

Albert Binger, Negotiator from Granada and Advisor to the Head of AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) on Bangkok

Q. You come from Grenada and you also head AOSIS. Grenada being one of the most vulnerable and impacted countries (by climate change), what are your major causes of concern as of now?

A. I'm the advisor to the head of AOSIS. Our major concern is the slow pace of these negotiations, (as a matter of fact, the slow pace of how the global community has responded to the threat of climate change. What did we do? In 1992 we signed an agreement- the Framework Convention where the goal was to reduce the GHG and the rate of increase.

Well, we are still increasing, maybe increasing faster than we've ever increased. So it's not only 15 years that have gone by- we've lost the opportunity. Yeah, we've done a little thing here and a little thing there but 15 years and we arrive at this critical moment.

The science is telling us we have very short period of time in which we have to get control of emissions otherwise we could be in for runaway climate change. As the people, who basically live in the oceans, we are the first manifestation there's going to be (of climate change). We are worried. We are very concerned. We've already seen impacts.

Q. In terms of impacts- in a place like Grenada, what do you see?

A. Well we had our first case in about 2004. We had a big hurricane- Hurricane Ivan. Basically in a couple of hours, it took about 204% of GDP. So we know. And we (have) only 0.7-0.8 degrees increase, so imagine a similar hurricane a couple of years from now, when we are at 1-1.5 degrees (higher) - probably in a few minutes we'd all be decimated.

So we are very concerned. We're seeing the impact - in the Caribbean we're having more and more climate-related impact, costing more and more. Same thing (is happening) in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean. Our marine environment is really being adversely affected. Large swaths of our reefs, our coral reefs are bleached. Reproductive (abilities) of our fish are declining. The waters are getting too warm and they (the fish) are migrating to other places. The marine environment is under threat and it's the basis of our biggest industry- tourism. So yeah...we are really seeing (an impact).

Q. You talked about the airports - only 2 airports that you have at 1m (above sea) level. And also, your mainstay for the economy is the tourism industry. So how do you see climate change affecting your economy in that manner?

A. It will be sometime, hopefully, before our airports are flooded. Most of them are just about a meter. And most of the projections (say) that...definitely, by the end of the century, if not before, we will have a 1 meter rise in sea level. That means, with high tide a lot of these airports won't be able to be used.

I guess if you can't get your main service or your goods out to your market or your customers to come to your market then that has significant economic impact.

As I was saying, if you look at the topography of the Caribbean - they're islands, so usually we try to find a little flat place to put an airport, which usually means right on the edge of the ocean. So you just about come in and land.

I think we only have about two countries whose airport is up to any significant altitude and sea level. So that's a big issue.

The next big issue is that we depend upon imports for our energy and our food - 90% of our energy comes in boats as fuel and so does our food. So if you see, sea level is not going to affect just our airports, but also our sea ports. So basically our whole transport system is at risk.

Even our road network is mostly coastal. So our whole (being) - our land, air and sea transport is threatened by climate change and sea-level rise. So this is a MAJOR concern for us.

Q. In terms of adaptation funds...adaptation is a major issue for you. So what are the current levels of funding available in the adaptation fund and the kind of indications you are getting from the negotiations? Are you happy with it? Is it enough?

A. You know, the adaptation fund is there only in name. I've been told various things about how much money there is. But we certainly have not received any costs from adaptation (fund). What limited amount of resources we get for adaptation comes through the GEF. We have a couple of GEF programmes and some bilateral programmes in the Caribbean but the levels of funding in those programmes are very miniscule compared to what is needed. They only support technical assessment- generation of studies, making of monitoring data...but no real action.

Q. No real ground level action?

A. No no...whatever ground level adaptation there has been funded (by us)...

Q. There is not a single project currently?

A. There is no project that we have in the Caribbean currently that is hardware in adaptation that is actually being funded.

Q. And how has your dealing with GEF been? Because you often hear that the GEF is very difficult to deal with.

A. You know...I think...(it is) not (necessary) to apologize for the GEF or anything. I think the GEF finds itself in a very difficult position because it has to work through agencies.

And yes, we do have lots of problems with those agencies, third party agencies - the UN, UNEP, UNDP - that make it very difficult for us to access funding in the Caribbean islands - specially the English speaking Caribbean islands.

We are looking towards the new GEF - you know they said they want to have a look at the new governance of the GEF.

Q. Should it come under the COP? All the funding?

A. To me, its not where the money is, its the accessibility. So wherever...for example, one of the things that we did in Poznan was to demand that we have direct access to the Adaptation Fund, that we shouldn't have to go through any third party to get the money, (because) the attitude of a lot of these people in these institutions is that it is their money.

They don't recognize that they are the servants of the people and I think sometimes they have a very bad attitude in how they relate to you. I don't know... I guess your colleagues in India can probably tell you the same thing.

Probably one of the things we should look at is basically...we definitely need more people, who are sympathetic to the recipients rather than people who want to pretend that they are the princes and princesses.

