

Delegates told to ID achievable goals on climate

October 4 2010, By TINI TRAN , Associated Press Writer



U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres stands in front of a poster made by Green Peace before the opening of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Tianjin, China, Monday, Oct. 4, 2010. China, the world's biggest carbon emitter, opened the U.N. conference on climate change aimed at narrowing differences before a major year-end meeting in Mexico. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan)

(AP) -- The U.N. climate chief urged countries Monday to search faster for common ground on battling climate change so that a year-end meeting in Mexico can produce results in that fight.

Christiana Figueres told 3,000 delegates in China - the last conference before Cancun - that countries must identify achievable goals ahead of December's summit so progress can be made toward a global climate treaty.

"As governments, you can continue to stand still or move forward. Now is the time to make that choice," she told delegates in the northern port of Tianjin.

"If you want a tangible outcome in December, now is the time to clarify what could constitute an achievable and politically balanced package for Cancun, and what could be subject to further work after Cancun," she said.

With a binding global deal largely out of reach for this year, negotiators in Tianjin will focus on smaller initiatives that can lay the foundation for a legal framework that could be approved later, possibly in South Africa in 2011.

The scaled-down ambitions are largely due to the collapse of climate talks in Copenhagen last year, when political leaders failed to produce a global and legally binding treaty on curbing the greenhouse gases that cause global warming. Instead, nations agreed to a nonbinding political declaration on fighting climate change.

Expectations still are small because countries remain deadlocked over the same issues. Distrust has only deepened between industrialized and developing countries over how to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

As the host, China will seek to reduce those differences, said State Counselor Dai Bingguo, the country's top foreign policy official, who urged countries to renew efforts in order to "hammer out a binding agreement at an early date."

Since a single climate package deal is unlikely, the focus has turned to finding areas of agreement on essential components, including financing and transfer of clean technology and ways of reducing deforestation.

Ultimately, if talks in Cancun fail to produce concrete results, the entire U.N. process could be in jeopardy, said Artur Runge-Metzger, a negotiator with the European Commission.

"If Cancun does not produce a solid outcome ... then I think it risks becoming irrelevant in the eyes of the rest of the world," he said.
"Decision-making will go to some other forum."

Much of what needs to happen in Tianjin is the less tangible task of restoring trust and some momentum in order to "set the stage for what's realistically possible in Cancun," said Jake Schmidt, international climate policy director for the U.S.-based Natural Resources Defense Council.

Two of the key pieces will be financing and transparency, he said. At Copenhagen, rich countries had pledged to give \$30 billion over three years in climate funding to poor nations, rising to a total of \$100 billion dollars annually by 2020, but little money has materialized.

"It's critical that countries move on really delivering the 'prompt-start' funding and show those commitments are real. We have a long history of developed countries promising a lot of money and not committing, so it's a chance for developed countries to prove this time is different," he said.

With China playing host to the climate talks for the first time, it has the opportunity to highlight its own commitment to clean energy, said Deborah Seligsohn, a Beijing-based adviser with the World Resources Institute.

Last year, China pledged it would cut its carbon intensity - emissions per unit of GDP - by 40 to 45 percent by 2020 from the 2005 level. Nationwide efforts have also been made to reach the goal of improving energy efficiency by 20 percent from 2005 to 2010.

"They're serious and they chose something that's not easy," she said.

"China has redoubled domestic efforts since Copenhagen. I don't think anyone can doubt that. China wants people to look at what they're doing on the ground. They'll use this as an opportunity to do that."

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Citation: Delegates told to ID achievable goals on climate (2010, October 4) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-told-id-goals-climate.html>

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