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# COP 17 Climate Conference

Experiences of the IFSA delegation in Durban, South Africa

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International  
**FORESTRY  
STUDENTS'**  
ASSOCIATION



**COP17/CMP7**  
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CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2011  
**DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA**

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## THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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### **IFSA and UNFCCC**

IFSA has been involved in the international processes of the United Nations for many years. Each year, the IFSA „Commission for International Processes“ organizes a student delegation to the Climate Change Conference, where all 193 UN member states meet to discuss political decisions to solve the climate crisis.

This year's COP (= Conference of the Parties), the 17th of its kind, took place in Durban, South Africa.

IFSA's delegation at COP17 consisted of eight forestry students from Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Nigeria, and South Africa.

As accredited NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), IFSA has the position of an official observer of the negotiations and is granted entrance to all open meetings of the parties or subsidiary bodies.

### **The COP**

Typically, a UNFCCC COP lasts two weeks. In the first week, scientific results are being presented and discussed by two main groups: the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). These two groups meet throughout the year to investigate scientific data and technical solutions as well as to explore the challenges of implementing the policies on the ground.

Besides the SBSTA and the SBI, so-called „Ad hoc Working Groups“ discuss issues about a further commitment under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) and additional, alternative commitments under a Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA).

In the second week, the Highlevel Segments are being introduced by an official opening ceremony where the current COP president, the UNFCCC secretary, and other official representatives welcome the ministers of the participating countries. Throughout the second week, presidents and environmental ministers of the countries hold speeches about their countries' concerns. They voice their countries' official position and announce their commitments for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The last days at a COP are dominated by intense, open ended, and very exhausting discussions until a definite document has been concluded.

## The Parties

Generally, the Parties can be divided into three major groups: Annex I Parties, Annex II Parties, and Non-Annex I Parties.

Annex I Parties include the industrialized countries that were members of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 1992, and countries with economies in transition (EIT Parties). The latter are Russia, the Baltic States, and several Eastern European states.

Annex II Parties consist of the OECD members of Annex I excluding the EIT Parties.

Annex II Parties are required to provide technology transfer and financial and technical support to EIT Parties and developing countries in order for them to adapt to climate change and undertake mitigation efforts.

Non-Annex I Parties are mostly developing countries and receive financial aid, technical advice, and capacity building from the developed countries according to the Convention.

The 193 United Nations member states organize themselves in various interest groups. For example there is the Alliance Of Small Island States (AOSIS), which reinforces the negotiative power of this particularly vulnerable group of states by agreeing on a common opinion. Another group is the African Group, which represents common points made by the African states. The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) comprise some of the world's poorest countries and ensure a sufficient consideration of these countries' special needs.

Besides these developing countries' groups, also industrialized countries form groups to voice their opinions. Among these are the Umbrella Group consisting of the USA, Canada, Japan, Norway, Russia, Ukraine, New Zealand, Iceland, and Australia, or the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) that comprises Mexico, South Korea, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Monaco. The European states are organized within the European Union and most of their negotiations are being undertaken in the name of the EU.



*Banner of activists on the Convention Campus*

## The Kyoto Protocol

An essential part of the last years' climate regime was the Kyoto Protocol. It was decided upon at COP<sub>3</sub> in Kyoto, Japan. Developed countries who signed the Kyoto Protocol (KP) are bound to reduce their emissions by 5% from 2007 until 2012 in comparison to the emissions from 1990.

Developing countries don't have any legal obligations but can commit themselves to the emissions reductions on a voluntary basis.

Until today, the KP remains the only legally binding agreement that sets clearly binding climate goals. At COP<sub>17</sub>, the Parties discussed about the future of the KP. While many developed countries, like the USA, Canada, or Japan tried to establish a new system based on a pledge & review system that does not have any legal force and allows the countries to set their own national targets for emissions reductions, the developing countries strongly favored a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol as the only means to avoid a transition period without any legal obligations for developed countries until the new climate treaty would come into force.

The European Union declared itself ready for a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol given that there would be a defined roadmap for establishing a new, legally binding agreement that involves all countries within the next years. To increase the pressure on some industrial countries, the EU started an alliance with the least developed countries and the small island states. This way, many of their points were adopted into the so-called „Durban Platform“ when COP<sub>17</sub> finally ended in the night from December 10th to the 11th. The outcome of COP<sub>17</sub> is that there will be a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, and that a new legally binding climate regime will have to be established by 2015 that shall enter into force by 2020, including the USA and China.

