

Some of the expectations for this year’s Conference of Parties of the international climate treaty, the UNFCCC, related to its host country, South Africa. Many had hoped that the COP’s location in Africa this year would help to highlight the serious issue of climate change impacts in developing countries, often the least responsible for climate emissions but also the least well equipped to deal with floods, droughts, heat waves, and other harms.

So far in Durban, issues of loss, damage, and adaptation have been inescapable, with strings of countries relating stories of recent catastrophic events in their homelands that they link to climate risks. Somalia has talked about drought and famine; Thailand about its recent floods; Australia about wildfires; Pakistan about floods; and on. Strikingly, countries aren’t just expressing fears of future climate harms but are instead often focused on some of the many dramatic events we’ve see in 2010 or 2011.



The photo is of the delegate from Grenada, speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, one of the blocs with the most pressing moral claims for the need for better adaptation and mitigation action. She called for a mandate to complete a protocol parallel to the Kyoto Protocol with legally binding emission reduction targets; for the adoption of a second KP commitment period; and for the implementation of funding and adaptation promises made at last year’s meeting, in Cancun. Our presence in South Africa informed her comments as well—she closed by quoting Nelson Mandela for the view that “it always seems impossible, until it is done.”

Too hard to tell, at this early stage, whether those larger ambitions for the COP will be near to fulfilled.