



**UN Climate Change Conference, Durban, South Africa, 28 Nov -9 Dec, 2011.**

**Report by Chika Eze, SHCI**

This report is based on my attendance and experience of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP7). The conference is organized by the United Nation and has been titled “Climate Change” with the major aim of bringing 194 countries together to negotiate responsibility for environmental management. The concern is that member nations and everyone is called to be responsible for preserving the earth’s natural resources in order to enable future generations to enjoy good health, without risks presented by pollution, contamination of land and depleted resources. The initiative and ethos of COP 17 focused on celebrating and

recognizing that governments, civil societies, non-governmental organizations, and everyone can come up with new and imaginative ways of keeping our Earth functional and beautiful. The consequence was that at this conference there was a multiplicity of people participating at different levels: apart from the main event of the Parties of the conference that deliberated on how to finance reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, there was a total of 350 non-governmental stands each with varying interest and activity, indicating what they are doing to help cut down on harsh weather conditions. Generally, it was interesting to note that many hands were on deck.



**An artistic piece showing what our world needs to look like, mounted at the open space within the conference arena**

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in accordance with its resolutions at Kyoto, Japan, in December, 1997 binds 37 industrial countries and the European community to finance the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This was chiefly based on the fact that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity. This agreement (treaty) is known as Kyoto Protocol and has been the central issue at various COP conferences since 2001. At COP 16, held in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010, UNFCCC convened national governments to decide on policies and actions that must be taken in order to fight climate change. In this conference, COP 17, however, it was pointed out that there are some countries other than the listed 37 industrial nations who are heavy pollutants like the host country,

South Africa. Thus, it was argued that climate change is a global challenge; therefore, climate solutions will not be possible without decisive actions from all countries of the world. Emphases were laid on facilitating a coordinated, international approach toward combating adverse weather conditions. This agenda was brought forward to COP 17. What would you and I do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, above and beyond the treaty that industrialized countries need to commit themselves to financially, to save the surface of the earth from depleting?



**It is the World's poor that are most vulnerable to extreme weather conditions.**

As mentioned above, the main focus of COP 17 was to continue to make efforts in informing, enlightening, educating and calling everyone to action towards bearing responsibility for sustaining the Earth. In order to achieve this goal the conference short listed the following aims:-

- To have a low carbon event activity based on reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions where possible.
- To actively reduce the amount of waste we generate every day, to ensure that water is consumed in a responsible manner.
- To encourage energy efficiency through energy-saving technology, management systems and responsible behaviour.
- To this effect we are encouraged to use renewable energy resources, as well as use natural light and ventilation.
- To encourage the use of public transportation systems, this will help in reducing air pollution.
- To promote the use of local goods and services that have a minimal negative effect on the environment.
- To encourage local economic development and social cohesion as well as create awareness for social responsibility.

Above all, the big picture is to establish a global climate agreement which will replace the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment that will expire in 2012.

Participating in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was indeed an experience to treasure though it was an awesome task. There was a myriad of activities going on concurrently. The main business of

the conference was Climate Change negotiations among member parties on funding the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emission, deforestation, carbon trading, carbon credit and technology transfer. The negotiations were too political as member parties were taking precautions to protect their individual national interests to the detriment of global interests. In their submissions at the conference panel discussions each of the member parties reported robust outcomes of what they are doing individually to combat climate change effects. The industrial nations have the advantage of having the finances to sustain carbon credit, deforestation, and increasing their green footprint but there is need for mutual action from all nations, particularly from the industrialized countries. If this mutual action fails to take place, then our world will suffer further untold harsher weather condition and the effect will be worse for developing nations.



#### **African Pavilion Green Foot Scenario displayed at conference venue**

Many of the side events of the conference featured different interest groups: I was caught up with the Gender and Climate Change panel organized by African Pavilion. This was an interactive learning session where participants were led by gender activists to address our responsive-action based on climate change. There was a showcasing of the development gender-responsive strategies particularly of women. Various womens' groups: rural women's organisations, widow's organisations, and self employed women showcased their efforts through involvement in planting trees which have the effect of increasing the green footprint. Women's participation was strong emphasizing that we are drivers of change, therefore, we must be at the forefront of ensuring that attitudes and behaviours are changed in order to improve climate conditions. However, there is always a dilemma as many women talked about how they have been held back by cultural constraints that keep them behind the scene.



