

CHAPTER 21

agreement mixed reviews. Many environmentalists and progressive activists were disappointed, criticizing it for lacking the binding targets of the Kyoto Protocol and for not going far enough to combat climate change. European leaders were pragmatic but clearly wished for more. Developing nations were wary but somewhat mollified by the promise of financial aid for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Nonetheless, as I debriefed with my team, I knew that we'd achieved a genuine breakthrough, however imperfect. For the first time, all major emitters, including China and India, had committed to concrete, albeit voluntary, actions to cut greenhouse gases. They agreed to a mechanism for transparency that, while not as robust as I'd hoped, laid the groundwork for future negotiations. And the pledge to help poorer nations adapt to climate change was a significant step toward addressing the global nature of the problem, recognizing that those who contributed least to the problem often faced the most severe consequences.

The Copenhagen Accord was not the comprehensive solution many had hoped for. But it represented a pivotal shift in international climate politics, moving beyond the binary of developed versus developing nations and recognizing the shared, but differentiated, responsibility of all nations to address the climate crisis. It was a foundation we could build on.

Arriving back in Washington, I reflected on the whirlwind negotiations and the complex tapestry of global politics, economics, and environmental science that had underpinned them. The experience reinforced my belief in the necessity of diplomacy, patience, and, when needed, the willingness to seize the moment with a mix of boldness and pragmatism. Climate change was a relentless foe, indifferent to our political squabbles and delays. The Copenhagen Accord might not have been the victory everyone wanted, but it was a step—an imperfect but forward-moving step—toward confronting one of the most daunting challenges of our time.