

COP24 Adopts Work Programme for Implementing Paris Accord

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The 24th Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) adopted work programme for implementing the landmark Paris Agreement, an international framework for long-term climate change countermeasures, at the end of its two-week run on December 15 in the Polish city of Katowice.

The Paris Agreement was produced at COP21 in the French capital of Paris in 2015 as a longer-term international framework for climate change countermeasures than the Kyoto Protocol covering a period through 2020. In contrast to the Kyoto Protocol characterized by the top-down approach of allocating greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to participating countries, the Paris Agreement features the bottom-up approach of leaving participating countries to set voluntary GHG emission reduction targets. Nearly 200 countries participating in the agreement are required to submit their respective voluntary GHG emission reduction targets to the United Nations.

The bottom-up approach was adopted for the Paris Agreement because the top-down approach was criticized for being no longer able to produce any international agreement. The prevention of climate change and global warming is a significant initiative that aims to protect global interests and should be endorsed by everyone in the world. However, climate change countermeasures affect economic growth, industrial development and employment in each country. On what to do to prevent climate change, developed countries that have led global GHG emissions while enjoying economic growth have a wide gap with developing countries that are about to achieve economic growth from now on. Conditions differ even among developed countries and among developing countries. In this sense, international negotiations on climate change and global warming countermeasures have become very difficult and complicated with national interests clashing head-on with global interests.

Thanks to the bottom-up approach, such large number of countries have participated in the Paris Agreement. Therefore, it is very important to secure the effectiveness of the agreement. In this sense, whether the participating countries would agree on the work programme for the implementation of the agreement or what the work programme would be was a key focus of attention regarding COP24 discussions or negotiations. Another focus of discussions was how to assess each country's voluntary GHG emission reduction target for 2030 from the global point of view. The COP24 agreement has become a milestone regarding these points.

The most important point regarding the work programme for implementing the Paris Agreement was whether common work programme and rules for developed and developing

countries would be adopted. Developed countries insisted that common work programme and rules should be formulated for climate change countermeasures as a global issue, while developing countries asserted that the work programme and rules should vary according to the conditions and realities in developing countries. After two weeks of discussions at COP24, the participating countries agreed on basically common work programme while giving some considerations to developing countries.

Specifically, COP24 adopted a common work programme on information to be included into target (such as the information on a common target year for reducing GHG emission cuts). As for the assessment or verification of progress toward GHG emission reduction targets, the conference decided that progress reports would apply common verification rules while giving flexibility to developing countries according to their respective conditions and capabilities. While setting up common work programme, the COP24 participants agreed that flexibility would be given in line with various national conditions and capabilities and that developed countries would help developing countries to prepare progress reports. Regarding developed countries' financial assistance that was also an issue at COP24, they agreed that assistance to developing countries would be reported to the United Nations every two years and that they would begin in 2020 to consider setting the annual financial assistance target of at least \$100 billion.

As noted above, it is significant for the Paris Agreement participants to address the global issue of climate change with common, transparent work programme and rules. The COP24 agreement made a step forward to implementing the Paris Agreement in that almost common or unified work programme was formulated with various flexibilities and considerations accepted for developing countries. In the future, the Paris Agreement participants will implement climate change countermeasures under the work programme.

On the assessment of a global GHG emission reduction target for 2030 that was another focus of attention at COP24, the participants discussed enhancement of the target while being conscious of the abovementioned difficult issue of a clash between global and national interests. While some participants called for a decision to require GHG emission targets to be enhanced to prevent climate change, the agreement was made that the United Nations secretary general would request the participating countries to voluntarily enhance their respective emission reduction targets at a climate summit in 2019.

In one of the other achievements at the COP24, 54 parties signed a declaration on “Just Transition” for workers accompanying a transition to a low-carbon society and others, as promoted by Poland, the chair of COP24. However, some issues including market mechanisms for emission cuts (such as a mechanism for a country to count its contributions to emission cuts in other countries into its cuts) were left for future discussions.

Overall, COP24 became a milestone for implementing climate change countermeasures. However, the future path toward the implementation may never be smooth. This is because the structural clash between global and national interests will remain regarding initiatives and international negotiations on climate change. The presence and expansion of differences between developed and developing countries, among developed countries and among developing countries

may complicate the climate change problem more and more.

The growing influence of the so-called “me-first” policy in the world is also making the problem more difficult to address. While global governance must be enhanced to protect “global interests,” the growing “me-first” policy could weaken or nullify global governance. All countries including Japan should implement climate change countermeasures voluntarily, steadily and appropriately under the Paris Agreement and participate in international discussions from the viewpoint of protecting global interests. Even while treading a difficult path, each country should do its best to protect sustainable development.

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