



Report

SB60 Bonn Climate Change Conference (June 2024) from an observer's perspective

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Introduction

I represented the National University of Singapore (NUS) as an observer at the SB60 Bonn Climate Change Conference from 8 to 13 June 2024. SB60 is shorthand for the 60th meeting of two permanent subsidiary bodies of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These bodies are the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI).

The aim of this report is to provide an overview and a brief record of my time at SB60, including the meetings I observed, who I met and what I learnt. This report is therefore written from a first-person perspective. This report will also include some insights on the overall conference and the progress made towards international climate change negotiations and governance.

While SB60 lasted for two weeks from 3 to 13 June 2024, I attended the second half of the conference. Other NUS representatives were from the Department of Geography, the Centre for Nature-based Climate Solutions and the Centre for International Law.



Agenda items

At SB60, the agenda items for both the [SBSTA](#) and [SBI](#) were wide-ranging. For instance, the SBSTA and SBI held meetings and negotiations for joint agenda items such as research and systematic observation; the global goal on adaptation; the local communities and indigenous platform; and the just transition work programme. The SBSTA had additional agenda items that were more granular and relating to operational and methodological issues, such as the operation of carbon market mechanisms or the clean development mechanism. The SBI meanwhile had additional agenda items that were broader in scope, such as the Adaptation Fund and capacity-building.

Apart from the SBSTA and SBI agenda items, there was also an ad-hoc work programme on the new collective quantified goal (NCQG) on climate finance. There were also dialogues and meetings for specific committees or topics, such as the Paris Committee on Capacity-Building (PCCB) and the Oceans and Climate dialogue.

In addition to meetings arising from agenda items and programmes, observer organisations also hosted a variety of side events and advocacy actions at the conference venue.

SB60 was attended by over [8,500 attendees](#) from all around the world, including around 3,500 party delegates and 3,200 observers including intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic and research institutions. The negotiation outcomes at SB60 will be progressed and finalised during SB61 and COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan this November, hopefully leading to outcomes that will accelerate climate change adaptation and mitigation.

RINGO meetings



The observers for the SB and COP conferences are grouped into constituencies and NUS is part of the Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organizations (RINGO) constituency. RINGO met every morning during SB60, where observers updated the constituency about the progress (or lack thereof) made the previous day, and what to anticipate or look out for during the day. These updates were useful as many negotiations (termed “informal consultations”) across different agenda items happened simultaneously, and it was impossible for any individual to be apprised of all the happenings.

Apart from covering the negotiations, the RINGO also covered other matters relating to SBs and COPs, such as the handling of logistical issues by the Azerbaijan COP presidency and organised research presentations on the negotiations process and creation of political norms.

Article 6 negotiations

Parties considered carbon market mechanisms in these negotiations. Under Article 6.2 on cooperation among parties for the implementation of their nationally determined contributions (NDCs), parties considered the regulations relating to transferring mitigation outcomes (i.e., transferring carbon emissions) to other parties. Parties discussed whether authorisation for each individual cooperative approach is required, and whether there could be any revocation of authorisation.



Under Article 6.4 on a centralised carbon-based mechanism, parties discussed authorisation issues, especially whether mitigation contributions can be issued before authorisation by the host country. Some parties were in favour of allowing authorisation after issuance as this would be procedurally simpler, particularly for parties that may not have vast administrative resources.

At the negotiations, the chairs would incorporate the views and submissions of parties to draft input texts that parties could comment further on. Through this iterative process of drafting, reviewing and commenting, parties could reach consensus on decision texts for various agenda items. For some agenda items, however, due to conflicting interests between parties, there was no decision text.

Climate finance negotiations



There was a clear lack of progress on this agenda item. Parties had decided, at COP21 in 2015 (when the Paris Agreement was agreed upon) to define a new collective quantified goal on climate finance (NCQG) prior to 2025. The current goal is USD 100 billion per year, which, according to an [OECD report](#) requested by donor countries, was met in 2022.

However, there was no discussion at all on the quantum of the NCQG during SB60. There was also no agreement on how much finance had already been flowing thus far, as developed countries considered loans and debt restructuring part of climate finance, while developing countries did not see those as part of climate finance.

