

# Intense climate talks stretch into final hours

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Environmental activists from 350.org, left, demonstrate before the cameras of journalists during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico, Thursday Dec. 9, 2010. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)

(AP) -- Exhausted climate negotiators labored nonstop through the night and into their final day Friday, bargaining intensely over draft accords and seeking small, but essential steps to stem global warming.

If successful, the two-week Cancun meeting will create a fund of \$100 billion a year for developing countries threatened by altered weather patterns, and give them the technology to leapfrog old petroleum-based economic development in favor of [clean energy](#).

"This is a crucial day, not only for the process but for the climate," said Joke Schauvliege, a leader of the European Union delegation.

A meeting of all 193 countries planned for Friday morning to report on the overnight talks was repeatedly delayed, as delegates continued wrangling behind closed doors.

In a late-night session Thursday, negotiating groups spelled out the progress they had made settling some disputed wording and clauses. But they reported that many knotty issues remained to be sorted out. One issue, related to pledges by industrial and developing countries to rein in emissions of heat-trapping gases, appeared deadlocked.

"We have very limited time," said the conference chair, Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa, affirming that negotiators worked through the night without a break. Delegates were beginning to stumble over their words from fatigue as they described the state of play in the talks.

Despite the reported progress, the EU's top climate official, Connie Hedegaard, said countries were withholding approval on all issues until everything is ready. "Everything is still being negotiated until we have the full package," she told reporters. "Nothing is carved in stone."

The limited agenda of secondary issues the U.N. conference had set for itself was proving tougher than expected. It was clear in the final hours of the congress that delegates were looking for creative language to finesse irreconcilable views and buy another year until the next major conclave in Durban, South Africa.

Norwegian Environment Minister Erik Solheim, a veteran of many diplomatic battles, urged negotiators to embrace flexibility. "If you want to pick fights in this audience it's very easy to do it. What we need is a spirit of compromise," he said to a round of applause.

Bangladeshi Environment Minister Mohammed Hasan Mahmud

complained that too many crunch issues were being postponed year after year, while countries like his flood-prone delta nation were at high risk from the impacts of climate change. "I doubt if the Durban conference will deliver the desired level of results if the negotiations go the way we have been going here," he said.

Among the issues in a set of draft accords are compensation for halting the destruction of forests for timber or for clearing agricultural land.

China and the U.S. were bickering over rules for countries to report actions curbing greenhouse gases and submit them to international scrutiny.

Even the forestry program, which had been touted as one of the easiest potential deals at Cancun, met last-minute hurdles over how to make sure that the rights of indigenous communities are safeguarded.

Off the agenda was any proposal for industrial countries to ramp up the modest pledges they made since the last annual meeting in Copenhagen for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that are causing a measurable rise in the Earth's average temperature.

That summit failed to produce a hoped-for overarching climate pact and instead concluded with a three-page political document, the Copenhagen Accord.

The 27-nation European Union wants language specifying that emissions pledges over the last year fall short of what scientists say is necessary to keep the Earth from overheating to dangerous levels. The agreement must reflect "that the Copenhagen pledges are not the end of the story, they're the beginning," Hedegaard said.

A key issue of contention was whether to make the post-Copenhagen

national emissions pledges legally binding, and in what kind of document.

The answer to those questions would determine the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 document that set reductions targets for 37 wealthy countries and expires in 2012. The United States rejected Kyoto - the only industrialized country to do so - because it didn't require fast-growing economies such as China and India to limit their emissions.

Developing countries attach huge importance to Kyoto as their only legal weapon against the wealthy countries, whom they blame for creating the [global warming](#) problem by dumping greenhouse gases into the air for 200 years.

Bolivian President Evo Morales, in a fiery 20-minute speech to the 15,000 delegates, activists and journalists attending the conclave, warned against letting the pact die.

"If, from here, we send the Kyoto Protocol to the rubbish bin we are responsible for ecocide and genocide, because we will be sending many people to their deaths," he said.

Japan reiterated its opposition to extending the protocol with new targets unless all the major emitting countries, including the U.S., China, India and other economic powerhouses, accept comparable binding targets.

An extension for a second period "is neither a fair nor effective way to tackle climate change globally," said Japanese delegate Akira Yamada, who complained that the world's biggest polluters were "sitting like spectators in the stands."

Environmentalists denounced the Japanese position. "Japan is putting the entire talks at risk," said David Turnbull of CAN International, an

alliance of 500 activist groups.

On the sidelines of the conference, countries, businesses and international agencies struck deals or announced projects to show they would take action against climate change independently of the talks.

World Bank President Robert Zoellick announced the creation of a \$100 million fund to help countries create carbon trading markets. China, India, Chile and Mexico were among countries that had expressed an interest in drawing on the fund, he told The Associated Press.

"Regardless of what happens in the negotiations, we shouldn't be waiting. We should be doing practical things on the ground," Zoellick said.

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