However it has to be mentioned that the countries that will be bound by the second commitment period of the KP together only account for 15% of the global emissions as Canada stepped out of the Kyoto Protocol and other countries like Russia and Japan don't want to commit themselves under a second period,



*Side Events at COP 17, Durban*

## **Side Events**

Another essential element of the COPs are the numerous side events that take place throughout the two weeks. Side events are held by organizations, states, or companies to present a specific topic. These topics include national adaptation plans for climate change, the presentation of new carbon trading market concepts, financing opportunities, or inventories of greenhouse gas emissions.

As COP17 was held in Africa, particular attention was given to climate change adaptation in rural areas that already now are affected by droughts, unregular weather patterns, floods, famines, or heat waves.

Climate smart agriculture that helps mitigate climate change by reducing emissions and that contributes to food security - therefore also being an element for adaptation - was a big topic at the African COP. Poverty alleviation, which is part of the United Nations Millennium Goals, was recognized to have to be fought all together in line with climate change. Important groundwork for merging these three major challenges - mitigation, adaptation, and poverty alleviation - together to find solutions contributing to each one of these factors, was done at COP17.

## REDD+

This year's special focus was on challenges for REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) as land use and forest management have been recognized to hold huge climate change potential. Since COP16 in Cancun last year, preserving forests and preventing forest degradation play an increasingly significant role in combating climate change. The challenges faced now are to find ways to make forest conservation economically attractive both to the local people and on the national level.

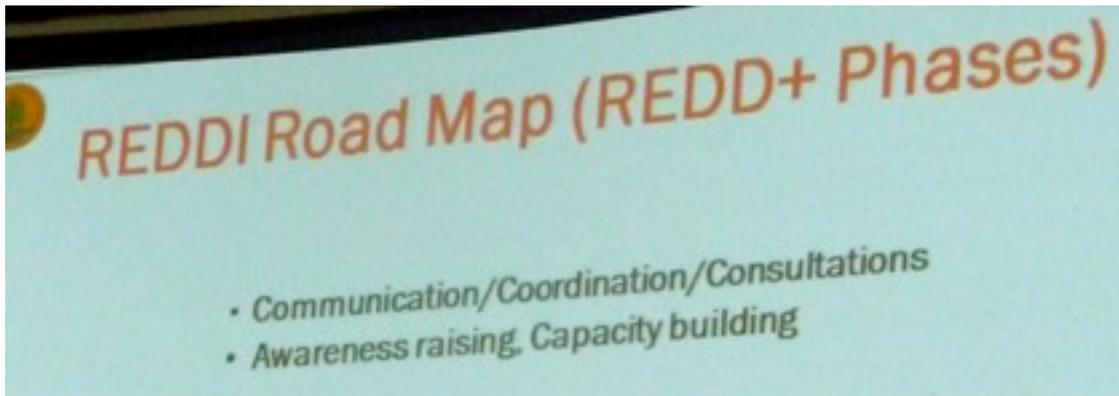
The idea of REDD+ is that certain areas covered in forests are excluded from exploitation, or that new forests are planted on previously unforested land. In many cases, neither logging is allowed in these areas nor are the local people permitted to extract fire wood from the forests included in REDD+ projects. The goal is to build up the highest possible carbon stock. The project areas undergo a carbon inventory, where certifiers measure the amount of carbon that is stored in the forests.

According to the results the land owners get a certain amount of carbon credits. One carbon credit accounts for one ton of CO<sub>2</sub> that was taken out of the atmosphere to be stored in the wood. The more carbon has been sequestered since the last inventory, the more money the land owners get as reimbursement for having taken their forests out of use, or for not using the respective area for other purposes, for instance as cropland.