These negotiations comprised the most frustrated negotiators, as no headway seemed to have been made. Parties also had to work with 40 and 30-page long input texts from the chair, which took considerable time to review and comment on.

Research and systematic observations negotiations



This agenda item was intended for parties to identify research needs. These needs would then be conveyed to research organisations and international organisations, to guide their research direction and outputs which would eventually assist parties in climate adaptation and mitigation. However, some parties were unwilling to specify any research needs at all. It appeared that in refusing to specify such needs, parties may have been worried that the eventual research could point to the insufficiencies in their NDCs or in the implementation of their NDCs. As such, there was no incentive to promote research that could ultimately be detrimental to their reputational interests or draw unnecessary attention to their flaws.

The negotiations here were most interesting to watch as an observer, as the negotiators had strong opposing stances on specifying research needs. There were also some delays caused by negotiators being unable to agree on whether to have informal-informals (which are party-only meetings closed to observers) or to have a revised decision text from the chairs first, and which area of the decision text to focus on.

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At the end of SB60, there was a last-minute attempt by the chairs to circulate a decision text that could potentially be adopted by parties. However, this did not work out and the agenda item was thus adjourned for discussion at COP29 instead. Parties also expressed concern during the closing plenary about the negotiations process and last-minute circulation of the text.

Just transition work programme

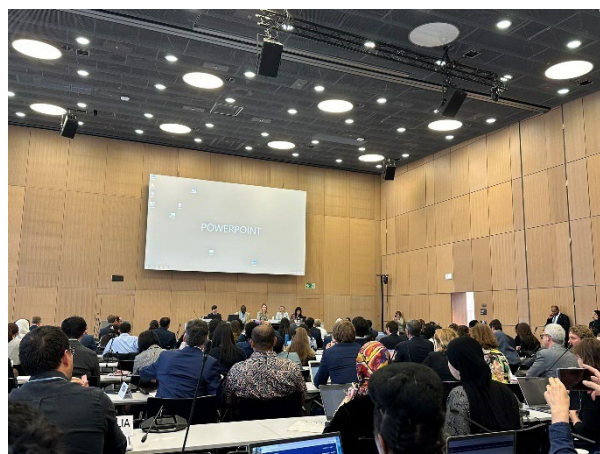


The discussions surrounding work programmes, including the just transition work programme, were more procedural and focused on the organisation of dialogues. On just transition, parties discussed how the topics for the second dialogue should be decided, and when to hold such dialogues – whether intersessionally, or at the same time as SB meetings. Parties decided that the second dialogue would be held before SB61.

There were also several side events on just transition, where speakers discussed how just transition could be reflected in different jurisdictions and incorporated in supply chains, and how workers could retain jobs even as industries change. Some speakers also discussed just transition from a gender angle, such as strengthening the role of women in leadership positions.

Adaptation negotiations

This agenda item discussed the work programme on indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation to ensure enhanced adaptive capacity. In particular, discussions focused on the engagement of experts and the development of indicators. Developing country party blocs wanted diversity and balanced regional representation of experts, and some called for the recognition of indigenous peoples. Toward the end of the negotiations, there was a debate about whether to reference the text of a previous COP decision on “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”, and whether to include very specific criteria for experts. The conundrum was eventually resolved with some wording changes, to refer to the particular provision but not the text of the prior decision, and to provide more leeway in the criteria for selection of each expert while ensuring balance in expertise as a whole. There was hence an eventual decision for adaptation negotiations, which was met with much applause.



Oceans dialogue

While I did not observe the dialogue, which took place over two days, for a long period of time, I understood from my observations that the dialogue was facilitated well. The dialogue consisted of presentations from a panel of speakers, followed by interactive breakout sessions. As the breakout sessions had able facilitators, participants to the dialogue could offer their opinions on a variety of topics including ecosystem-based adaptation, mangrove restoration, plastic pollution and coastal communities.



Voices of marginalised communities



I also attended press conferences held by climate groups such as Climate Action Network. These press conferences invited representatives including negotiators and activists, especially from developing countries and indigenous communities. Through these press conferences, I could understand the sentiments of various communities about the SB60 meetings.

