

Transcript of the press conference with The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister of Australia, on 27 November 2009

PM: Well it's good to be here in Trinidad to attend this meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. This marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, of course, continues to do good work around the world. In the Commonwealth Heads of Government session today, we have spoken exclusively about the challenge of climate change, and how Commonwealth countries, through this meeting, can accelerate momentum towards a good outcome at Copenhagen.

We were briefed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the progress in the Copenhagen negotiations. We were also briefed separately by Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark. I also met with Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark over lunch to discuss specific details of progress in the Copenhagen agenda as well. There has been following that, an extensive discussion involving many contributions from around the table, both from developing and developed countries on the need to get a solid outcome in Copenhagen.

One of the proposals which has been advanced by the British Government, and by others, has been for a fast-start fund to assist in overall climate change financing, underpinning an agreement at Copenhagen. Australia today has said that should such a fast-start fund come into being, then it should be governed by the following principles. Firstly, fast-start assistance should represent a substantial increase on existing climate change funding allocations, and use existing distribution channels to ensure fast-start finance is not delayed. Second, focus on the most vulnerable, least developed countries. A large number of these are small island states.

Third, ensure adaptation activities are adequately and transparently funded, separately from mitigation activities. Fourth, to focus mitigation finance on time-critical activities, including reducing deforestation and forest degradation, otherwise called RED. And fifth, increase the capacity of developing countries to absorb significantly scaled-up climate finance in the post-2012 funding arrangements, including through leveraging private investment flows.. This set of five principles we have circulated to delegations today. I spoke to them in the plenary session of the Commonwealth as well.

Australia is of the view that such a fast-start fund can assist in bringing about a good outcome at Copenhagen, but most critically, assist those most vulnerable states dealing with adaptation challenges now. Which brings me to the second proposal which Australia spoke to in the deliberations of the Commonwealth today. And that deals with the particular vulnerabilities of the small island states. The Association of Small Island States worldwide includes some forty plus States, twenty of whom are here represented at this Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

Small Island states in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean and of course here in the Caribbean as well. The particular vulnerabilities facing small island states from climate change is acute. In our own region in the South Pacific, we are particularly mindful of the challenges in Kiribati and Tuvalu, but elsewhere as well, where coastal inundation is not simply a problem, it becomes an existential threat.

For these reasons, what Australia has proposed today is that if the United Nations agrees to establish a fast-start fund to assist with adaptation tasks for the most vulnerable states, then five to ten percent of that fast-start funding should be dedicated to small island states.

This is of particular relevance in our own region, where we have states already being directly affected by inundation and other consequences. It is also relevant in the Indian Ocean with states such as the Maldives, whose Head of Government spoke eloquently about the challenges which he faces, as well. This has, these proposals from Australia, and proposals by other countries, have led to extensive discussion among Commonwealth Heads of Government today, and will be deliberated on further overnight, before we continue our deliberations tomorrow.

Can I just conclude my remarks by saying I've also used the opportunity today to have a number of bilateral discussions - informal bilateral discussions with the Prime Minister of India, with the Prime Minister of Canada, with the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and also with the President of South Africa. And together with a range of other countries, of course including Prime Minister Brown of the United Kingdom, not just on the climate change agenda but on a range of other bilateral challenges as well.

Over to you folks.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister if you received an early election trigger would you use it?

PM: Our strong and continuing resolve as a Government is to serve our full elected term. I have said repeatedly in the past, I have deeply conservative views about these questions. Those views have not changed. I've been elected to serve a full term, and that is my intention.

Furthermore, can I say this. My expectation is that the negotiated, bipartisan deal on climate change in Australia passes the Australian Senate, and passes the Australian Parliament. Remember, the Government and the Liberal party under Mr Turnbull and Mr Hockey, worked constructively to reach this bipartisan deal on climate change to pass the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

And Mr Hockey himself said on Thursday that voting for this bipartisan agreement on the CPRS - on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme - was in the national interest. Mr Hockey argued on Thursday that such a vote was in the bipartisan - such a vote was in the national interest, a vote in support of this bipartisan agreement on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. That was Mr Hockey's position last Thursday. I expect that would be his continuing position now. Furthermore, it is a view which I continue to support as well. We want and need this legislation to be passed by the Australian Parliament.

JOURNALIST: So you'd be quite happy if Joe Hockey took over as Leader from Malcolm Turnbull?

PM: The internal deliberations of the Liberal party are a matter for them. What I'm concerned with is acting in the national interest to get the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme passed through the Australian Parliament, so that our action at home on climate change can be

implemented, and so that we can also be fully active abroad in the international negotiations on climate change as well.

JOURNALIST: Aren't the issues at home weakening Australia's positions when talking about climate change at a global forum like CHOGM?