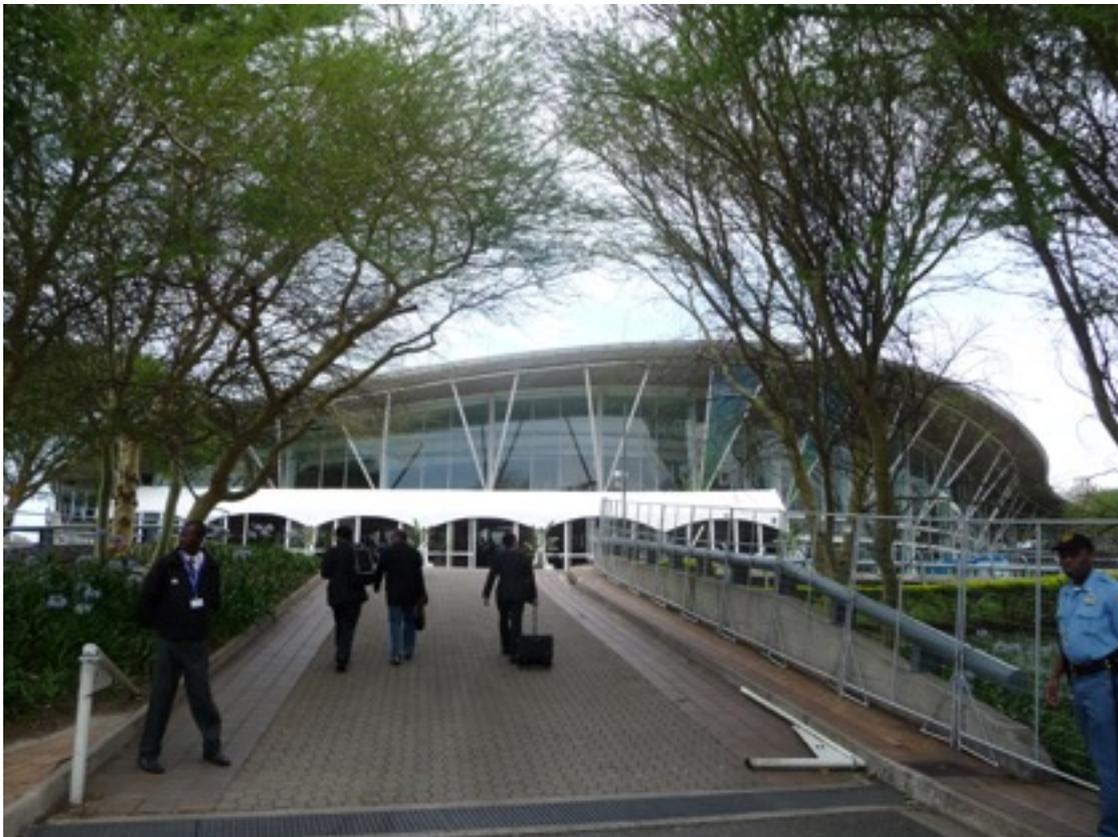
An important element of REDD+ projects is the so-called „additionality“. This means that only forests that would otherwise have been cut, or newly afforested areas that would have been used differently (say as cropland or pastures) without the financial recompensation, can be registered as REDD+ projects.

REDD+ is believed to increase in significance over the next years and to display a relatively inexpensive method of lowering the atmosphere's CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations.

Until now there are many difficulties that have to be overcome in the field of financing and social safeguards for the local communities that are directly affected by REDD+ projects. Another challenge is to ensure biodiversity and other ecosystem services. Clear legislation and strict jurisdiction is therefore essential for the success of the conception of REDD+.



*Headline of a PowerPoint slide of a Side Event about REDD+*



*Entrance of the International Convention Centre, Durban*

## Forest Day 5

During COP17, Forest Day 5 took place in Durban on a Sunday without negotiations between the two conference weeks. Forest Day is an event held by CIFOR and has developed into one of the world's most renowned events on forests over the last five years. As CIFOR, the Center for International Forestry Research, is a professional IFSA partner, our student delegation was actively involved in the event. Beforehand we had agreed on volunteering during the day. We assisted the organizers in showing the participants the plenary rooms or providing similar help. In return we didn't need to pay the newly introduced participation fee of \$50 and furthermore got a booth for free. With this booth we were given the opportunity to present IFSA and show our promotional material.

The day was perceived as great success. At the end, IFSA was being officially acknowledged for the help by Frances Seymour, the Executive Director of CIFOR, during the closing plenary session.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, symbolically said that those who didn't attend Forest Day 5 missed COP17.



*President of COP17, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane; UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon;  
President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma;*

## IFSA'S PARTICIPATION

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### **The IFSA delegation**

The IFSA delegation was accommodated in a hostel within walking distance of the International Convention Centre (ICC), where the Conference took place. In order to make our attendance at COP17 a common IFSA experience, our delegation met frequently during the conference. In the first week, we had a briefing in the mornings and a debriefing in the evenings of each day. At these occasions, we talked about our plans for the day and about what events we had visited.

These conversations were especially valuable as all of us perceived the negotiations or the side events differently. Talking about what we had understood helped us clarify the complex topics.

In the second week, it turned out increasingly hard to match the students' individual plans with regular daily meetings within the delegation. As everybody became more familiar with the processes and developed individual preferences, we agreed to meet rather spontaneously and to discuss our experiences in a less formal manner.

