Copenhagen climate summit undone by 'arrogance'

By Richard Black
Environment correspondent, BBC News

Western nations failed to understand how China works, says Lord Stern

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The economist told BBC News that the US and EU nations had not understood well enough the concerns of poorer nations.

But, he said, the summit had led to a number of countries outlining what they were prepared to do to curb emissions.

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"So that was a product of the UNFCCC (UN climate convention) process that we should respect."

The former World Bank chief economist and author of the influential 2006 review into the economics of climate change was speaking to BBC News following a lecture at the London School of Economics (LSE), where he now chairs the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment.

During the lecture, he compared the atmosphere at the Copenhagen summit to student politics in the 1960s - "chaotic, wearing, tiring, disappointing" - and said it was one in which countries had little room for real negotiating.

However, he said, it was vital to stick with the UN process, whatever its frustrations.

Twin tracks

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Lord Stern agreed that what he described as the "disappointing" outcome of the Copenhagen talks was largely down to rich nations' failure to understand developing world positions and concerns.

"[There was] less arrogance than in previous years - we have, I think, moved beyond the G8 world to the G20 world where more countries are involved - but [there was] still arrogance and it could have been much better handled by the rich countries," he said.

The EU limited its room for manoeuvre, he said, because too many of the leading political figures wanted to demonstrate that they were leading.
Brass from pockets

The most concrete part of the Copenhagen Accord is an agreement that richer countries should raise funds to help poorer nations adapt to climate impacts and "green" their economies.

Lord Stern is a member of the group set up by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to advise on how to raise $100bn (£66bn) per year by 2020 using various "innovative mechanisms" that could include taxes on international aviation and banking transactions.

But the immediate objective, he suggested, was to enact the short-term promise of providing $30bn over the period 2010-12 from the public purses of western nations.

If that money did not start to move fairly quickly, he said, that would further erode trust among developing countries.

Speaking in Brussels during a meeting with EU leaders, Mexico's environment secretary Juan Rafael Elvira endorsed the point.

"The developing world needs to see clear signals to have something in their hands at Cancun," he said.

The Mexican coastal city will host this year's UNFCCC summit.

"The developing countries want to see this money unblocked; the island nations especially are waiting for this funding," said Mr Elvira.

How and where these funds are to be disbursed has yet to be decided.