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Road to Durban, South Africa

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Youth Perspective

Ready, set, go! My Travel Experience to Durban

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Durban, the 3rd largest city in South Africa was chosen to host over 14,000 delegates including young people from countries across the globe. Amidst the gratitude and excitement of my selection as the Caribbean's youth delegate at the Conference of Parties on Climate Change came the realities of this responsibility. Getting to and from Durban required stops through the bustling airports of the UK (Gatwick and Heathrow) and South Africa's Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban airports.

For the first time and with the support of UNDP, CYEN and the OECS, my journey began expecting everything iconic, magical and of course a much needed learning experience. What seemed like the longest flight to London Gatwick was in reality the easiest part of my trip. I braced for the initial shock of cold air to continue my 2 hour bus ride to Heathrow Airport. With the scenic view of London's city-side I conceptualized the next 10 days. With another 11 hours before my African journey, I used the time to catch up on my Kyoto Protocol, reading and familiarizing myself with the famous English breakfast. My attempt to venture outside the warmth of Heathrow airport braving the express took me to the busy Victoria train station. Maneuvering through was certainly a challenge and my attempts at becoming a 1-day tourist and seeing the London Eye or even the famous Big Ben was nullified after being disoriented by the big city.

After a two-day (20 hours of flight time) journey crossing the Caribbean Sea into the Atlantic Ocean changing two time zones, I arrived at the King Shaka International Airport in Durban, which was alive with young folks doing their African dancing to local music, welcoming delegates and other participants. The fresh Durban air, renowned as a major centre for tourism because of its warm climate and far-reaching beaches, 4.5 billion population and metropolitan land mass would be a suitable choice to host a monumental event on climate change.

"It always seems impossible until it is done" Nelson Mandela



African Youth entertaining visitors on their arrival at the King Shaka International Airport into Durban

Overview of the Conference

Over 14,000 participants, including some 6172 government officials, over 6975 UN bodies, agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, 1423 accredited media members and 154 youth from 140 countries came together November 28 to December 9 2011.

The opening ceremony for the UNFCCC Conference on the morning of Monday 28 November was attended by South African President Jacob Zuma and other dignitaries. The plenary room filled up quickly with countries seated alphabetically as well as observer nations and organizations. The Saint Lucia delegation under the leadership of Mr. Crispin D'Auvergne, Director of the Sustainable Development Unit, and his four (4) member team were equipped with the knowledge, training and experience having attended previous meetings and conferences of this nature, and provided the guidance needed to understand the processes, including my role as youth delegate.

Maite Nkoana-Mashabane COP17 President opened the negotiation process highlighting the rules of procedure and the adoption of the agenda. Countries immediately began with their opening statements with Argentina, on behalf of the G-77 & China group supporting the second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol as a hopeful outcome to the talks in Durban. Other countries such as Australia, EU, Switzerland and Grenada for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) for which the Caribbean falls, all supported the call for a second commitment period. The Youth also expressed "that Durban should not be the burying ground for the Kyoto Protocol" (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, Vol 12 No.524)

The days progressed with the delegates continuing formal working sessions according to priority areas for their groupings and countries. An atmosphere of uncertainty and speculation about what the meetings might deliver particularly the future of the Kyoto Protocol and how it would help those countries needing serious climate adoption strategies, was evident. For the Saint Lucian delegation and the other 42 member states of AOSIS, daily sessions began promptly at 8am with debriefings and discussions which sometimes continued into the evening and mornings. Our days began and ended with member states sharing the outcomes of formal and informal contact groups and consultations on a wide range of agenda items.

Outside the negotiation rooms, many side events hosted by the 707 NGO organizations gave newcomers like myself a different perspective of what goes on behind the scenes of every conference. Numerous booths had on display various projects, information booklets, newsletters and reports. Demonstrations were scheduled daily by various youth groups petitioning delegates/decision makers to bring their emissions down and limit their CO₂ levels below 1.5°. Rallies were also organized by the well-known global movement of young people, 350.org. These rallies saw huge turnouts of young people across the African continent calling for political action and less delay to the climate change negotiation process.

