

Report: Climate science panel needs change at top

August 30 2010, By SETH BORENSTEIN , AP Science Writer

(AP) -- Scientists reviewing the acclaimed but beleaguered international climate change panel called Monday for major changes in the way it's run, but stopped short of calling for the ouster of the current leader.

The independent review of the UN climate change panel puts new pressure on panel chairman Rajendra Pachauri, who has been criticized for possible conflicts of interest, but shows no sign of stepping down.

"It's hard to see how the United Nations can both follow the advice of this committee and keep Rajendra Pachauri on board as head," said Roger Pielke Jr., a frequent critic of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The professor at University of Colorado praised the review findings as a way of saving the climate panel with "tough love."

Representatives of the world's science academies outlined a series of "significant reforms" in management structure needed by the IPCC, a body that won a Nobel Prize with former Vice President Al Gore in 2007.

Last year, a batch of errors embarrassed the authors of the climate report. Among the most prominent were misleading statements about glaciers in the Himalayas. The IPCC incorrectly said they were melting faster than others and that they would disappear by 2035 - hundreds of years earlier than other information suggests.

"Those errors did dent the credibility of the process, no question about

it," said former Princeton University president Harold Shapiro, who led the review of the IPCC.

Pachauri, an academic from India who also is a professor at Yale, said many of the specific recommendations outlined are ones that he already has started. Critics, including those in the U.S. Senate, have called upon him to resign, but on Monday he gave no indication he would.

"This has nothing to do with personalities," Pachauri told The Associated Press. "I think we're jumping the gun if we're talking about taking any action before the IPCC takes a look at the report."

Shapiro said if fundamental changes are made, the IPCC - created in 1989 by the United Nations and World Meteorological Organization - can regain its credibility. The IPCC involves scientists mostly volunteering work with only 10 staffers, and even Pachauri is a part-time volunteer.

The 113-page review was requested by the IPCC and the UN after the errors were found. It didn't look at the quality of the science itself, only how it was produced. Shapiro said the science behind the climate report was still credible, telling The Associated Press, "All the key recommendations that are really important are well supported by the scientific evidence."

Other outside reports - including those by the British, Dutch and American governments - have upheld the chief scientific finding of the IPCC - that global warming is man-made and incontrovertible.

Still, Shapiro said the way the report expressed confidence in scientific findings was incomplete and at times even misleading. In the panel's first report, which is about the physical causes of global warming, scientists may have underestimated how confident they were in their conclusions,

Shapiro said. But the second report, about the effects on daily life, in at least one instance claimed high confidence when there was no backing for that, he said.

The InterAcademy Council, a collection of the world's science academies, said the climate change group overall does a good job. But the council said it needs a full-time executive director, more openness and regular changes in leadership. It also called for stronger enforcement of how it reviews its research and adoption of conflict of interest rules. The conflict of interest issue was raised because of criticism last year of chairman Pachauri's work as adviser and board member of green energy companies.

Pachauri said he has been cleared on conflict claims, especially since he gave away all money he was paid to sit on companies' boards. Until the overall group of governments that runs the IPCC tells him to leave, Pachauri said his mandate "is very very clear" and it is to work on the next report and incorporate the reform suggested by the InterAcademy Council.

Achim Steiner, the executive director of the U.N. Environment Program, said the review would help the IPCC recover some of the credibility it lost in many people's eyes when it came under "assault" from some quarters last year.

"There really was a concerted effort to attack the integrity and credibility of the world's premier science review body on climate change," Steiner said in a telephone interview. Heated debates over [climate change](#) will likely continue, said Steiner, but the new report restores "in the public mind a level of confidence which is critical for the IPCC's work to be used as a basis for international negotiations and policy making."

More information: The InterAcademy Council's review:
<http://reviewipcc.interacademycouncil.net/>
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

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