

December 13, 2008

Amid a Hopeful Mood, U.N. Talks Set Countries on Path Toward a Global Climate Treaty

By [ELISABETH ROSENTHAL](#)

POZNAN, Poland — The [United Nations](#) climate talks concluded here early Saturday, having seemingly achieved their modest goals and then some: setting the world on the track to a new global climate treaty with a renewed sense of purpose and momentum.

The final documents produced at the conference contained a few groundbreaking elements, most notably giving nations credit for saving forests and opening up a long-planned fund to help poor countries adapt to [climate change](#). However, many countries complained bitterly that the fund did not provide adequate financing.

Perhaps contributing most to the hopeful mood were signs from high-level United States officials that the incoming administration of President-elect [Barack Obama](#) would be ready to hit the ground running with a new United States climate policy.

“This is a challenge of leadership, and we have an enormous obligation to meet it,” said Senator [John Kerry](#), Democrat of Massachusetts, who will be chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and who has been here for past two days meeting with officials from various countries, including China and Australia.

The new administration and the Congress “are all on the same page,” he said. “The U.S. has to act, we must lead and we need to have mandatory emissions targets.”

The United States would need to have its climate negotiation team in place by late January or early February, Mr. Kerry said, so that it could be “confident” of shaping the next treaty negotiating session, scheduled for March in Bonn, Germany. Nations are aiming to have a treaty finished at a final negotiating session in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Mr. Obama has said he wants to return to 1990 greenhouse-gas emissions levels by 2020, but Mr. Kerry said he personally felt the cuts should be deeper. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said nations would need to reduce emissions 25 to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 in order to avert the serious and potentially disastrous consequences of climate change.

The struggles the [European Union](#) has had in passing its own climate and energy package, which was announced on Friday after rancorous negotiations in Brussels, showed how difficult it can be to get businesses to cut emissions or invest in clean technology against the backdrop of a global recession.

Environmental groups like [Greenpeace](#) said the European Union package “watered down” an ambitious program by giving too many carbon credits for free, allowing some industries broad exceptions to the

emissions limits and giving countries too much leeway to offset pollution at home by investing in green projects overseas.

“Just at the time that the U.S. is finally re-engaging with the international community on climate, it looks like the E.U.’s leadership is dropping away,” said Joris den Blanken, the European climate and energy director for Greenpeace.

Still, many here took heart that the European Union package did not backslide on previously announced commitments to reduce emissions by 2020 to 20 percent below 1990 levels. Indeed, they said the fights in Brussels demonstrated the flexibility of a so-called cap and trade system and were a preview of struggles to come in the United States. Under such a system, which is planned by the new administration, limits are placed on emissions by companies or industries; and if those limits are exceeded, carbon credits must be purchased from others who have not reached their limit.

“The most important thing is that they were not revisiting their targets,” said Elliot Diringer, vice president of international strategies at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

Indeed, the combination of a progress here, a new European Union package and the change of administrations in Washington left many delegates and environmental advocates here echoing the words of the Bellona Foundation, the largest environment group in Norway: “Now the ball is rolling.”

“The expectations for this meeting weren’t high, but there have been good developments and the E.U. package makes me happy,” said Frederic Hauge, chief of Bellona, noting that the package contains billions of dollars for developing new clean technology. Still, some environmental groups left Poznan unsatisfied. “Over all we are disappointed,” said Savio Carvalho, of Oxfam Uganda, noting that developed nations seemed too consumed with their own financial troubles to provide genuine assistance to poorer countries.

The conference mostly set out to define the final outlines of a treaty that will be negotiated over the next year, and in that regard “the meeting got done what was needed,” Mr. Diringer said.

At the same time, battle lines were drawn for the coming year. Under the previous treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, industrialized nations had to commit to emissions reduction targets, while developing nations did not. The United States never ratified the Kyoto Protocol.

That formula may no longer be acceptable, Mr. Kerry suggested, since some developing nations now contribute heavily to global greenhouse-gas emissions. China and India are the world’s No. 1 and No. 3 emitters, respectively. The United States is No. 2.

While Mr. Kerry said that no one expected China to accept the same kind of emissions commitment as industrialized countries, “they will have to have some kind of target or we will not be able to ratify the agreement.”

Another point of contention was control of a fund that had been created to help poor countries respond to climate change. The European Union initially proposed that an outside group like the [World Bank](#) do the job. But that angered many poor countries, and the proposal was dropped.

“We need something simple and responsive that developing countries control,” said Masao Nakayama, the ambassador of the Federated States of Micronesia to the United Nations. “There’s a fire, and it’s like they’re arguing about whether to use a plastic bucket or a metal bucket or a hose.”

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