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**Wall on climate change comes down**
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It is a start. That's the best assessment of the agreement produced by the
190-some governments at the United Nations climate change conference in Bali,
Indonesia, earlier this month. After an abrupt U-turn by the United States,
delegates reached consensus on a new framework for tackling global warming.

Significantly, this deal requires both developed and developing nations to
commit to measurable, verifiable action.

If implemented, the agreement could slow and perhaps even stop global climate
change. That is a big "if" and history is not encouraging.

It has been a decade since international negotiations produced the Kyoto
Protocol to the International Framework Convention on Climate Change. That
agreement was a first attempt to deal with global warming, but it proved
ineffective. Several governments resisted implementation, arguing that they
could not accept the limits to growth it would create, or that the exemption of
rapidly developing states producing greenhouse gases was unfair. While the
United States was generally castigated for being the chief offender, it was not
alone in opposition to Kyoto.

As doubts about the reality of climate change receded, the call for action grew.
The Kyoto Protocol's impending expiration date - it ends in 2012 - galvanized
international action. The Bali meeting was intended to provide a broad framework
that will yield, over two years, an agreement that will succeed Kyoto. Yet
despite virtual unanimity on both the seriousness of climate change and the need
for immediate action, Bali looked deadlocked.

The primary culprit was the U.S. The Bush administration has continued to reject
mandatory targets. U.S. delegates held out throughout the Bali meeting,
incurring considerable abuse in the process. Finally, after a dramatic
confrontation in which developing nation representatives asked the U.S. to at
least get out of the way, the American position changed.

The "Bali Roadmap" provides an agreement in principle to cut emissions by 2050.
All nations accepted that the 2009 Copenhagen conference will produce binding
targets as well as aid to developing countries that will help them mitigate the
effects of climate change and speed their adaptation to "greener" societies.
China and other developing nations agreed to measurable, reportable and
verifiable emissions cutting actions. Finally, a mechanism was established to
give tropical nations financial compensation for preserving rain forests.

Delegates were pleased with their work. Mr. Yvo de Boer, head of the U.N.
climate control program, said Bali had "delivered what it needed to do." In one
of those rhetorical flourishes that marks U.N. work, he concluded that "What
we've seen disappear today is what I would call 'the Berlin Wall of climate
change."'

While such hyperbole is to be expected, environmentalists applauded the Bali
outcome, while cautioning that the real work has yet to be done. Hard choices
have to be made and the crucial question of how to treat countries that violate
commitments is unanswered.

Scientists insist that two sets of numbers are the baseline for effective
action: 2 and 445 and "25 to 40." A rise of 2 degrees Celsius rise in
temperature and 445 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are
the ceilings that the planet can endure; a 25-to-40-percent reduction in
global-warming gases is required to maintain those levels.

Explicit language calling on industrialized countries to cut their emissions 25
to 40 percent from 1990 levels, by 2020, was cut from the Bali agreement. It was
referenced in a footnote, however.

As attention now shifts to negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen meeting,
Japan must become more active. There was disappointment in Japan's diplomacy at
Bali. The Japanese government provided a draft but it was skeletal. While
working as a mediator between the U.S. and other countries, there was criticism
of Japanese passivity.

Japan must end its passive role. Japan was instrumental in developing the Kyoto
Protocol and its companies are some of the most energy efficient in the world.
Japan is reportedly planning to put the environment front and center at the
upcoming Group of Eight conference that it will host next summer.

As this country seeks a higher international profile, few issues deserve more
attention and are better suited to Japanese strengths than climate change. As
the world focused on Bali, another group of scientists reported that the world
was reaching a "tipping point" at which climate change will become irreversible.
Bali is the first turn in a race whose finish line is rapidly approaching.