

# Comparability of Efforts

## A Brief Note

Jonathan Boston  
Institute of Policy Studies  
School of Government  
Victoria University of Wellington

July 2008

# Introduction

*Nothing could be worse than the fear that one had given up too soon, and left one unexpended effort that might have saved the world. (emphasis added)*

Jane Addams (Nobel Peace Prize, 1931)

# Bali Action Plan

## Paragraph 1 (b)(i)

... Measurable, reportable and verifiable nationally appropriate mitigation commitments or actions, including quantified emission limitation and reduction objectives, by all developed country Parties, **while ensuring the comparability of efforts among them**, taking into account differences in their national circumstances; ...

Qu: Why was this particular clause included, what does it mean, what does it add (or subtract), etc. ?

# Rationale for “comparability of efforts”

1. Unwillingness of all Annex 1 parties, especially the US, to take on Kyoto-type emission-reduction targets (i.e. ‘responsibility’ targets) for a second commitment/compliance period (e.g. 2013-20); hence “... mitigation commitments or actions ...”
2. “Actions” open-ended; could be “national” and/or “international”
3. How to avoid free-riding, and ensure parity (or fair sharing of the mitigation burden)?
4. Note lack of reference to “comparability of efforts” in relation to *developing* countries

# Defining “comparability of efforts”

1. “Comparability” derives from Latin (*comparo*):
  - Prefix “com” (with, together, jointly) and “par” (likeness or equal)
  - Meaning: capable of being compared; or similar (e.g. standard or quality); or identical or equal
2. “Effort” derives from Latin:
  - Prefix “ex” (out) and “fortis” (strong or force)
  - Meaning: earnest striving or attempt, or achievement or accomplishment (e.g. the book was the author’s *best effort*)
  - But the principle of ‘effort’ is usually distinguished from other desert-based principles of justice (i.e. merit, achievement or contribution)
3. “Comparability of efforts” – ambiguous, open-ended, but six broad conceptual options

# Defining 'comparability of efforts'

	Able to be compared	Similar/ alike	Equal/ equivalence
Hard work (e.g. to reduce emissions)	The efforts of the parties are able to be compared	The efforts of the parties are similar (on some relevant dimension)	The efforts of the parties are equal (on some relevant dimension)
Achieving a result (e.g. reduced emissions)	The efforts of the parties achieve results that are able to be compared	The parties achieve similar results (on some relevant dimension)	The parties achieve equal results (on some relevant dimension)

# Applying “comparability of efforts”

1. Resonates with Aristotelian principle of comparative justice or principle of like treatment (i.e. treat like cases alike and different cases differently, in direct proportion to the differences between them)
2. But this is a *formal* principle; it lacks substantive content, and needs *material* principles or criteria for determining the relevance of particular differences (e.g. responsibility, capacity, need, equality of some kind, etc.)

# Applying “comparability of efforts”

3. If the aim is to equalize mitigation efforts, there are various options (see Schmidt, et al. 2008):
  - equalize inputs, such as abatement costs or marginal abatement costs or total abatement costs per capita, etc. or
  - equalize outcomes (or endpoints), such as equal emissions per capita or equal emissions intensity (GHG/GDP), etc.

# Conclusions

1. At a minimum, “comparability of efforts” suggests that mitigation efforts must be *capable of being compared* (and thus reinforces “meaningful, reportable and verifiable” ...); implications for baselines and metrics
2. Accords with principle of comparative justice, but does not provide a distinctive material principle or criterion for differentiating the mitigation efforts of developed countries
3. It could imply *equal* effort, but this can be interpreted and measured in multiple ways
4. The emphasis on *efforts* does not necessarily weaken the Kyoto framework; but it does imply the need to compare *packages* of mitigation policies and measures (or *total effort*) rather than relying on a single metric