

Compromise spirit at climate talks in last days

December 7 2010, By CHARLES J. HANLEY , AP Special Correspondent



An activist from Via Campesina, an international movement of peasants, holds a container filled with incense during the 'Global Forum for Life, Environmental and Social Justice', an alternative event parallel to the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico, Monday, Dec. 6, 2010. According to the UN weather agency, 2010 is "almost certain" to rank among the three hottest years on record, and the 2001-2010 decade is the warmest period since the beginning of weather records in 1850. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)

(AP) -- It may not last, but a spirit of compromise seems to have settled over the annual U.N. climate conference as negotiators enter its final days looking for agreements on secondary tools for coping with global warming.

The open sniping between the U.S. and China that marked periodic talks

earlier this year was not in evidence Monday as the second week of the two-week meeting got under way.

"There were heated discussions at Copenhagen. Here the atmosphere is relatively mild," China's climate chief, Xie Zhenhua, told reporters.

He was referring to the intense talks in the Danish capital last December that failed to produce a hoped-for binding pact requiring substantial cuts in emissions of [carbon dioxide](#) and other industrial, agricultural and transport gases blamed for [global warming](#).

No such overall emissions deal is expected at the negotiations under the U.N. [climate treaty](#) here, where environment ministers and other negotiators from the 193 treaty nations are to wrap up their talks on Friday.

They are aiming to reach agreements on such side issues as laying the groundwork for a "green fund" of \$100 billion a year by 2020. Financed by richer nations, the fund would support poorer nations in converting to cleaner energy sources and in adapting to a shifting climate that may damage people's health, agriculture and economies in general.

Underlining the climate challenge, the U.N. Environment Program on Monday reported on the impact of global warming in Latin America.

"The effects of climate change in the region are already significant," it said, citing a surge in extreme climatic events, with a sharp rise in the number of people affected by [extreme temperatures](#), forest fires, droughts, storms and floods growing from 5 million over the 1970s to more than 40 million in 2000-2009.

It also said that malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases that 40 years ago afflicted just a few countries in the Caribbean and Latin America

can now be found, with warming, in the vast majority.

Cancun's spirit of compromise may be most needed in the coming days' debates over limited gestures proposed in the area of emissions reductions.

The U.S. has long refused to join the rest of the industrialized world in the Kyoto Protocol, a 1997 add-on to the climate treaty that mandates modest emissions reductions by richer nations, and whose commitments expire in 2012. The U.S. complained Kyoto would hurt its economy and should have mandated actions as well by such emerging economies as China and India.

For their part, those poorer but growing nations have rejected calls that they submit to Kyoto-style legally binding commitments - not to reduce emissions, but to cut back on emissions growth. Their first obligation, these governments say, is to develop their economies, not hobble them.

"We still have 150 million people under the poverty line," Xie told reporters Monday.

In a nonbinding Copenhagen Accord last December, an agreement not accepted by all treaty parties, the U.S. and other industrial nations announced targets for reducing emissions by 2020, and China and some other developing nations set goals, also voluntary, for cutting back on the growth of their emissions.

Many parties now want to have those voluntary targets "anchored" more formally in a document emerging from the Cancun talks. At the same time, developing countries are pressing for the industrial nations to commit in Cancun to a second Kyoto period, further mandatory cutbacks beyond 2012 - a demand resisted by Japan, Russia and others who won't submit to more legally binding emissions cuts until the U.S., China and

some others take on binding targets under treaty.

It's the kind of negotiating impasse custom-made for creative diplomacy and lawyerly wordcraft.

Late Monday, looking for a middle ground on these post-2012 commitments, diplomats searched "for some kind of a political message from Cancun included in the Cancun final decision that there will be a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, although no numbers will be decided upon at this stage," said Brazilian negotiator Sergio Serra.

The wordcraft was already being practiced by China's Xie. With linguistic sleight-of-hand, he told reporters that his country's ambitious energy-efficiency plans represented "binding" targets - although the obligation will be owed only to China's National People's Congress, not to the international community.

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