



WORLD LEADERS RECONVENE TO DISCUSS GLOBAL WARMING GOALS

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Leaders from 189 countries are meeting in the Kenyan capital Nairobi to revisit the United Nations' global warming reduction effort, the Kyoto Protocol.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, a product of an international treaty on climate change, was ratified by 165 countries between 2005 and 2006. It requires 35 industrialized countries to cut greenhouse gases emissions to 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Global warming threats

International scientists with the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change say human-made greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide from fuel consumption could lead to an increase in global temperature by 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius between 1990 and 2100 if significant action is not taken.

The group says the resulting change in global climates and rise in sea level could lead to water shortages, massive population displacement, decreased food production and extensive species extinction.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan put Africa high on the agenda of the climate change meeting. He announced the launch of the Nairobi Framework, a two-year plan that would promote alternative energy sources for developing nations and raise money to protect those nations from climate change.

He said though African countries contribute a relatively small amount of global warming gases, they would be the most harmed by climate change.

"The question is not whether climate change is happening, but whether, in the face of this emergency, we ourselves can change fast enough," he said.

Countries rejecting the Kyoto Protocol

Australia and the United States -- the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter -- are the only two major industrialized countries to reject the Kyoto Protocol.

"If they do not sign the Kyoto agreement, they have to act and be in step with the rest of the

world, the rest of the industrialized world," said Annan, according to the Australian Associated Press.

Though White House spokesman Tony Snow said earlier in the week that climate change was a priority for President Bush, Harlan Watson, the main U.S. representative at the Nairobi meeting, told reporters it was unlikely that the president would ratify the Kyoto Protocol anytime in the next two years even with pressure from the United Nations and other countries.

The Bush administration objected to the Kyoto Protocol because developing nations that produce significant amounts of greenhouse gases do not have to meet the same goals as developed nations.

For example, China, a rapidly developing nation exempted from the Kyoto Protocol, is predicted to surpass the United States in carbon emissions within three years, according to an International Energy Agency report. India and Brazil are two other highly populated countries of concern because their pollution levels are growing as quickly as their economies. These countries have rejected emissions limits.

And though each of the Kyoto member countries had agreed to decrease carbon dioxide emissions, many have failed and the actual levels of carbon dioxide have been increasing globally at a rate of about 1 percent each year.

Economic impact of climate change

The United States also has argued that voluntary emission reduction programs can work better than the Kyoto Protocol, and that excessive limits would harm economic growth.

But Annan said it would cost nations more in the future if they don't invest enough to address climate change now.

"Too often climate change is seen as an environmental problem when it should be part of the broader development and economic agenda. Until we acknowledge the all-encompassing nature of the threat, our response will fall short," Annan said.

The secretary-general's remarks echo those of former World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern who said last month that the world's response to global warming is "the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen."

Using the most dramatic estimates available, Stern predicted the cost to control greenhouse gas emissions to be about 1 percent of the world's economic production, but could rise to 5 percent and 20 percent of the world's economic production if no action is taken.

Next steps

Though most members were skeptical that the conference would produce new targets beyond the 2012 Kyoto Protocol expiration date, there is hope for progress.

"It will be a series of steps, on the overall understanding that the deal will be done in time for the parties to ratify before the end of 2012." Michael Zammit Cutajar, chairman of the post-2012 talks, said, Reuters reported.

"Tackling climate change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term, and it can be done in a way that does not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries," said European Union nations who have called for a new round of Kyoto-like emissions cuts.

The British government pledged Wednesday to pass a law requiring a cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 60 percent by 2050.

However, Cutajar said many countries are reluctant to submit to further controls while the United States is not at the negotiating table.

-- *Compiled by Adnaan Wasey for NewsHour Extra*

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