



## LEADERS OF MAJOR INDUSTRIAL NATIONS CLASH OVER CLIMATE CHANGE

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*Amid a growing call to address global climate change, the leaders of the major industrial nations are set to debate some of the most ambitious climate change proposals at an international meeting since the mid-1990s.*

The conversations will come this week in Heiligendamm, Germany, during the annual Group of Eight (G8) Summit, a gathering of the world's largest economic powers.

The host country, Germany, has proposed that the participating countries adopt a plan to "stabilize" global temperatures, keeping them from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Most scientists predict that if global temperatures rise more than this amount, changes to the climate could be catastrophic.

After six years of refusing to agree on a global framework for addressing global warming, President Bush issued his own plan for high-level talks on climate change among the world's 15 biggest emitters of greenhouse gases.

Greenhouse gasses, like carbon dioxide and methane, are components of the atmosphere that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to the process of global warming.

China, though not a member of the G8, will attend the summit and has recently released its first national plan to address climate change. Currently, China is the world's second biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, but it will likely become the biggest within a few years.

### **The G8 and climate change**

Members of the G8 are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Combined, these nations represent about two-thirds of the world's economy.

Germany's decision to focus on climate change at the G8 this year comes only months after an international panel of scientists convened by the United Nations published a report saying that it was "very likely" (more than 90 percent probable) that rising global temperatures are linked to human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels.

The topic is also taking on additional importance as the last major international treaty aimed at reducing emissions, the Kyoto Protocol, is set to expire.

## **The Kyoto Protocol**

Countries that signed the Kyoto Protocol committed to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions to levels at least 5 percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. The agreement was signed in 1997 but did not go into effect until 2005.

One hundred sixty-nine nations ultimately ratified the Kyoto Protocol. The United States, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, did not.

In 2001, President Bush said that he would not sign the agreement because it exempted some of the world's largest nations and biggest polluters, China and India, from reducing their emissions.

Under the agreement, China and India were exempted because they were developing economically and facing challenges cutting emissions while trying to expand their industries. The Bush administration argued that the two countries would have an unfair economic advantage if they weren't required to reduce their emissions.

## **A new international framework**

President Bush's recent proposal would bring both India and China to the negotiating table, starting this fall. Each of the 15 countries included in the talks -- which produce 85 percent of world greenhouse gases -- would be responsible for coming up with its own plan to reduce emissions between 2012 and 2030.

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel initially welcomed Mr. Bush's push for talks on climate change, calling it an "important step forward." But she also cautioned that the talks should not replace United Nations negotiations and will continue to advocate for a stabilization of global temperatures.

Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations' secretary-general, called the White House proposal, "a positive statement, in the sense that the United States, at the level of President Bush, has realized the urgency and importance of climate change," the New York Times reported.

Ban Ki-moon has plans to renew talks on climate change within the United Nations this fall. The White House has already given assurances that the president's talks would "feed into" this discussion, the Financial Times reported.

## **China's role**

China, in the meantime, has said that it is against mandatory caps on emissions and rejects Germany's goal of stabilizing world temperatures, saying they both run counter to its development goals.

Yet Ma Kai, chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic planning body, said that the nation is "ready to work with the rest of the world community to reduce the effects of global warming," Bloomberg News reported.

China's recently released plan addressing climate change would focus on increasing energy efficiency and work to cut its greenhouse gas output, by adopting hydropower, nuclear energy and biomass fuels.

-- *Compiled by Noah Buhayar for NewsHour Extra*

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