As the meetings came to an end, the Durban conference from my perspective was a complicated and difficult meeting and even as I took my exit out of South Africa I asked a very important question: "What happens next? "



Members of the Saint Lucia Delegation (left to right: Alma Jean, Judith Ephraim, Crispin D'Auvergne, Ambassador Donatius St Aimee, Teshia Jn Baptiste, missing: Neranda Maurice

"Durban should not be burying ground for the Kyoto Protocol?"

The Caribbean and Climate Change

In an opening statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) made by Ambassador Dessima Williams, Permanent Representative of Grenada to the United Nations and Chair of AOSIS, it was highlighted that as islands the Caribbean makes up some of the 43 most vulnerable countries to the adverse effects of climate change. Ambassador Williams noted the threat posed by climate change has become far



worse than was predicted and quoted the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) which indicates that global CO₂ emissions “would need to peak by 2015 and decline in order for countries to stay on track for limiting warming to 2⁰C or below”. Ambassador Williams also reminded everyone present of the likely increasing sea-level rise than was projected in the IPCC AR4 report mainly due to the melting glaciers which could raise sea levels by the year 2100.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K79PWV5b50&feature=relmfu>

Our mere existence as island states and the extreme weather conditions that have and will continue to have damaging effects in the Caribbean (noting the effects of Hurricane Tomas) that resulted in deaths and severe damage, the islands of the Caribbean need to adopt immediate climate mitigation pledges. The facts presented by the Caribbean in Durban required governments to call for urgent action and commitment to the second period under the Kyoto Protocol with a comprehensive legally-binding system. However despite the many pleas for immediate action, some parties appeared ready to turn their backs on the rest of the world ignoring the pleas of the most vulnerable.

The Eastern Caribbean’s response to climate change from Dr. Len Ishmael Director General on behalf of the OECS to world leaders at the conference spoke of the immediate reality of the adverse effects of continuous heavy rainfall on the livelihoods of Eastern Caribbean States. Dr. Ishmael reminded leaders “to raise their mitigation ambition and take immediate action” against greenhouse gas emissions and access to green climate funding for technologies and technical assistance.

Reflections on COP17

After 2 weeks of negotiations, formal and informal sessions, countries are expected to commit to a 2nd period of emissions reduction from 2013 – 2018. However, countries such as Canada, Japan, Russia and others have chosen not to proceed.

The agreement in Durban extended the Kyoto Protocol, providing a transition period for the European Union and other countries to maintain a common legal framework as they head toward a new future agreement. Parties who sign up to the [Second Commitment Period](#) are committing to reduce emissions by at least 25%-40% below 1990 levels by 2020.

The second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol is set to begin on January 1, 2013 and end either on December 31, 2017 or December 31, 2020.

The Green Fund

The launch of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was one the most important outcomes from Durban. The Green Climate Fund will promote low emissions and climate resilient development pathways by providing support to developing countries to limit or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Youth Aflame in Durban South Africa @ COP17

The highlight of COP17 was most definitely the young people in Durban. The Youth delegates were a daily source of energy and creativity which at times left me amazed.

YOUNGO Global Youth Movement on Climate Change from day one had the enthusiasm, energy and spirited approach with youth from around the world taking a leading role and getting their voices and messages across at any opportunity. Our presence at the UNFCCC Climate Change Conference was driven by the need to represent various groups including youth, women, indigenous rights and especially nations that are disadvantaged and affected by climate change.

To see different backgrounds connect to form a strong voice on various issues was heartening and encouraging. YOUNGO remained the link (via our Google group) to the many different sessions and events taking place over the 10 –day period. Daily meetings prepared us for the barrage of activities ahead. They always solicited the advice and support of other young people who were part of the conference on ideas and suggestions, on plenary speeches or simply their support in working groups. It was evident to me that the young people there were passionate about climate change issues and kept us informed on what was going on inside the talks as well as the behind the scenes events that some youth delegates were unable to attend. The youth worked hard to raise the awareness about their organizations and some produced videos which were posted on Youtube (*see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5rcabBeOtk> for Shakira's Waka Waka comes to COP17*).