### **Meetings with Alumni**

An occurrence that was very interesting for our delegation was to meet two IFSA alumni during COP17.

In the first week, we had a meeting with Moriz Vohrer, a former Subhead for UNFCCC, who now works for CarbonFix, a German organization that has developed an own carbon standard and works in the field of forest certification. The provided insight into the complex system of developing afforestation projects, consulting, and certifying was very much appreciated by the whole delegation. Moriz took himself a lot of time to answer all our questions and also gave us general information about the whole conference including his personal experiences.

In the second week, we got the chance to meet Dario Vespertino, another IFSA alumnus, who was at the conference as a Party delegate for Italy. During the spontaneous meeting with him we talked about REDD+. Dario could provide us with insight from the internal Party discussions about the topic. As the meeting took place in the end of the conference we already had learned a lot about specific issues across the foregone conference days and Dario's expert knowledge rounded up our conception about the REDD+ negotiations.

All future delegations should be advised to meet as many IFSA alumni as possible. Besides containing some exceptional IFSA spirit, our meetings with the alumni were very fruitful and

positive.

Seeing former IFSA members in their professional lives shows possible career paths for forestry students and gives motivation for further commitment to IFSA.

## Conclusion

Everyone had different experiences, everyone had had different expectations about the climate conference, and yet we all were there together and benefited from the mutual exchange. It was interesting to see the different backgrounds of all of us. Even though we are all forestry students, everybody was on a different level of knowledge and processed information differently.

One thing we had in common, was our will to take the most out of the conference. Our motivation combined with the awareness of having a unique insight into policy making processes enabled us to perceive our attendance at COP17 as a life changing experience.



## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

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### Urs Dieterich

Coordinating the organization of the students delegation to COP17 together with the Head of Subcommission for UNFCCC was a very fruitful experience. Working in a team to plan the event felt very good. Both of us could rely on each other and we also learned a lot. The event was an exceptional occurrence to see the professional surrounding and conditions of a field where forests gain more and more importance.

During my time in Durban I had three main occupations: side events, negotiations, and networking.

### Side Events

The side events took place in separate rooms that accommodated between 100 and 300 people and had podiums where the speakers were seated in front of the audience. The side events covered topics that ranged from the experiences of indigenous peoples, over financing opportunities for the private sector, to Greenpeace presentations about the world's worst coal consuming companies.

Throughout the two weeks I visited many side events about REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). Since COP16 in Cancun, last year, forests have been politically recognized to play a major role in the carbon cycle and therefore influence the climate. REDD+ therefore was taken into the policy agenda of UNFCCC. This year, REDD+ pilot projects were presented and the people and communities involved shared their experiences.

Becoming more familiar with the topic, it came clear to me that much of what is assumed to run perfectly fine from the outside turns out to have major problems in feasibility and acceptance by the affected people.

The challenges REDD+ faces are to enable knowledge exchange between the different stakeholders. Project developers of new projects should learn from the mistakes of previous projects, all stakeholders should be respected in their needs, and financial benefits should be divided equally.

A major challenge is uncertainty in land tenure. Indigenous peoples often use the forest as a source of food and fuelwood without actually having an official document that guarantees them the forest as their property. Globally 75% of the forests are government owned. If a government of a country decides to implement a REDD+ project, the local people lose their rights to use the forest for their daily livelihoods as the forest is to be left undisturbed. As the official land owner is the government, all the revenue from the carbon sequestration in the project area flows to the government and not to the local people who actually are the ones compromised in their daily lives.

A big topic at the COP17 REDD+ side events was therefore to establish certain social safeguards that have to be taken into account to share the benefits among all affected parties. The need to clarify land tenure in many developing countries was expressed unequivocally. If the local communities have official property rights, they can manage their forests independently and are granted the revenue from the carbon sequestration in a REDD+ project. Forest inventories have shown that forests owned by indigenous communities in Brazil and Ecuador have upheld their expansions over years through sustainable use while

unclear tenure led to less responsible management as the communities did not consider the forests their own capital.

Furthermore, government owned forests are more likely to be sold as concessions for logging companies than privately owned forests because treaties for big areas have to be negotiated only with one partner - the government - and not with many communities where endless discussions often impede the companies' projects.

Another issue of REDD+ that I occupied myself with during COP17 was the necessity to ensure diverse forest structures.

Plantations with fast growing eucalypt trees will make bigger contributions to CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration but therefore have detrimental effects on biodiversity and other ecosystem services such as the provision of clean water. Uniform plantations also exploit the soil and lead to increased fire susceptibility.

