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SG/SD/RT/A(2009)3

Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Économiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

English - Or. English

GENERAL SECRETARIAT

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Round Table on Sustainable Development

COMPARING CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITMENTS: Political Versus Technical Judgement

**for the 24th meeting of the Round Table on Sustainable Development
New York City
21 September 2009**

English - Or. English

24TH ROUND TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COMPARING CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITMENTS: POLITICAL VERSUS TECHNICAL JUDGEMENT

Thomson-Reuters Headquarters
New York City
21 September 2009
14:00-16:30

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

This Round Table will address the issue of balancing political and technical judgements about what constitutes comparable climate change commitments amongst Annex I countries.

Being able to claim that there is comparability of effort in sharing the burden of reducing emissions is important for countries in addressing both global and domestic audiences. But it is an open question whether comparability claims will rest on the same grounds for both audiences.

Analytical methods can deliver transparent criteria upon which a “deal” can be evaluated. However, different research methods will give somewhat different results on what constitutes comparability. This leads to choices which need to be made over which analyses are more useful than others. At worst it can lead to suspicion about model results and concern that they reflect biases or particular national or sectoral interests.

1. The background paper provides illustrations of what simple analysis can tell us about comparability. Is there sufficient trust in analytical methods, such as these, for them to form a basis for ensuring or gauging comparability of efforts?

Analytical methods can be broadly categorised into simple indicator-based analyses which compare countries on the basis of known national circumstances and model-based analyses of likely national efforts, mitigation potential and costs. The former are simple and very transparent. The latter are sophisticated, more flexible but more complicated.

2. How much weight should be given to simplicity in analytical analysis of comparability of effort? Do models overly-complicate conversations about comparability?

Analytical methods may be extended to consider commitments across both emission caps and public financing contributions to developing country mitigation.

3. Would the inclusion of public financing yield a superior approach to comparability?

The deal struck in Kyoto gave considerable weight to political judgement. It may be that the deal struck in Kyoto was the best there was under the circumstances however this does not diminish the fact that it is difficult, ex post, to gauge the comparability of efforts encapsulated in that deal.

4. Did the absence of common measures of comparability in Kyoto lead, in retrospect, to a lowest common denominator outcome?

5. Would the absence of analytical judgement in decisions on post-2012 commitments risk delivering an outcome well short of what is needed?

Whatever the merits of analytical methods, they are not easily incorporated into the negotiating process under existing modalities, at least not without sufficient acceptance of their usefulness to the process and a willingness amongst Annex I parties to take ownership of a systematic analytical approach to ensuring comparability of effort.

6. Should Annex I parties seek to elevate the role of analytical approaches in the negotiating process and what might the best approach for doing this?