



PRESSURE MOUNTS FOR U.S. TO JOIN KYOTO TREATY

Policymakers, scientists and activists are on the island of Bali, Indonesia, this week to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations treaty on climate change.

The two weeks of talks come amid increasingly dire warnings about the warming of the planet.

In mid-November, the Nobel Prize-winning scientists on the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report stating that greenhouse gas emissions must begin to decline by 2015 and be cut at least in half by 2050 to avert global disasters like drought, rising seas and mass extinctions of species.

Australia signs on

Against this backdrop, the Bali conference's aim is to begin negotiations for an emissions-reduction treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which will expire in 2012.

The protocol, which 175 nations agreed to in 1997, requires 36 industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2010.

Until this week, the United States and Australia were the only two developed countries not signed on to the accord. They argue that the rigorous goals outlined in the Kyoto accord would unfairly harm their economies, while not addressing the rising emissions of rapidly developing countries like China and India.

But Australia changed that Monday when the new prime minister, Kevin Rudd, immediately signed documents to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, ending his country's decade of opposition.

"This is the first official act of the new Australian government, demonstrating my government's commitment to tackling climate change," Rudd said in a statement.

Complicated negotiations

The U.N. hopes the Bali talks are open enough to bring in both the United States and developing countries -- which are not required to make any emissions cuts under Kyoto. The goal is to complete the negotiations by 2009 and give countries time to ratify and implement the treaty by 2012.

Some U.N. leaders say public opinion has changed since 1997. "There is an unprecedented awareness among the public and leaders now. This augurs some seriousness towards the

discussions that take place and the negotiation of post-2012 commitments," Rajendra K. Pachauri, chairman of the IPCC, told reporters.

President Bush's perspective

In recent days, the administration has reiterated its position that it doesn't plan to make any commitments to specific emissions reductions in Bali.

In a statement released last week, President Bush said, "Our guiding principle is clear: we must lead the world to produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and we must do it in a way that does not undermine economic growth or prevent nations from delivering greater prosperity for their people."

Paula Dobriansky, the under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs representing the United States in Bali, said that any new agreement should involve all the world's major economies.

"We feel very strongly about having a global framework here," she said. "In order to have a global framework there has to be an effort here to determine how one can engage all the players. In order to do that there has to be some flexibility in this," she said.

Carbon emissions markets

One focus of the negotiations is expected to be "cap and trade" schemes, in which power plants and other carbon intensive factories can "buy" pollution credits that allow them to pollute while they try to figure out how to lower their emissions. Trading in the permits hit \$30 billion last year, according to the World Bank.

The European Union Emission Trading Scheme (or EU ETS), the largest greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme in the world, was created to meet the goals set out for European nations in the Kyoto Protocol.

Countries such as Indonesia, the summit's host, want to add credits from "avoided deforestation" to the new rules.

Currently, carbon offsets are only available for tree-planting, not preservation.

Destruction of Indonesian tropical forests to clear land for money-making plantation crops such as palm oil releases so many tons of carbon into the atmosphere that Indonesia ranks in third behind the U.S. and China as the top emitters of greenhouse gases, according to the World Bank.

However, some diplomats worry that expanding the cap and trade markets too much could make them less effective at curbing the consumption of fossil fuels.

The cap-and-trade system was "a brilliant idea," said Michael Zammit Cutajar, a Maltese diplomat who helped create the carbon market. But, he told the Wall Street Journal, market

forces have found ways to buy credits the easiest way, which gives polluters an "out" from reducing emissions.

-- *Compiled by Leah Clapman for NewsHour Extra*

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