Q. And its sort of begging...

A. Yes...and we should kowtow and beg and besiege to sort of get it. That really annoys me and I'm sure it annoys a lot of people in your place as well.

Q. Ya ya. Absolutely. Bangkok...hasn't been a good interaction as we've seen. For the first time, we're seeing that KP is almost going away. Most of the developed countries have backed out. If they haven't then they are backing out. The EU, for the first time, is saying that they are looking for a new legal instrument and probably have some bits and pieces of Kyoto. So how do you look at that?

A. I think that's a very unfortunate development, given the number of people who originally committed to the Protocol have not even met their obligations under it and now they want to disband it for something else or merge it or whatever.

I think what is important (is) that the Annexe I live up to their commitments, live up to their obligations, their responsibilities...people say there are divisions within the G-77, I think those are miniscule. I think those are about details. Nobody in the G-77 misunderstands or has any confusion (about KP).

Q. So there could be small divisions, diversions. But more or less as a group..

A. Yeah, I mean come on...there are more than a 100 countries. Look at the size of the countries, look at the vested interests. Even in families these (lines) are blurred. You have

disagreements between brothers, sisters, uncles and cousins. So if you have something as big as a 100 countries, you are bound to have differences.

But the issue is that those differences are not what threaten us. What threatens us instead is the Annexe I refusal to do what they need to do. This is the threat. The little details of disagreements in the Annexe I do not pose a threat to our survival. What poses a threat to our survival is the refusal of the Annexe I to do what they know they should be doing.

Q. So you want the Kyoto architecture to stay the same way and they should take their commitments (seriously)...

A. You know, I would say that the Kyoto architecture was a first model. And with every first model there is room for improvement. So there is room for improvement. I don't think any of the parties to the KP would say there is no room for improvement.

But there is a lot of difference between room for improvement and basically demolition. Those are not the same.

Q. So you are open to amendments to the protocol.

A. I think any person, who is well-intentioned, never stops looking for ways to improve, to make it better, to make it more efficient, to make it reach the goal.

The KP is what we are looking to deliver emission reductions. This is what we need. So we would basically be shooting ourselves in the foot to say, lets abandon the thing that is supposed to be delivering emission reductions and then go complain that we need emission reductions.

Yeah, we would like to see through KP. We would like to see people honour their obligations. And if the KP can be supplemented by other mechanisms, that can get us more emission reductions, we are all for that too.

Q. On the question of US and Canada - how do you see their attitude? They've been making a lot of noises, making a lot of positive statements but in terms of real action, in terms of political will to actually take emission reduction commitments, we have not seen much progress from the previous administration.

A. Well...you know actions. For me, I like actions. Actions speak louder than words. We hear the words but we've heard the words before. We've heard the words repeatedly. We heard lots of nice words at the climate summit in New York a few weeks ago.

The issue is that lots of those words are not being manifested here among most of the parties. So we just want them to live up to their obligations. The US is a large generator of GHGs, the largest generator of GHGs. As I said today, gases are garbage. It's a waste. And every society, every person has a responsibility to clean up their waste. Especially if that waste threatens the well-being of some other people. In our case, we are the parties,

at this point, who are threatened; eventually many more people will be threatened. So we are feeling the impacts of a number of countries- Canada, the US.. they need to act in a responsible manner. And that's what we want to urge. We want to urge them (to) think what it would be like if the roles were reversed. If they were living in our place. How would they feel? I think you shouldn't judge somebody until you walk in their shoes. But I would feel that if you are a powerful country and little countries are being affected by your actions, or lack thereof, you do have a moral responsibility to act in a way.

Q. Absolutely. But they are not doing that just now.

A. We all know that. That's what this week has been- (there have) been frustrations for a lot of people. And the thing is, when you have big countries not acting, then countries of a similar status feel that well, we don't have to do anything. So rather than (aspiring for better) - everyone wants to be where the big boys are. And the big boys aren't doing much so everybody goes "why should we?" And the end outcome is - we become more threatened, more vulnerable and our future more insecure.

I would say if you were from Tuvalu or...some places in Tonga, there are just no words. This is something that is unfolding as we speak. There is water in peoples homes...how would you like it - you come back home in the evening and there's 2-3 inches of sea water in your home. What do you do? And it's none of your making!

Q. What are your expectations from Copenhagen? Do you think progress will be made? Some kind of ambitious and equitable deal will happen at Copenhagen? Or are you skeptical about it?

A. You know...when life is as it is for people in small island states, you can not lose hope. But I must say, my degree of hope is not what I would have loved to go home with.

In a way, it's hard to accept that the powerful, the rich, the people who have the best of this planet, are not acting in a more responsible manner. And I hope that they will act in a more responsible manner by the time we get to Copenhagen.

But if the trend that we see continues, it's not good. You really have to (have) a high level of optimism, if you think that Copenhagen will deliver the kind of agreement that we would have hoped for, when this process...when we left Bali. It's disappointing to say the least.