To conclude my report about the side events I can say to have learned a lot about the very basic problems and challenges that have to be tackled to make new policies work on all levels and to not leave behind part of the affected stakeholders.

### Negotiations

Witnessing how new policies are being discussed and decisions are being taken on an international level is a corner stone in understanding our world's government structures. Many negotiations at COP17 were open to observer organizations - like IFSA - and therefore allowed us to sit in the back of the big negotiation rooms.

Even though it was sometimes hard to concentrate and to actively seize the parties' statements, I am sure to have learned a lot about the procedures and the decision making.

For me it was interesting to see how the journalists who sat in the negotiations together with us managed to extract explicit political positions from the vague diction of the speakers. Sometimes I only really understood the significance of what had happened during a negotiation when I read the news the next day.

Another tiring fact of the main negotiations was that - as publicly known - politicians manage to talk for half an hour without actually saying anything. Precise statements and announcements were rare. Among the really technical speeches that included a record of concrete actions undertaken was the one of Iran's government representative.

Due to the long lasting discussions without clear coherence I only listened to some of the negotiations and spent most of my time visiting side events and networking with other organizations or youth initiatives.

### Networking

In the Exhibition Centre there were dozens of booths where organizations presented

themselves. Walking through the booth rows and talking to the representatives of the organizations was very interesting. Infomaterial like brochures about REDD+, forest certification, gender issues, national energy plans, or sustainable palm oil could be taken from the booths.

Throughout the two weeks I got into contact with government representatives from Tanzania, the Comores, Cameroon, Pakistan, and India among others, whom I exchanged business cards with and who would like to establish local committees for IFSA in their countries' forestry faculties of the universities. Networking to increase the awareness level of IFSA and to spread our outreach into more countries was therefore another goal that we achieved during our stay at COP17 in Durban. Now, it is going to be my task to ensure the continuity of the established dialog in order to make it happen.

In the end, it is our objective to increase the forests' significance and recognition. We want to demonstrate possible careers in the field of environmental policy where technically experienced people with an academic forestry background are increasingly needed. IFSA is therefore also a platform that enables foresters to come out of the forests and encourages them to be proud of their field of study, which is indispensable in today's climate talks.

### **Walid Fayez Mustapha**

Being at COP 17 was a fruitful experience, which offered knowledge and insight beyond that of any lectures. Being the Head of the UNFCCC Sub-Commission, I had been working hard for 3 months alongside the Head of IPC, Urs Dieterich, who was a tremendous support throughout. We planned, we discussed, we laughed and when we arrived in Durban, we knew we would gain a truly unique experience. After two very demanding and rewarding weeks with intense negotiations, a myriad of side events and a vast amount of hand shaking and business card sharing, we returned home tired and fulfilled. Since then, I have had time to reflect on what happened during the COP, and while I could share with you all the facts associated UNFCCC with all of its structural frameworks, its bodies, its member states and its' endless list of jargon, I will share with you all of the embedded knowledge of the conference; the knowledge that isn't immediately noticeable to the novice how doesn't know how and where to look.

#### The main negotiations

At first the main negotiations seemed like a constellation of vague statements, confusing topics and misleading headlines with a high excess of formality. Initially, it seemed that choosing a plenary session over another was an arbitrary choice. Hence, when taking part in a plenary session, my initial goal was to understand the jargon, which was a daunting task in of

itself. Slowly, the confusion turned into insight and I began to identify exact political positions, bargaining power and how the framework of the UNFCCC was used as a political tool. Thus, my focus turned towards the relations of power; that is how the parties exerted influence on each other and how this resulted in the decisions made. In the open plenary sessions, which I was permitted to attend, countries had an array of tools at their disposal to enforce their bargaining positions, as well as limit those of others. One tool was to openly critique other member countries for not being ambitious enough, or not wanting a sustainable result from the conference. The logic behind this strategy is that it not only puts the other country in a bad light, but it enforces your own position as a climate friendly country. Another tool parties utilized, was to attempt to gain sympathy for their specific needs, which was a tool all countries attempted to make use of, albeit their needs differed greatly. One interesting tool I noticed was, when a party made a suggestion during a subsidiary body session, another country was able to stall the discussion by suggesting forming an ad hoc working group to deal with the issue. To the untrained eye forming an ad hoc working group seems progressive, but given the framework of the UNFCCC, this actually brings the issue to a standstill. This was a tool all parties utilized. During closed plenary sessions and private meetings, it can be assumed that parties offered more honest statements as the public were not permitted access. Thus, I was unable to identify the relations of power outside the eyes of the public. Presumably, parties are able to enforce their will by use of power structures outside of the UNFCCC framework to gain leverage.