### **Women's session discussing engagement & effort toward Climate Change**

One side event run by National Aeronautics and Space Administration - a United States non-governmental organisation was alarming as the emphasis was on "Fires in Africa" indicating that the burning of farmlands has contributed to climate change and extreme weather conditions. The audience reacted to this projection of blame on Africa, fires in Africa cannot be compared to emissions from factories and planes. This presented those present with the dilemma of pollution and we were invited to personal commitment on how to alleviate the effect of climate change.

There were seminars on energy policy and ecosystem-based adaptation which featured South Africa's response to climate change. Sessions highlighted successful stories of ecosystem responses to climate change in the context of rural livelihood. Discussions helped to educate participants on indigenous knowledge systems as well as highlighting Africa's vulnerability. One major concern that kept coming back was the issue of harsh weather conditions which have affected subsistence farming in Africa. It was observed that the delay of rain fall leads to drought experiences, at other times there is an abundance of water with rivers rising and resulting in floods. Such things don't happen in their normal order anymore and this affects both input and output of goods and services.

Medical personnel also made submissions on the position of sustained good health as a means towards addressing the effects of climate change. A group of medical activists argued that there is a need for everybody to engage in advocacy in order to sustain good health across the globe. For example a nurse gave an input expressing how good knowledge about climate change helps to provide improved medical care to the populace. Along these lines there were some discussions on disaster risk management behaviour which will promote good health.

Part of the conference included marches in the city of Durban, to highlight discussions going on at the conference. These marches were organized by civil society, faith-based organizations, artists and musicians. Some of these marches were protest, particularly during tough decision making days among negotiating countries. In reality many groups took to the street condemning the actions of some member nations that appear to be sabotaging the effort to fund the green climate change.



### **Demonstrations in the City of Durban.**

On a lighter note there were many dinner and gala nights to which people were invited. Most of these were organized by different groups with a particular interest. For instance one group was advocating animal meals without a dependence on animals: emphasizing that people should stop eating meat. Others were more interested in promoting meals prepared with food grown organically. There were some events reserved specifically for VIPs. On the whole, I would say that participation in the COP 17 conference was an all-round enriching experience for me.



### **African women showcasing the beautiful art of Africa as sign of indigenous effort**

#### **Personal Reflection**

I would say that my experience of COP 17 conference on Climate Change was more meaningful at the grass roots i.e by means of the multiple side events that took place during the conference I was better informed about the predicaments facing our planet with regards to climate change. It is consoling to know that awareness is being created and many people are beginning to wake up to the challenge. On the other hand it is terrifying to know that if we don't step up our action to green the earth we may face the disaster of harsher and further terrible weather conditions in the very near

future. My hope is that in spite of the fact that we expect our governments to finance the green fund for Climate Change we will all, in our little/big ways, contribute toward a more collaborative effort. Such actions could range from planting trees, treating our environment with respect/care, using resources wisely, and we can add our own God given initiatives to the list.



**Sr. Chika, SHCJ, on the right with Sr. Laura (both members of the Franciscan International delegation to the conference)**

### **Conclusion**

The conference of COP 17 on Climate was an attempt to inform/educate people on Climate Change, although this awareness creating did not start with this conference, it has been going on for a while and was further enhanced by the conference. For Africans this was a mile stone because it took place in the African continent and has helped to create more awareness among us Africans. With tension, the negotiation among parties to the Kyoto Protocol extended beyond the official ending of the conference, but thankfully they came up with a working agreement to finance the Green Climate Fund that will assist the developing countries with climate change adaption.

To read the agreement document visit

[http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/durban\\_nov\\_2011/decisions/application/pdf/cop17\\_gcf.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/durban_nov_2011/decisions/application/pdf/cop17_gcf.pdf)