

## Many "mays" but few "musts"

*A limp agreement at the UN's vaunted environmental summit*

A DEAL is one thing. A deal that means progress another. By the end of the three-day UN environment summit due to end on June 23rd in Rio de Janeiro, a hundred-plus national leaders and representatives were expected to approve a 283-point agreement negotiated in advance by their envoys. The gathering was called Rio+20, in reference to an important environment conference in the city in 1992. But the agreement this time was filled with weasel words and compromises.

Hidden among the caveats and hobby-horses in the provisional agreement, entitled "The Future We Want", were at least a clutch of potentially useful ideas and promises. One was a commitment to devise new environmentally friendly development benchmarks, in areas such as renewable energy and food security, to replace the millennium development goals, which expire in 2015. It also gave a small boost to scrapping fossil-fuel subsidies, which have rocketed in recent years, to an estimated annual cost of over \$400 billion. The International Energy Agency reckons binning these by 2020 would cut carbon-dioxide emissions by nearly 6%.

Yet, despite great pressure from greens and European governments, oil producers buried this in caveats, making it all but meaningless. The draft agreement merely invited governments to "consider rationalising inefficient fossil fuel subsidies...in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities."

Other draft recommendations were similarly diluted. A decision on managing the global oceans was postponed by three years. Critics say America blocked an effort, first mooted at the Stockholm Earth Summit 40 years ago, to make the UN's Environment Programme a fully fledged UN agency.

By the reckoning of WWF, a big green group, a preliminary version of the draft agreement included the word "encourage" 50 times and the phrase "we will" just five times; "support" appeared 99 times, but "must" only thrice. Once the draft agreement was approved, on June 19th, the EU's climate-change commissioner Connie Hedegaard tweeted: "Telling that nobody in that room adopting the text was happy. That's how weak it is."

Recent UN meetings on climate change have highlighted the difficulties of reaching ambitious deals between so many countries. And the distractions of the European debt crisis made this one especially inauspicious. Yet some had still hoped that Rio+20 would be better: greens are necessarily a hopeful lot. Memories of the 1992 Rio summit, which produced important global agreements on combating climate change and protecting biodiversity, as well as the presence of so many world leaders, had also inflated expectations. Besides Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, the leaders of, among others, France, Australia and India attended.

Also in Rio were many of the world's biggest companies, with some promising announcements. Nasdaq OMX and four other bourses said they would pressure listed companies into disclosing details of their environmental and social footprints.

Such unilateral promises and the likely Rio+20 agreement probably amounted to modest progress. But it was still a poor result for a summit billed by some as a "once in a generation" chance to save the planet from its intolerable burden.

**Fonte: The Economist, London, v. 403, n. 8790, p. 64, June 23th-29th, 2012.**