PM: Australia has a national obligation to act. We represent 1.5% of global emissions. We are a developed economy. And therefore have responsibility, together with other Annex 1 countries under the Kyoto Protocol to undertake particular actions. That's up until 2012. Subsequent to 2012, we're talking about the next set of actions, which arise in terms of the responsibility of developed countries. We must act. A cap and trade scheme has been argued across the United Nations family as the most effective means by which you can achieve targeted reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

We have spent two years now developing a cap and trade scheme for Australia. It's called the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. We released legislation for it nine months ago. It's been before the Australian Parliament since then. The Australian Opposition have said that this bipartisan agreement that we have with them on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is in the national interest. That is my view. That is the Leader of the Opposition's view. That has been Mr Hockey's view. I expect that view to prevail, and for this legislation to be passed. In the meantime, we'll continue to act abroad in our negotiations both in the Commonwealth, but also, of course, in the lead up to Copenhagen itself.

JOURNALIST: After today's meetings, how would you characterise Canada's position on climate change?

PM: Well Canada and all nation states have to deal with their own domestic challenges and their own international obligations. I've had many discussions with Prime Minister Harper on climate change over an extended period of time. Canada deals with domestic challenges concerning carbon intensity - so does Australia. And we, as Australians, have come to this table with our own particular historical responsibilities.

As I said in the general session, all developed economies come to these negotiations bearing an historical responsibility. Australia does. Canada does. All developed economies do. It's a matter of course for individual national Governments how they respond to that domestically. Our plan is clear, and how Canada participates in the international negotiations is a matter for its Government. As we move towards Copenhagen, my discussions with Prime Minister Harper on these matters have been productive and fruitful to date.

JOURNALIST: Mr Ramussen asked today that industrialised nations put a firm commitment on the table on funding at Copenhagen. Is Australia going to be able to do that, and on your fast action fund, what are we - in dollar terms - what is Australia prepared to give?

PM: On the question of the magnitude of a fast action fund that's still a matter for discussion among the Member states. What we, in Australia have a view of is that there is a need for such a fast action fund. Furthermore, we've argued that there is a need, within it, to identify a specific

funding stream for small island states who are particularly vulnerable, because of the consequences of climate change. And our position on that hasn't changed. In terms of the overall dimensions of climate change finance, there are still multiple proposals on the negotiating table in the lead up to Copenhagen.

In fact, around the world at the moment, there are ten sets of proposals rolling around at various negotiating tables. Our job is to try and condense those down to a manageable number, it's one of the things Prime Minister Rasmussen and I are talking about and have been speaking about in recent days. It's one of the things I'll also be discussing with President Obama when I travel to Washington on Monday. As for Australia's participation, we've always said that we will play our role, we'll pay our fair share, but the quantum, in both respects, are yet to be determined.

JOURNALIST: You've mentioned that environmental issues exclusively dominated the talks today. This notwithstanding the fact that this CHOGM meeting has come amidst a lot of human rights issues being raised - with the Ugandan homosexuality bill and so on and so forth - I mean, what scope is there for those issues arising over the next few hours of talks?

PM: Well as you know, CHOGM occurs over a number of days. We have explicitly as Heads of Government agreed to dedicate today exclusively to climate change. It's a global priority. It is a global absolute priority. The clock is ticking to Copenhagen. And we, representing two billion people on earth, representing 53 nation states, something like more than one third or about one third of the Member states who will attend the conference of the parties, representing the richest and the poorest states on earth, representing the most populous to the least populous, we believe this is a forum which can have something credible to say to the global community about the action which needs to be taken at Copenhagen.

Which is why we've decided to dedicate such an extended period of time.. Also the fact that we, uniquely, have invited the United Nations Secretary-General to attend CHOGM, the Prime Minister of Denmark to attend CHOGM, and in a world first, the President of the French Republic to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, indicates that we think this is not a business-as-usual CHOGM, that there are some big global challenges out there requiring flexible global, flexible use of global institutions to rise to the challenge.

As for the rest of the agenda, can I say there is ample time in the period ahead to discuss a whole range of political and security matters which also affect the Commonwealth together with the impact of the global financial crisis and the global economic recession on many states for whom the task of development has been made that much harder because of the impact of the crisis.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible) Prime Minister Harper has said that there's no point in negotiating a global climate change deal that doesn't involve firm commitments from the emerging economies. How does that limit negotiations (inaudible) that we don't have, China, Russia, at the table?

PM: Well the only table at which you have all the economies gathered is of course the one which gathers in Copenhagen itself. Recently, together with the President of Mexico I convened a roundtable in Singapore at APEC, exclusively on climate change, which brought together the

President of the United States, the President of China Hu Jintao, the Prime Minister of Japan, and together we represented some 50-60% of global GDP.

