-gas emissions casts a pall over the country's struggle to meet its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol.*

*The Environment Ministry reported Nov. 12 that Japan's emissions in the fiscal year ended March 2008 hit a record high of 1.37 billion metric tons worth of carbon dioxide, 8.7% above the fiscal 1990 level. Japan is required to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions to 6% below the fiscal 1990 level under the climate treaty.*

*Much of the blame for the year-on-year 2.3% spike in emissions in fiscal 2007 falls on the closing of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco)'s Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, in Niigata Prefecture, following a powerful earthquake that struck the region in July 2007.*

*The suspension of operations at the plant forced the power company to ramp up output from thermal power plants, which spew more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.*

*Emissions from the industrial sector, which experienced a production boom, grew by 3.6% from a year earlier. The household segment emitted 8.4% more greenhouse gases due to heavy use of air conditioners during the summer.*

### Forest creation

*To reach the Kyoto target, Japan now needs to cut its emissions by 13.5% from the fiscal 2007 level during the five years through fiscal 2012, the treaty's commitment period.*

*The government plans to narrow the margin of the required reduction by 5 percentage points to 8.5% by creating or replanting forests at home and buying emissions credits abroad.*

Inspiration for an article can come from any source. This morning's (Dec 4<sup>th</sup> 2008) Gospel from St. Mathew's about the fate of the house which was built on sand, as against the one that was built on a solid rock could very well be a parable for the whole UN Climate Change process. If the agreements for the Post-Kyoto regime ( post 2012) are not substantial, and, therefore, are not founded on solid rock, then the world and the peoples of the world could be heading for a very painful future.

### The Value of going on the prowl

Right around the Conference Centre there are stalls on which various Environment, Development and Scientific bodies displaying their literature. They are usually manned (or, more likely, "womaned") by people who are willing to answer questions about what their organization stands for or what they do. Among those present are, Greenpeace, Friend of the Earth, Tearfund. On the scientific side, I found the Hadley Centre (Climate research at the Met Office Hadley Centre) and the Postdam Centre from Germany. UN Bodies, such as the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and UN Food and Agriculture (FAO), and many others also display their particular take on climate change. The “baddies” are also well represented with stalls on Nuclear Energy and the NGO, World Business Council for Sustainability. Each one of these groups has their literature on offer, either on hard copy, or disk or on memory stick (this is the first Conference where memory sticks are on offer). You can find valuable information at these booths, but, of course, one must be discerning. I would rate a booklet on REDD (Reducing Emissions From Deforestation in Developing Countries) from Friends of the Earth more reliable than a similar publication from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. As I move around the stalls, I often meet some one I have known, either from Ireland or the Philippines or have met at past Climate Change Conferences. This can lead to a coffee and the exchange of some useful information.

### Evening Sessions

From 18.00 to 19.30 and again 19.30 – 21.00, there are presentations by various groups, sometimes scientific bodies, Environmental Agencies or Development groups. Again one has to exercise judgment on the value of such events based competence, orientation and usefulness of a particular seminar.

On the evening of December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, I attended a presentation on sea-level rise given by Professor Stephen Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute in Germany, and Dr. Bill Hare, an expert on glaciers. Both scientists raised questions about the predictions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change). This body predicts that with a 2°C sea-levels will rise between

18cm and 59cm. Rahmstorf and Hare felt that this projection was too conservative and presented data, which was not available to the IPCC, in support of their projections. The lectures were clear and helpful. This issue of a rise in sea-levels is crucial for everyone living in low lying areas around, which include many of the largest cities in the world. A storm-surge event in Manila Bay, on top of one-metre-and-a half rise in the level of the ocean, could make Malate Parish uninhabitable. Anyone wishing to follow Professor Rahmstorf's argument will find his PowerPoint on [www.wbgv.de](http://www.wbgv.de)

On the evening of December 3, 2008, I attended two sessions. The first from 18.00 to 19.30, was focused on how Indigenous people were adapting to climate change. There were four speakers, two young people, who spoke English and two elders, Gilbert Arias from the Kunayala people in Panama, and Bill Erasmus from the Athabaskan Council of the First Peoples' Council, in Canada. In each presentation which were like case-studies, from Panama to Canada, climate change is making life difficult and, in some situations impossible, for their people. I was particularly struck by the presentation from Gilbert Arias. He was obviously a man who had experienced the elements as his face was weather-beaten. Nevertheless, he radiated a sense of great dignity. He spoke in his native tongue and, even though no-one in the room understood his language, I felt he was addressing each one of us personally. His eyes engage everyone and his eyebrows dipped and rose as he tried to press home his point. He wanted us to understand that the situation of his people was similar to what was happening to islanders on coral islands in the South Pacific. They can no long live in their home place. Sea-level rise is forcing them move to the Panama mainland where they face uncertain and very difficult future. In 10 minutes this man help ground a lot of us who use abstract language or a spate of acronyms to talk about climate change. To this man

and his tribe it is a matter of survival. It was obvious that Gilbert was a person of great standing in his own community. He spoke with passion, composure and conviction. He reminded me of some of the Datu(s) whom I knew during my years with the T'boli. These are kind of memories which make missionary life so unique and special.

I thought that the following seminar, On Sustainable Building/Sustainable Living (19.30 to 21.00), would be of great interest to me, given the energy problems we Columbans face in heating a building such as Dalgan. Before the seminar began there was a short reception, where we enjoyed a glass of wine and some canapés. Maybe It may be the late hour, or possible the effect of the red wine, but I didn't find the seminar helpful. The man from Philips took 20 minutes telling us that new, energy efficient lighting was available for domestic use, street lighting, and offices. Everything he said could have been communicated in five minutes. He was followed by a representative of the Velux Company. His message was similar, except the focus was on his product. My main interest was on value of photovoltaic technology for small and large buildings but the Professor from the Technical University in Warsaw who made the presentation had a very poor PowerPoint and used off-putting, technical language.

I began to nod of to sleep, so didn't wait for the final two presentations. I caught a No 5 tram back to the Friary and went to slumber-land, without my usual match of the day fix!!!