

Copenhagen is a ticking bomb

Demonstrations might turn into violent scenes, when thousands of activists meet in Copenhagen in December during the Climate summit.

By ADELJA SIUGZDINYTE AND MARTIN POULSEN

Cobblestones are thrown, teargas aches in people's eyes and cars are set on fire. The scenery has been very well known in Copenhagen in recent years and the police admit that it just might happen again in December.

"All we can do is to prepare as much as possible. We have done so for the last year, but we can not give the citizens any guarantees," says Mogens N. Lauridsen, Police Commissioner of the Copenhagen City Police.

While the police have planned for one year, the political outcome has been on its way since 1997. It is the follow up of the Kyoto protocol that is being planned, and a worldwide solution to the problems with CO2 emissions is to be schemed. An agreement of all 189 UN-countries is the goal, so much can go wrong. If USA won't join in on an agreement like they wouldn't with the Kyoto protocol, chances are that Copenhagen will blow up in fire.

"Normally it is the politics that decide how things

go. No political result often gets some people to act with violence," says Natasha Carstens, climate campaigner of Greenpeace. Mogens N. Lauridsen back up her statement:

"We know from football games that a wrong result can mean violent behaviour from big masses, so we can only imagine what will happen if the deal is not agreed upon."

Summit attracts criminals

So far it is impossible to say how many demonstrators will show up. The plans of the police are based on there being more than when the enlargement of EU where agreed upon in Denmark in 2002. Back then there were approximately 14.000. And it was then believed that about 10% would have been violent in case no agreement would have been made.

This year there might be more potential violent demonstrators as this deal is more complicated and less likely to be agreed upon. A research done for the Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology says that



Police cannot always control the crowd.

Photo: Martin Kiil Poulsen

low expectations to the summit might attract more violent demonstrators to go to Copenhagen.

But even before it is certain if there will be an acceptable political result or not, there are risks of violent demonstrations. The police will be present at all dem-

onstrations, and to some demonstrators this can be seen as a provocation.

"People in demonstrations get violent because they are frustrated, sometimes the police provoke, sometimes demonstrators, it depends on the situation," says Safania Eriksen of the Danish NGO NOAH.

NGOs work for a peaceful summit

By ADELJA SIUGZDINYTE AND MARTIN POULSEN

Preparations for peaceful demonstrations are already being made for the December 2009 Climate Summit in Copenhagen. The NGOs know that to get the attention of both media and activists they need to be well prepared.

"We started preparations for Copenhagen already a few months before the summit last December in Poznan," says Natasha Carstens, climate campaigner of Greenpeace Nordic.

Big crowds of activists are going to Copenhagen to bring their opinions during the summit. Most of them are not allowed inside the official buildings. It is therefore a big challenge for NGOs to activate and gather everybody in a peaceful way.

"We will have guards to organize our demonstrations. At least 200 campaign

workers will be present on spots when we are demonstrating," Says, Stig Melgaard, climate campaigner from NOAH, the Danish branch of Friends of the Earth.

"We are aware that some people want to make problems because that always happens," he reasoned.

To make demonstrations more peaceful NOAH plans to make a sort of a social forum, instead of traditional demonstrations on the street. Together with another Danish NGO Klimabevægelsen they are planning to book Øksnehallen, a multiarena in Copenhagen, for their event. Here they will have information stands and debates for activists so they can come and discuss their beliefs. It should be a peaceful place for activists so they have a place to go when they are tired of the traditional protests on the street.

Numerous activities

NOAH is far from alone to

have these thoughts. And though many NGOs are keeping their plans close to themselves until December, it is certain that The Danish Society for Nature Conservation are making a website for people to come and write their opinions on the summit. In Christiania, a small alternative Copenhagen community, a group is planning to hold a 'bottom meeting' in contrast to the official top meeting. In Christiania it should be regular people who will negotiate an alternative emission plan. These are just a few of the many projects local NGOs are making to keep Copenhagen safe during the December summit.

30 of these NGOs have built a network called Peoples Climate Action to coordinate activities during the summit. They all have the same goal of preventing violence from happening. And to ensure this they are getting help from the government.

"So far we have been

promised around 2,7 million euro from the ministry of foreign affairs, but of course we are hoping that more will come," says climate campaigner Natasha Carstens from Greenpeace.

The money can only be used towards making peaceful activities. But of course there will be traditional demonstrations as well. This is what most activists come for. And so far no one has any actual idea of how many people will show up.

"When the government asks us, we are saying between 10.000-15.000 people. But we really don't know," says Safania Eriksen climate campaigner from NOAH.

"We will try only to make peaceful demonstrations because this is what Greenpeace believes in," says Natasha Carstens. But with big crowds she argues that the NGOs can not be held responsible for nonmembers' actions.

"We can't control people's actions, and we can't

And when violence occur the NGOs in charge of the demonstrations will not be able to stop it.

"We can't stop the violence. It is not our job and we have no rights to involve in other people's actions," says Natasha Carstens of Greenpeace.

Mass arrests

During the last years riots in Copenhagen there have been incidents where whole masses have been arrested. At some events more than 200 has been arrested at one place and Mogens N. Lauridsen are ready to use that method again, though it can involve the arrest of several innocent people. In 2007 this was documented as a TV-journalist making a live report was among the arrestees.

"Mass arrests are not something we plan to do, but it is definitely an option. We always do what we believe is the best in every situation."

Learning new tricks

In order to find the best solutions the Danish police have been observing at the latest international summits, such as G8-meetings

and the previous summit on environmental change in Poznan last year. They are looking at how others deal with big summits and if there are any form of equipment or methods that can enhance the safety for demonstrators and citizens during the summit in Denmark. "We have tried to go to places where we think there might be violent demonstrations. And we learn every time about the newest trends and tricks troublemakers are using"

Though they are learning from others experiences, the Danish police can not promise safety for all during the summit. Preventing the use of cobblestone, teargas and burning cars is the challenge of a lifetime. A challenge that might blur the picture of what the summit is all about.

"We still don't know how big this summit will be. But everything points in the direction that this will be the biggest police assignment in the history of Denmark."



Preparations for the summit have started long time ago. Here the main building of the summit has been taken over by demonstrators from KlimaX.

Photo: KlimaX

do anything if people start acting in violent ways."