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COPENHAGEN: Obama Speech Disappoints Many

By Brian Beauchamp 12/19/09



Activists take to the streets following President Barack Obama's speech to world leaders at the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen today.

For weeks there was a sense of hope that President Barack Obama's visit to Copenhagen on the last day of climate negotiations would bring with it enough financial backing, political will, and international fanfare to strike a binding deal that matches up with the known science of global warming.

Instead, the speech that he gave here this morning to more than 180 heads of states from around the world was mostly met with incredulity.

These were the words of 350.org's Bill McKibben immediately following what many are calling the most underwhelming speech of the President's time in office:

"In the face of leaked UN documents showing that this agreement is a sham, we were hoping for some movement from the president. Instead, his response was, take it or leave it. One hundred other nations are not making reasonable demands because they want to make the president's life harder. It's because they would like their countries to actually survive the century."

Others, like Kassie Siegel, director of the Climate Law Institute of the Center for Biological Diversity, were terser:

"Obama offered only ultimatums to those countries most impacted by global warming: Accept our terms or we will block funding to help you survive the crisis we caused, but for which we still refuse to take responsibility."

As helicopters circle overhead and thousands of police and military officials patrol the streets of the city, many people are showing much frustration. Some claim that, given President Obama's

speech, his visit was nothing more than a photo-op, not the last-minute “deal-breaker” many anticipated.

Others are less cynical, saying that the president is intending to stay in Copenhagen to help hammer out an agreement that won’t be announced until late Saturday morning.

The harsh, extreme reactions are notable: They could not have been more different than yesterday’s mood in anticipation of Obama’s visit.

While no one expected a miracle, many people did expect something new. But that doesn’t appear to be what’s happened-his speech basically reiterated what’s already been announced here by U.S. negotiators over the past two weeks.

But the criticism about what many are calling a failed negotiation is not directed entirely at the U.S., by any stretch.

For example, the Climate Action Network (CAN) today handed Canada its Fossil of the Year award, given to the nation that most stymies and stalls CO2 emission reduction progress inside negotiations.

Citizen groups and others will use the remaining time here in Copenhagen to continue their message: Work to solve the climate crisis must continue.

A candlelight vigil will take place downtown as darkness sets in and COP15 comes to a close. Thousands are expected to attend and the occasion which will be captured by an overhead aerial photograph to mark the historic occasion.

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