

Young Islanders from Seychelles disappointed with COP 15.

Young Islanders from the Seychelles islands say that they are “profoundly” disappointed with last December’s United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 15). They felt that as future leaders of this planet, inheriting the impact of climate change, their future is being decided “for” them instead of “with” them. All these feelings were expressed during a public speaking competition organised by the Ministry of Education to celebrate Earth Day 2010.

They felt that as future leaders of this planet, and the inheritance of climate change impact, their future is being decided “for” them instead of “with” them.

Prior to the competition, a workshop was organized for secondary school students and their teachers where they learnt about the reasons for organizing such an important conference in December 2009. They also learnt about the COP 15, the different negotiations which took place there, and looked at the COP 15 Accord. The competition provided secondary students with an opportunity to give their opinions on COP 15 whereas the Primary ones topic was ‘Stop! We do not want to live in a world of Climate Change.’

The competition was a very tough one, especially for the secondary students which proved that a lot of research was done on the topic. The students concentrated on their position as young islanders.

All teams stated that they were disappointed with the results of COP 15. One of the team stated that the negotiation should have been an “open, democratic, party driven, transparent, inclusive, legitimate and accountable” but due to the final decisions being made “just between a few” and “behind closed doors” showed that “the super powers’ greed overruled the small island states needs.” They felt that as SIDS, ‘life is so unfair’ and that the “superpowers bullied us!!” They said that even if so much money was spent, people met, voices cried out, in the end, superpowers once again put their self-interest first instead of the health of the planet, though they accepted in the accord that climate change is real.

Anse Boileau team, the winners of the competition argued that even now, days after the meeting, they are still asking themselves whether this whole ordeal really paid off. They further declared that the biggest losers from COP 15 are the SIDS and that as young SIDS people they are very disappointed as COP 15 have “failed to meet our expectation for the future.”

They stressed that “the Accord was not acknowledged by all present ...” for decisions were made mainly by the same “major polluters who got to write down what they thought was best for the world.” In the end they said, “It was not negotiable it was

jammed down the throat of the rest of the world” and that SIDS, as major victims were left out. They also said that they were not happy with Maldives who was amongst the final small group which drafted the Accord; they did not defend SIDS enough they said. They felt that there was no transparency in the negotiation and it was undemocratic and asked the audience “Why was such a negotiation held, don’t the rich countries want us, small islands to exist?” They said that they supported their Seychellois delegates for not endorsing the agreement made.

The participants of competition also argued that as future victims of climate change and leaders of tomorrow, they felt that “youth were left out of the whole process at Copenhagen.” They said that although many youth were present, they were not included in the final decision making process. For that they say:

“Our future was being decided FOR us, but not WITH us. They (other youth around the world) like us didn’t feel valued. I wonder how the rich countries would have felt if they were in our shoes and they have to live to see effect of **their** decisions.”

“... the Copenhagen conference and its subsequent Accord did not deal Seychelles a fair deal, we were ignored and our request for survival denied. Our future is at stake, we need to act now’.

One team stressed that even if their President, James Michel, tried to plead for their survival, it fell upon deaf ears. Similarly, another team sadly put it as “... the Copenhagen conference and its subsequent Accord did not deal Seychelles a fair deal, we were ignored and our request for survival denied. Our future is at stake, we need to act now’.

One of the teams which came from the second largest residential islands, Praslin brought forward several examples of how their once beautiful coasts are not being battered by climate change. They explained that for them “climate change is already a reality and this issue is of urgency. Waiting for 2015 to review and consider the reduction of emission is far too late. But then the gravity of the existing problems will have multiplied.”

Some of the teams acknowledged that the accord at least made reference that funding will be needed to assist developing and the least developing countries. But most of them also stated that too often there are frustrating delays where it comes to accessing large donor funds. The Praslinois argued that “we felt that money will not solve the existing problem,” and that “much of the money earmarked for climate adaptation, the global community is left resembling an alcoholic who has decided to save up for a liver transplant rather than give up drinking.” They questioned if the money will bring back their beautiful eroding beaches.

To conclude the teams expressed that they are “disappointed”, “frustrated”, “angered” and “saddened”, especially as the accord was made by “a selected few”. Seychelles youth said that “fear of becoming climate change refugees and loosing our way of life, culture and identify.” Young islanders from Seychelles islands are calling upon world leaders stating that it’s high time “we stop the talk and start walking the talk.” They further stated that “we therefore, reaffirm that the cost of inaction today will be higher tomorrow than the cost of action today.” Stop talking they said, take action to reduce carbon emission for that is our main problem.

They also strongly recommended that at the next COP 16, all government of SIDS, including Seychelles, should have at least one youth representative on their team and that young people must be involved, stop underestimating them they said. They further requested that: “Decision makers need to understand that whatever decision they make today, they may not live to see their outcomes. We, the youth of island states, we are the frontline of being totally gone, WE NEED TO SURVIVE! So listen to us, we can help”.

They also strongly recommended that at the next COP 16, all government of SIDS, including Seychelles, should have at least one youth representative on their team and that young people must be involved, stop underestimating them they said.

Teams called upon all youths around the world to stand together and ask boldly, in the name of their future that “more be done to make 350 ppm and 1.5 degrees goal a reality to ensure our survival.” The youth from Seychelles also called upon young people from other SIDS to fight against the decision made at COP 15. “They have not done enough for us, the SIDS,” they said.

“It is now or never. Now is the time to save our planet. To do the right thing before it is too late. We are fighting for 1.5 degrees to stay alive,” they emphasized. They concluded that “we are glad to form part of the global community of young people who are increasingly taking bold steps to protect our planet against climate.” As for world leaders, they are insisting that it is high time to try to take decision “**WITH US**” they said instead of “**FOR US**”.

By Jeannette Larue, Coordinator Environmental Education, Ministry of Education, Seychelles.