### The side events

The side events were abundant, which made choosing between them difficult, but unlike the main negotiations, the themes and contents of these side events were transparent, thus making choices reasonably founded in interest. Many organizations, research institutions and ENGO's, among others, provided the conference with a multitude of themes, and all had an agenda to promote. Many research institutions presented findings on projects that have been executed in relation to schemes under the UNFCCC framework. Others presented own findings and how and why their findings should be integrated into existing or new UNFCCC schemes. Thus, the purpose of the research institutions was to offer member countries knowledge that they could apply. Additionally, the research institutions were also present to share knowledge amongst each other. The ENGO's also attempted to influence decision-making through various side events. Besides presenting their perceptions on how to mediate climate change, they ensured that not only the policy makers took notice, but also the public and the media. Thus, the contents of their side events were understandable and immediately accessible, and usually attempted to engage the listener's emotions.

### Closing statements

It is noteworthy to mention that many different entities attempted to gain influence throughout the conference. Those that had no voice in the open and closed plenary sessions adopted various and arguably effective methods to influence the decision making process as well as the results. The only thing that remains certain for me, is that I need to attend another COP, if I am to understand all the power relations and how they affect decisions, from when the initial idea is born till it is implemented. I hope I get a chance to attend this wonderful conference again.

### **Simone Herpich**

I study environmental sciences and international forestry in the second year at the Albert-Ludwigs University of Freiburg in Germany. Since one year I have been involved in IFSA now and for me the climate conference was the first big important international meeting at which I had the chance to take part.

Because we had limited access to COP17 with only 8 delegates, I shared my 2 weeks of presence with our president so that I came to Durban just for the second week from the 03.12.2011 to the 11.12.2011. This way, I hoped to be better able to share this great experience with as many people from around the globe as possible.

My activity started with the Forest Day 5 at the Olive Convention Center on the 4th of December. We had a booth there to promote IFSA and to address all the forestry-interested attendees of this big special event. This conference was a very good opportunity for promoting IFSA, its goals and structures especially since IFSA understands itself as a link between students and professional partners. We appreciated this opportunity a lot, and were able to further increase our contacts to interesting professional partners in the environmental and forestry sector worldwide.

We were also able to walk around and have a look at the other booths from other organisations like for example CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research), ITTO (International Tropical Timber Organisation), Green Ink, ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute) etc. Some of them, like CIFOR, have been professional partners of IFSA for many years now. We were given a unique insight into the companies working fields, collaboration partners, the regions on which the companies focus and so on. Many of us gained great interest in those companies, especially as possible future employers in the forestry sector.

For me personally it was great to meet the manager of ESRI there and talk to him a bit. ESRI provides their software ArcGIS (a geographical information system) for free to my university

in Freiburg and I guess nearly every forestry or forest-related student has to learn how to use ArcGIS from ESRI. The product is also one key tool used by the United Nations REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) program, which hopes to reduce further deforestation especially in the boreal and tropical forests.

Finally there were many side events which appealed me and other IFSA members a lot. I was most impressed by the Momentum for Change initiative. The speakers in this event included UN general secretary Ban Ki-moon and Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa. The initiative sought to present so called „lighthouse projects“, examples of successful adaptation to or mitigation of climate change and its manifold negative effects on the environment and people.

I liked the project's approach very much of not only showing all the negative trends and effects of climate change, but also portraying methods of dealing with it and actually helping people. The side event laid great emphasis on the little actions everybody can take, instead of solely relying on federal states in solving climate change issues. In my opinion, this is especially important since it is not sure whether the Kyoto Protocol or similar following agreements will ever be fully accepted by all necessary states. The Momentum for Change initiative therefore also motivated me personally for becoming more actively involved in IFSA and the political decision making process and raising awareness for climate issues within IFSA.

All together, I am glad that IFSA gave me the opportunity of attending this high level event in South Africa, enabling me to form global bonds between students and forestry organisations, and therefore helping in the process of fighting climate change and its manifold negative effects it has on us all.

## **Bamidele Oni**

The United Nations framework convention on climate change held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November to the 9<sup>th</sup> of December in Durban, South Africa was the 17<sup>th</sup> conference of parties which is a sequel to the previous meetings which had its inception since the 1997 Kyoto protocol ratification in Japan. This year's convention was exceptional in that a consensus was finally reached and with a conclusion that the commitment period for the Kyoto protocol has been forwarded with an additional five years, so the target year is now 2017.

