

Copenhagen: U.S.-China Climate Negotiations Get Hot

Michael Casey & Seth Borenstein, Associated Press Writers

COPENHAGEN (AP) — President Barack Obama and other world leaders took stalled climate talks into their own hands Friday, holding an emergency meeting to come up with a political agreement to salvage a conference marked by deep divisions between rich and poor countries.

But neither Obama nor Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao offered any new commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions as they addressed the U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen. And Wen skipped the high-level meeting, sending an envoy instead.

With the talks in disarray Friday, many delegates had been looking toward China and the U.S. — the world's two largest carbon polluters — to deepen their pledges to cut emissions to salvage a deal in Copenhagen.

"We are ready to get this done today but there has to be movement on all sides to recognize that is better for us to act rather than talk," Obama said, insisting on a transparent way to monitor each nation's pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Wen told delegates that China's voluntary targets of reducing its carbon intensity by 40 to 45 percent will require "tremendous efforts."

"We will honor our word with real action," Wen said.

China has been criticized at the two-week summit for not offering stronger carbon emissions targets and for resisting international monitoring of its actions. After the impromptu high-level meeting, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said progress in the climate talks was being held back by China.

An early draft of the climate agreement, obtained by The Associated Press, called for rich countries to mobilize \$30 billion over the next three years to help poor countries cope with the effects of global warming, scaling up to \$100 billion a year by 2020.

But it called for continued negotiations on targets for emission cuts, with a deadline of a climate conference in Mexico City in December next year.

The lack of progress meant Obama changed the word "agreement" from his prepared speech to negotiators to "framework I just outlined."

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon told climate negotiators that "the finishing line is in sight," reminding them that "the world is watching."

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And Brazilian president Luiz Lula da Silva told the joint session of negotiators how frustrated he was that the job was left to heads of state after talks ran into the wee hours Friday.

"I am not sure if such an angel or wise man will come down to this plenary and put in our minds the intelligence that we lacked," Lula said. "I believe in God. I believe in miracles."

To move the talks forward, Lula said Brazil, a developing country, would give money to help other developing countries cope with the costs of global warming.

Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs said the U.S. president met with world leaders Friday from wealthy nations like Australia, the United Kingdom, France and Germany and developing countries like Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Colombia.

China and Russia, both seen as key participants in climate change discussions, also were at the meeting with Obama.

Delegates earlier were blaming both the U.S. and China for the lack of a political agreement that more than 110 world leaders were supposed to sign within hours.

The conference has been plagued by growing distrust between rich and poor nations. Both sides blamed the other for failing to take ambitious actions to tackle climate change. At one point, African delegates staged a partial boycott of the talks.

World leaders handed off a three-page draft text about 3 a.m. time to their ministers and they continued to work on it through the night. But by 5 a.m., negotiators from Mexico and the G-77 plus China said they were nowhere near agreement on the final document.

"It is now up to world leaders to decide," said Swedish Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren.

Carlgren, negotiating on behalf of the 27-nation European Union, blamed the morning's impasse on the Chinese for "blocking again and again," and on the U.S. for coming too late with an improved offer, a long-range climate aid program announced Thursday by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

A leading African delegate, meanwhile, complained bitterly about the proposed declaration.

"It's weak. There's nothing ambitious in this text," Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan, a leader of the developing nations bloc, said Friday.

Any agreement was expected, at best, to envision emissions-cutting targets for rich nations and billions in climate aid for poor countries, but fall well short of the goal of a legally binding pact. If the political deal is done, it would still be seen by many as a setback, following two years of intense negotiations to agree on new emissions reductions and financial support for poorer nations.

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China and the U.S had sought to give the negotiations a boost on Thursday with an announcement and a concession.

Clinton said Washington would press the world to come up with a climate aid fund amounting to \$100 billion a year by 2020, a move that was quickly followed by an offer from China to open its reporting on actions to reduce carbon emissions to international review.

That issue — money to help poor nations cope with climate change and shift to clean energy — seemed to be where negotiators at the 193-nation conference could claim most success.

Pollution cuts and the best way to monitor those actions remained unresolved. And negotiators also didn't come to an agreement on an important procedural issue — just what legal form a future deal would take.

Yvo de Boer, the U.N.'s top climate official, said early Friday that a political declaration needed to include a deadline for agreeing on a replacement for the Kyoto Protocol, whose modest emission cuts for 37 industrialized nations expire in 2012. The U.S. rejects Kyoto and would be covered by a separate eventual agreement.

"You can reach an agreement here that sets out major political contours, a long-term goal, targets for industrialized countries, engagement by major developing countries, financing," he told The Associated Press. "But people will want to see a clear deadline that turns that into a legally binding instrument."

Delegates filtering out of the predawn discussions Friday sounded disappointed.

"It's a political statement, but it isn't a lot," said Chinese delegate Li Junhua.

"It would be a major disappointment. A political declaration would not guarantee our survival," said Selwin Hart, a delegate from Barbados speaking for the Alliance of Small Island States, many of which are threatened by seas rising from global warming.

Clinton's announcement on funding was widely praised. Yoshiko Kijima, a senior Japanese negotiator, said it sent a strong signal by Obama "that he will persuade his own people that we need to show something to developing countries. I really respect that."

But none of the leaders at the summit offered to increase their emissions targets, which the United Nations has concluded would fall far short of what is needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Sudan's Lumumba said the agreement that was being worked on included a goal of keeping temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees C above preindustrial levels, a ceiling a half-degree warmer than developing nations demand.

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Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere have already increased global temperatures by 0.7 degrees C (1.3 degrees F) since the Industrial Age.

A U.N.-sponsored scientific panel says any further rise to above 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F) more than preindustrial temperatures could lead to a catastrophic sea-level rise threatening islands and coastal cities, the die-off of many animal and plant species, and damaging storms and drought.

An internal U.N. calculation, obtained by The Associated Press, said pledges made so far by both industrial and developing countries would mean a 3-degree Celsius (4.8-degree Fahrenheit) temperature rise over preindustrial levels.

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Associated Press writers Arthur Max and Karl Ritter contributed to this report.

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