



By Robert N. Stavins

Two Countries Key To Progress in 2010

My travels over just the past two years on behalf of the Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements have taken me (in alphabetical order) to Bali, Beijing, Bonn, Brussels, Canberra, Copenhagen, Geneva, London, Mexico City, New York, Paris, Poznan, Rome, Tokyo, Seoul, Venice, Warsaw, and Washington, among many other locations. Along the way, I have met with senior government officials, business leaders, academics, and representatives of green NGOs to talk about opportunities for the design and implementation of a post-Kyoto international climate regime that is scientifically sound, economically rational, and politically pragmatic.

Of course, over this same time period, there have been many ups and downs for the prospects of establishing a reasonable post-Kyoto international climate policy architecture.

Most recently, the 15th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which met in Copenhagen in December, produced two significant outcomes. The key substantive outcome, of course, was the Copenhagen Accord. The key institutional outcome was speculation that the UNFCCC may not be the best venue going forward for productive negotiations on climate change.

These dual results point to the

special importance of two nations in international climate policy developments, especially this year. I'm not referring to China and the United States (despite the fact that they are, of course, the world's two leading emitters of carbon dioxide). Rather, I am referring to South Korea and Mexico. Why?

First, these two nations are unique in being both long-time members (South Korea since 1996, Mexico since 1994) of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development and members of the group of non-Annex I countries under the Kyoto Protocol, which have no direct commitments under that international agreement. The OECD comes as close as anything to defining the set of industrialized nations.

Thus, South Korea and Mexico have their feet planted firmly both in the developed world and the developing world (a fact that is readily apparent on even brief visits to these nations). This gives them remarkable credibility with the two key blocks in international climate negotiations. That, on its own, would be of considerable importance, but there is another reality that makes this of even greater significance (and opportunity) this year.

Coming out of Copenhagen, many participants in the international climate negotiations (as well as informed observers) noted that the UNFCCC has real limitations as the sole venue for future climate negotiations: too many countries (192), excessively stringent requirements for agreement (unanimity), and a distinct tendency to polarize debates between developed and developing countries. Two other, potentially supplementary venues stand out as promising: the Major Economies Forum and the G20.

The MEF, which has hosted productive discussions among 17 key countries and regions that together

account for nearly 90 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, may be somewhat limited by the fact that it was created by and is chaired by the United States, a nation with constrained credibility on climate issues among some countries, particularly in the developing world.

The G20, which brings together the world's largest economies, focuses on economic as well as other global issues and consists of almost the same set of nations as the MEF, likewise accounting for about 90 percent of global emissions. The G20 could thus be an exceptionally promising supplementary venue for meaningful and realistic climate discussions.

And in November of this year, the G20 will be hosted by South Korea. This gives the Seoul government a special role in setting the agenda for the discussions and presiding at the sessions. The meetings there will come

just two weeks before the 16th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, which will take place in Cancún, Mexico. Thus, the Mexican government is also in a key position this year.

Add to this the fact that both South Korea and Mexico have been particularly creative in their domestic climate policy initiatives and international proposals over the past year.

Together, South Korea and Mexico, share credibility in the developing and developed worlds, and likewise share unique international legitimacy as the hosts and presidents of the G20 and COP-16 in 2010. This is why these two countries have a remarkable opportunity to provide leadership of the international community and make real progress on negotiations to address the threat of global climate change.

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South Korea and Mexico will host meetings that could help climate policy