However, it was indeed a great privilege and opportunity to take part in such a huge world event as the UNFCCC, COP17, and as the first to be held on the African continent. Being a part of the youth delegate that represented the international forestry students' association, I attended a number of side events and open sessions. Mostly followed a detailed schedule provided as regards the relevant side events and sessions. The COP this year saw a lot of presentations making references to the issue of REDD (reducing emissions from

deforestation and forest degradation) and protection of the vulnerable whose livelihood depends on the forest and its values. The U.N. climate change talks in Durban resulted in a mixed bag for REDD+: progress on how to set reference emissions levels, progress on defining how to measure emission reductions stemming from forestry initiatives, but a weak decision on social and environmental safeguards for the program, and no advances on sources of long-term funding, according to CIFOR's leading climate scientist . Issues regarding the use of forest in combating climate change took a re-defined turn at the negotiation table of the conference of parties and in major side events. And majorly most issues revolved around the challenges in the unfolding of The REDD initiative in the developing world. Some of the challenges include tenure, financing, participation, monitoring, verification, Elite capture of funds and conflict on enforcement. Below I have a list of some of the notable side event presentations I attended:

ECONEXUS-Agriculture, soils and forests in carbon market? Impacts on climate and climate justice

Carbon capture and storage association-CCS CDM: addressing outstanding issues.

CIFOR - How is REDD+ unfolding on the ground on the ground: An exploration of the social, political and biophysical issue, FCS/CarbonFix role and contribution of forest certification towards a low carbon forestry, A/R and REDD+ projects

CIFOR- bio fuel development and forest.

... Just to mention a few.

Alongside these events, there were side meetings with some IFSA alumni- we had an informal meeting with Mr. Moriz Vohrer, who now works with CarbonFix. We had a brief question and answer session and discussed our experiences so far at COP17. Also we met with another Alumnus, Dario Vespertino, who also gave us some insights as regards the negotiations and meetings.

Also I attended and volunteered at the one day conference organized by CIFOR, tagged forest day5, in which will helped around with the organization. Also, Among the many discussions on Forest Day 5, REDD+ and the drivers of deforestation were discussed and in particular the role of funding, and it was mentioned that the role of agriculture as a driver should be more integrated than at present state resulting in a more broad landscape approach. To further explorer funding schemes for REDD+ was a major issue. Additionally we had the opportunity of having a booth at the event. Also as a group we volunteered at another side event tagged avoided deforestation organized by Jane Goodall. This event featured a broad range of

leaders, from the governmental and private sector and civil society who to met to carry on the work of Wangari Maathai's vision of protecting people, forests and the climate. The focus of the event was how innovative partnerships can change the current market paradigm from one that leads to the destruction of forests to one that rewards those committed to protecting them. The event featured several speeches from prominent leaders and other key stakeholders.

And from the negotiation table, parties expressed divergent views on the need for a mandate in Durban for a process to launch a new global treaty to address climate change, several developed countries with the European Union, Japan, Australia called for a new global and comprehensive legally binding framework that binds all major economies. But unfortunately, after all negotiations and round table talks, a consensus was not reached and the youth had a brief protest which I believe fast tracked the negotiations and some days were added to the days of the negotiations and finally a consensus was reached and the Kyoto protocol was given some more commitment years to be realized. However it was shocking to hear recent news that one of the world's biggest emitters 'Canada' withdrew from the Kyoto protocol. It was a big blow and the question then is, how many more countries would withdrawal before the world realizes action speaks louder than talks.

In totality, my overall experience at the COP has opened my eyes to the need of taking all the necessary actions towards ensuring I play a tangible role in combating climate change. And I came to the realization that we can only reverse the effect of climate change only by committing ourselves and doing the little we can because now we live in the reality of the management rather than the mitigation of climate change. I had the best companions in my fellow delegates, Matabaro Aino, Walid, Urs, Simone, Matre and the president Juliette. The organization was above average and I believe subsequent UNFCCC will be more perfect regarding logistics and support for fairly funded delegates.

### **Matabaro Ziganira**

The UNFCCC (COP 17) was held at the Durban International Convention Centre (ICC) from 28 November to 10 December 2011. From my personal opinion, the organisation of this event was a great success for the city of Durban to host in all aspects, although the outcome did not testify success in the history of COP. Because of the chaos caused before the final plenary session, negotiations took two additional days to save COP 17.