The work of young people kept me hopeful for such energy and enthusiasm does exist among Caribbean Youth. However, we lack the support and leadership skills required to take up the mantle. YOUNGO blazed a trail which certainly left me inspired.

Survival Guide for Youth Delegates

Preparing to attend an international conference? Getting ready to represent your organization or country requires time and advance research. These are some of the things we should know as Ambassadors:-

- ✓ Get advance knowledge of key terms and documents relating to the conference;
- ✓ Know your country or organization's position on the topics to be discussed;
- ✓ Research protocol procedures, culture, customs and norms and conference rules and regulations;
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with the conference website and all requirements re: visa, letters, vaccines, hotel, transportation, dress code, currency conversion rates, time zones, etc.
- ✓ Be prepared for impromptu press briefings and presentations on behalf of your organization.
- ✓ A report will be expected at the end of the conference, take daily notes to help in the preparation of your final report.

"the enthusiasm, energy and spirited approaches of youth from around the world taking a leading role."



On the 3rd of December 2011, COP17 delegates took to the streets with local South African residents to demand a fair, ambitious and legally binding treaty to come out of COP17.



"It may seem impossible, but working together we can all rise to our responsibilities."

Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, COP17 President

Lessons Learnt & Youth-In Think Tank (YTT)

Amidst mixed feelings of the Durban outcome, I look back at my two-weeks and fully appreciate it for the eye-opening experience that it was. Ambassador Jorge Arguello, Chair of the G77 said that “the challenges and difficulties of these negotiations cannot be faced with dismay and must not lead us to give up without a fight”.

I left Durban with an eagerness to see more young people from the Caribbean represented at such conferences. There are many opportunities for sharing, learning and networking for which one youth delegate representing the Caribbean would not suffice. We need to educate the youth on the positive channels available where they can explore and add their voice to various political issues that require youthful perspectives. I learnt that opportunities do exist but we need to actively seek out these opportunities and hold our governments to the task, particularly on what was proposed in the Kingston Declaration i.e. to have a youth delegate representing the various island states at all international conferences which they attend.



Judith Ephraim & Neranda Maurice
(Saint Lucian Government Representatives)

The Youth-in Think Tank proposes such opportunities under the support of the UNDP Subregional Office for Barbados and the OECS. By utilizing the skills of young leaders in analyzing and debating policy issues, the YTT will advocate to unite and build consensus amongst all stakeholders about the main challenges facing the youth today.

The YTT will enable young leaders to develop and formulate policies which reflect the interest and concerns of young people from the Caribbean.

Members will be selected among young people between 18 and 35 years of age from the CARICOM countries who are motivated and talented and have a passion to make a difference to the Caribbean’s youth; who have a strong commitment to development; who are willing and be able to listen to and understand the ideas and concerns of the vulnerable population groups; who can mobilize, and share knowledge and resources that inspire and catalyze development; who are confident without arrogance; who are able to communicate; and who can work using innovative approaches and effectively with others to achieve results. (For more information visit www.bb.undp.org)

Teshia Jn Baptiste Youth-in Think Tank Member

Important links to follow:

- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/teshiacop17sa/> (Teshia’s COP17 photos)
- www.unfccc.int
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/71383950@N08/> (Photos of March, Dec 3 2011)
- www.350.org
- www.cyen.org
- <http://insights.wri.org/news/2011/12/reflectio-ns-cop-17-durban#assessing> (Reflections on Cop17 in Durban)
- www.youthclimate.org
- <http://aosis.info/documents-and-media/>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P61VAX6wi5o&feature=player_embedded (Voices of the Caribbean Video)
- <http://panoscaribbean.org>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN3cLHW90kw&feature=player_embedded (Video: Climate march on in Durban)