Advocacy actions at the conference venue

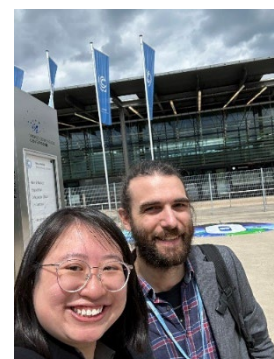


Each day, there were advocacy actions within or at the entrance of the conference centre. These advocacy actions centred around demanding for more climate finance from developed countries, though there were also advocacy actions to promote meat-free or vegan diets. During lunch, there was a booth outside the conference centre distributing free vegan food to the conference attendees. These advocacy actions are subject to prior approval by the UNFCCC secretariat, to ensure that the UNFCCC process remains conducive to intergovernmental dialogues.



Meet-ups

During the conference, I met with several faculty members and researchers from other faculties and centres in NUS, including Lindy and Melissa from the Centre for Nature-Based Climate Solutions, Railla from the Centre for International Law and David from the Department of Geography. I also met with many observers (faculty; researchers; students) from academic institutions and NGOs, and party delegates including Singapore's chief negotiator, Mr Joseph Teo. There were also mini events organised by the Youth Climate Movement (YOUNGO), such as a world café with negotiators where I could learn from them about bloc meetings were run and how blocs arrived at a common position. In addition, the University of Bonn very kindly hosted a networking event for researchers and students involved in SB60 to connect. These meet-ups helped with consolidating my understanding of the SB60 negotiations and the UNFCCC processes, and with building my connections to researchers worldwide.



Closing plenary on 13 June 2024

The closing plenary session started and ended very late, past 1 a.m. local time. While it was originally scheduled to start at 4 p.m., the start time was delayed again and again until it finally started at around 8 p.m. Rumours swirled out that the late start time was due to a certain party blocking consensus on the negotiation outcomes. However, as an observer, information that I received was limited and it was difficult to pinpoint the exact causes for the delay. I could only, as with the negotiations before, infer the positions of



each party or party bloc based on rumours and their public statements in informal consultations. In any case, waiting for and attending the closing plenary in person was a fitting end to my week in Bonn as parties' statements encapsulated their positions and disappointments as to the negotiation outcomes and processes at SB60.

During the closing session, the chairs of SBI and SBSTA read out and confirmed the decision texts for the numerous agenda items. Some agenda items had no decision text, which meant that the negotiations would continue in SB61/COP29 without a decision text to build on. The UNFCCC Secretariat read out the expected budgets for each agenda item, followed by parties giving their closing statements.

While there was a decision text for climate change adaptation, there was no decision text for the climate change mitigation work programme. The negotiations for mitigation were instead adjourned to SB61/COP29. A key reason for the lack of consensus was the perennially opposed positions of developed and developing countries on climate finance. Throughout the entire SB60 and more emphatically at the closing plenary, developing country parties expressed their discontent that developed countries are not setting a climate finance goal that will provide developing countries with monies to engage in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Parties accused each other of derailing the negotiation process and not working collaboratively to achieve consensus. The lack of an outcome for mitigation negotiations can be considered the most disappointing part of SB60.

Alas, as the summer night was turning dark, I left the conference venue at around 10.30 p.m., but continued to catch the proceedings online in my accommodation. The end of the conference left me with the haunting question – a tremendous amount of resources has been put into organising SB60 and other climate change conferences, but to what end? I am of the view that while each conference may only see incremental progress, it is nevertheless important for each party and NGO to outline their position on climate action at this global stage. Otherwise, those who are absent from the process may not have their voices heard by the rest of the world.

Together with other means of environmental action around the world – such as climate litigation and private environmental regulation by corporations – the COP process drives climate action.



P.S. On 7 June 2024, we were able to catch the very rare blooming of the *Titanenwurz* (German name; *Titan arum* in English). The flower blooms once every two or three years, but under optimal cultivation at the botanical gardens in Bonn, it can bloom every other year. The flower is endemic to the rainforests in Sumatra, Indonesia, but has been cultivated in Bonn and other botanical gardens. While climate action may be difficult, hopefully, with cultivation and support from developed countries, climate action can also bloom like the *Titanenwurz*.

