



If the rich don't lead, the poor world won't heed

What is needed is the will to reduce carbon emissions and money to launch programs

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Developing countries, including China and India, are unwilling to sign up to a new global climate change pact to replace the Kyoto Protocol in 2012 because the rich world has failed to set a clear example on cutting carbon emissions, the UN's top climate official said.

Rajendra Pachauri, head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said too many rich countries, including the US, had failed to take the action needed to convince the developing nations to sign up to a deal in Copenhagen next year that could help to stabilize global emissions.

"You may not be able to get an agreement in one shot, let's say by Copenhagen, that sets you on the path of stabilization in keeping with some kind of long-term target," Pachauri said. "Looking at the politics of the situation, I doubt whether any of the developing countries will make any commitments before they have seen the developed countries take a specific stand."

He said there were "reasons for dismay" at the rich countries' failure to cut carbon emissions.

"This really doesn't give anybody the conviction that those that had agreed to take action as the first step are really serious about doing so. And in several developing countries you get the feeling — in fact people state it very clearly — that these guys [rich countries] are going to shove the whole burden on to our shoulders. That's why it's necessary for the developed world to establish a certain credibility," he said.

Pachauri said Germany had set a good example, with significant investment in renewable energy, and Britain had done "quite well." The UK is on track to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions as required under Kyoto, but will miss a separate domestic goal to reduce carbon dioxide pollution by 20 percent on 1990 levels by 2010. If emissions from aviation and shipping are included, Britain's carbon dioxide emissions are higher now than in 1990.

Analysts say a new global deal needs to be agreed at the Copenhagen meeting for it to come into force by 2012, because it will take several years to be ratified by countries. If a new deal is not in place when Kyoto expires, then confidence in emerging carbon trading markets — seen as a key way to reduce greenhouse gas pollution — could collapse. Schemes such as the European emissions trading scheme, set up under Kyoto, force polluting companies to invest in carbon credits or cleaner technology, but rely on carbon caps continuing past 2012.

Pachauri, who is also director general of the Energy and Resources Institute in New Delhi, India, said: “I don’t think they [China and India] will come on board in the first round. I think they would like to see some level of ambition on the part of the developed countries before they make any voluntary commitments of their own.”

Last year Pachauri, an economist and environmental scientist, collected the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the IPCC, which it won jointly with former YB vice president Al Gore. The IPCC analyzes the state of climate science and issues reports that form the foundation for international action under the UN.

Any reluctance by China to participate in a new agreement would spell problems for the new US president, who could sign a deal in Copenhagen next year and then find it rejected by the US Senate. Several leading figures in the US have said the Senate would be unlikely to pass a new treaty that did not require China to act on its soaring carbon emissions. All three presidential candidates have promised stronger domestic action on global warming, and are expected to play a more constructive role in the search for a new international treaty than the Bush administration.

Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, told an IPCC meeting in Budapest this week that it would be “very, very difficult” to reach an agreement. He warned that if the carbon emissions of China and India continue to grow at the same pace as their economies, mankind would be unable to prevent a critical level of warming.

Pachauri said there was still time for the developed countries to convince India and China to sign a new deal next year, but that it would require a series of “measures and actions” in the next few months.

He urged other rich countries to follow Europe’s lead and set ambitious carbon reduction targets for the next 10 years. He said more money was needed to help poorer countries adapt to the likely impact of global warming, as well as “some tangible efforts to make technology transfer a reality.”

Rich countries could help China to invest in more efficient coal power stations, for example. “If there was low interest financing of some of these measures, it would make it very attractive to developing countries.”

Britain and the US have pledged support for new World Bank funds to support climate adaptation and technology transfer, but poorer countries and green campaigners are more skeptical, and would prefer the money to be administered through the UN. Rich countries have failed to keep similar promises in the past — only £ 90 million (US\$177.3 million) of a promised £ 600 million to pay for adaptation measures had been delivered to a Global Environment Facility fund by the end of last year.

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