We did not have India at the table, we didn't have the European Union at the table, but can I say that gathering was useful in creating political momentum and support for the process being led by the Danish Prime Minister, which is a leaders' level process, because the official level process has run into so many obstacles. Secondly, it was important in terms of obtaining for the first time US public indication that they would be indicating a target for the future, one which President Obama subsequently articulated publicly.. And for China itself at that meeting to indicate that it was happy to work with the process led by the Danish Prime Minister. And furthermore we've seen further statements from China about its own national actions.

The Commonwealth meeting is one further step in the process of building political momentum behind what would then unfold at Copenhagen itself. It is however unique given its size, given its spread across Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. Its spread across developed and developing countries, and the fact that we have here large economies from Europe, we have India, and of course we have major economies like Canada and ourselves, it is in fact a useful forum to begin to shape the final consensus that will be necessary to underpin a Copenhagen agreement of the type that Prime Minister Rasmussen's been describing.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Well I think the critical challenge in dealing with climate change is always bear two big priorities in mind. One is mitigation, how do you bring down greenhouse gas emissions, both for developed and developing countries, and building on the earlier question, actions both by developed economies and developing economies to actually bring down greenhouse gas emissions, hence the target we have for ourselves of 450 parts per million, in order to stabilise temperature increases around 2 degrees centigrade.

But the other half of the action lies in adaptation. And that deals with the immediate physical problem of people living in low-lying areas, whether they're in small island states, or in the world's other vulnerable states, and I've just been speaking at length with the Government of Bangladesh about their particular challenges there.

Therefore, when we talk about the need for a fast-start fund for adaptation purposes, as well as mitigation purposes, it's to provide the immediate resources necessary for a number of those states to deal with the real challenges that their populations face in the here and now, starting in 2010, 2011, 2012, before in fact the post-Kyoto agreement would kick in. So you ask what practical measures can be taken to deal with the impact on human security? Frankly, getting this fund rolling quickly, getting it distributed quickly, and getting it distributed quickly and effectively to the most vulnerable states, that's practical. Second, what's practical and necessary is to have the deployment of that fund also measured in terms of its effectiveness.

JOURNALIST: At this point Prime Minister, how would you rate the prospects of a meaningful agreement at Copenhagen?

PM: That's a really good question. I wake up in the morning and scratch my head sometimes and wonder how it's all going to turn out. But I'm in the business of acting to make a difference. And can I say the resolve of Heads of Government here is of a similar nature, which is how do we make a difference. Prime Minister Rasmussen has in the last week or two flown from Copenhagen to Singapore, now Copenhagen to Trinidad, in order to make a difference. And underpinning that is his determination to make a difference, because the officials level process through the UNFCCC negotiations has basically ground into a whole range of technical difficulties.

And so what he's trying to do is to craft an operational framework agreement for Copenhagen, a Copenhagen agreement across the top of that. One which is capable of providing effective policy guidance to treaty negotiators to produce a binding legal treaty during the course of 2010. So, I'm with him in that, putting Australia's shoulder to the wheel, together with various other Governments as friends of the Chair, and we will be with him all the way through.

I can't predict the outcome, but can I say there are, there are available to us the resources, the political will and the policy instruments to craft an effective Copenhagen agreement. It's there. We can do it.

But the question between now and December 17 and 18 is one of political will. And Prime Minister Rasmussen's process, backed by the UN Secretary-General and backed by myself and other Prime Ministers and Heads of Government is to try and craft that. There's a lot of opposition around the world, there's a lot of indifference around the world. The international legion of climate change sceptics is still at work around the world. But we intend to give it our absolute best.

JOURNALIST: Just back on the domestic question, do you believe the Senate is behaving responsibly? And if not, why wouldn't you call an early election? Because you seem to be almost ruling that option out.

PM: No, what I've said is that the Australian Government has achieved a bipartisan agreement with the Australian Opposition to pass the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through the Australian Parliament. Mr Turnbull and Mr Hockey have said that that bipartisan agreement is in the national interest, and it should be legislated. I agree with them. My expectation is that that is what they will do, because they have said that is their commitment.

JOURNALIST: But they can't control the Senate.

PM: Furthermore, can I say it is in the national interest that they do so. And to go back to what I said earlier on, I've been elected by the Australian people to govern. I've been elected by the Australian people to implement our mandate, including the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. We intend to get on with the business of doing that, and we will continue to exercise the mandate given to us by the Australian people. I have said consistently, going back a long, long time that my belief is the Australian people expect us to serve a full term. My view on that has not changed. And we intend to get on with the job of governing.

Thank you very much.