

3rd International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Davos, Switzerland – Some 800 global experts at the International Disaster Reduction Conference IDRC Davos 2010 biannual gathering in this famous skiing resort are focusing these days on every scholar’s buzzword: “sustainability”.

Or, in plain risk-management jargon, “If ‘COP 16’ fails, what next?” For those out of the “in” circle, COP 16 refers to the 16th meeting of the conference parties, not the failure to reach a consensus on global climate-change standards in Copenhagen.

One interested party here, Vice President Isatou Njie-Saidy of the Gambia, urged diplomatic consensus seekers to engage more seriously in give-and-take negotiations.

“We’re all on this globe as one,” she told fellow panellists on the topic. “We must be prepared to lose sometimes in the interest of consensus. That’s critical in policy-making – especially in confronting security issues today.”

But Berlin-based panel moderator Thomas R. Henschel, a German mediation specialist, cautioned that negotiators should not give away too much too early. Being conciliatory too quickly, he suggested, can undercut the process.

But a panellist representing China’s State Council, Yanhua Liu, hinted that his country first needs to reach a national consensus before it can enter into active give-and-take in a UN-sponsored conference this December in Mexico to follow-up the failed Copenhagen meeting. Yet Liu made clear that China had deep reservations about sharp reductions in its carbon footprint. It remains the world’s “hot topic”, but the Beijing-based spokesman said he remains hopeful of a “miracle” that will harmonize the diverse views still in play.

“What you’ve got is paralysis,” said Swiss panellist Walter Fust, a former head of the Swiss Development Agency (SDC). “Paralysis is everywhere today.”

Asked by German moderator Henschel about Switzerland’s credibility since it has opted out of joining the European Union, Fust shot back:



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For more information
please contact:

Astrid Heinrich
Tel: +41 81 414 16 20
astrid.heinrich@grforum.org
www.grfoum.org

“No country is too small to have good ideas,” he said. “But no country is too big to have silly ideas.”

Looking back at Copenhagen from a historic standpoint, German economist Carlo Jaeger told fellow experts that the notion of international cooperation made great progress until the end of World War I. Then the high-minded ideals of the Kellogg-Briand Pact began to fall apart.

“The elitists didn’t pay attention after World War I,” Jaeger said, “and now historians are deeply, deeply worried about the trend. We need to set proper incentives. I think it’s a good goal for the IDRC and disaster prevention.”

Too often maligned, the world’s business community can act in what Dutch entrepreneur Roland A. Jansen calls a “socially responsible role.” His Switzerland-based firm, Mother Earth Investments, plays such a role – one heavily engaged in CO2 reduction through grown of sustainable bio-fuels.

“We believe in doing well by doing good,” he insists. “It gives farmers jobs, and it gives them money.”

He pointed to his firm’s plantations in Mongolia and China that produce jatapha as an example of cultivating such a win/win bond between business and the farming sector.

Lyn Shepard, Conference Journalist

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