I personally learned lots from this conference. Firstly, just like many people (students) who do not understand what the UNFCCC and what kind of conference it is, although it is easy to access the information about COP from the internet. I was in the same category before

participating to COP 17. This conference has taken my knowledge on climate change to another level and added much information to what I learned in various undergraduate courses. Because of the organisational structure of this conference (side events etc.), I now understand that climate change is more than just the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This conference was also about international politics between developed and developing countries in issues such as adaptation, mitigation, transfer of technology, poverty alleviation, youth development, women empowerment in particular in developing countries. Besides forest conservation, COP 17 raised issues on carbon credit, sustainable agriculture in the Miombo dry forests of Africa as well as energy saving by improving ways of cooking in rural communities and recycling of resources. Many organisations, companies, associations were involved in promoting their work during the COP 17, and I took this as an opportunity to meet and inform myself about various projects currently undergo in the world. The generated information would definitively have great impact on my career choice and served as an eye opener of future projects I could personally do.

Most side events I attended in the African and EU Pavilions were of great interests to me as Africa held a second largest forest reserve in the world and the EU in particular has been involved in various projects in the Congo Basin forests of Africa. I was curious to know the progress, opportunities and challenges that Africa faces due to climate change.

From the main negotiations, I learned that parties meet ahead of the sessions, discuss issues and implement the agreement if any. During the conference, each party present what they have agreed with to the rest of the delegates (parties). Sometimes, the meeting can be postponed if there was no agreement yet to be implemented.

### **Marte Franck**

The experience attending COP17 has been a good and rewarding one, although also overwhelming. During the two weeks conference we learned more than ever expected both regarding the actual negotiations but also about the whole scene of such a big global get together.

None of the IFSA delegates attending this year's conference had previous experience with the COP before, and slowly but surely we all attained knowledge on how the conference worked, the daily life at COP, what to do and what not to do.

I will here provide an overview of my experience and learning outcome of the trip. There were big expectations beforehand from what we would experience and how much of the negotiations we would actually be able to attend. In addition we were curious to attend

different side events from important and less important but still interesting organizations and NGOs.

After a successful arrival in Durban, conference registration and bike-sightseeing around the city, the anticipation for the conference to get started was high. Once inside the grounds at COP17, we realized the enormous size of the COP and all of its events. The first couple of days were spent getting to know the daily routines, figuring out where everything was, and last but not least, understanding what was important to attend. The buzz was high and there was so many things going on at the same time, meaning that we had to choose some things and neglect others, which we in the beginning considered a shame, because almost everything seemed worthwhile our time, at least mine. But some time passed, and we learned to be pickier about what to do.

The first week we focused mostly on the different side events, which were everything from “Coal – The Dirty Truth” by Greenpeace to REDD+ national projects from countries such as Brazil, Indonesia and Tanzania. It was an excellent way to start out the conference, because we got a lot of information which helped us understand the bigger picture. In addition, as we were told, the main purpose of the negotiations during the first week was to be done with all of “easier” decisions, i.e. the smaller decisions which the different states negotiators could agree upon without their political leaders present. The beginning of the second week, started with the opening of the high level segment. Security increased, and political leaders from all over the world came to Durban, we felt that the real negotiations were now about to start. The pace in the corridors increased and you could feel the stress level rise and the tension intensified.

At this point we decided to suck in as much information as possible on the progress of negotiations both out in the corridors as well as inside the meetings. We learned that the best strategy was trying to obtain some “inside” information from more experienced “COPers” than ourselves. In addition, by attending some of the media briefings and national briefings we were able to get more up to date on what was actually happening.

One of the most rewarding events during COP17 was Forest Day 5, where we volunteered and also had our own IFSA booth. All the important organizations within forest and forest research were represented here, as well as some amazing speakers. The event helped us promote IFSA, and we also got to speak with some very interesting people.

To sum up the conference in a few words, I would say that it is a big circus, where one can easily trail of the main path, which is to obtain a legally binding agreement in order to put a halt to climate change and reduce emissions. The conference is actually very much about

networking, create new contacts and promote oneself and one's organization. As IFSA don't have a political statement, we didn't actually have a "mission" being at the conference, differently from most other organizations. Our aim was to promote IFSA, get new contacts and just learn as much as possible by attending different events and by following the negotiations.

By the end of the two weeks I was a bit disappointed by the outcome of the negotiations, but at the same time I had an amazing learning experience. I boarded the flight back home with new knowledge and many new impressions on climate change and the difficulties of getting the whole world to agree on how to handle it.