

Plodding climate talks stepping up to higher level

December 5 2010, By CHARLES J. HANLEY , AP Special Correspondent



Campaign Against Climate Change protestor claims that palm oil manufacture is endangering animals, during a mass protest in London's Hyde Park before a march to parliament Saturday, Dec. 4, 2010. A Global Day of Action to coincide with UN climate talks in Cancun, Mexico, is promoting Zero Carbon emissions by 2030. (AP Photo / Ian Nicholson, PA) UNITED KINGDOM OUT - NO SALES - NO ARCHIVES

(AP) -- The slow-moving U.N. talks on combating global warming took a step forward Saturday with revised proposals for a \$100 billion-a-year

climate aid fund and other issues for debate by the world's environment ministers this week.

Despite that advance, the chairwoman of key closed-door negotiations warned the open conference that obstacles remain to what delegates hope will be a package of decisions next Friday on financial and other side matters under the U.N. climate treaty.

"Progress has been made in some areas," Zimbabwe's Margaret Mukahanana-Sangarwe said. But she said the talks were "going backwards" on important issues. "We need to redouble our efforts."

Environment ministers began flying in Saturday for the final days of the annual two-week [climate conference](#), hoping to put new life in the U.N. talks.

Last week, under Mukahanana-Sangarwe's leadership, a working group from among the 193 treaty nations sought to whittle down the contested texts of proposed decisions.

In one sign of the work facing them, only 170 words had been undisputed among the 1,300 on two pages of a key text on the "shared vision" of what the treaty nations want to accomplish. The disputed language was options proposed by various parties and placed within brackets.

Some parties, for example, want the world to reduce emissions of global warming gases so that temperatures don't rise more than 2 degrees C (3.6 degrees F) above preindustrial levels, beyond which scientists say serious damage from [climate change](#) would set in. Others want to aim even lower, at 1.5 C (2.7 F) above preindustrial levels - a position favored by island states and others most threatened by warming's impacts, such as sea-level rise.

The Zimbabwean's revised text eliminated the 1.5-degree option, drawing an immediate protest from the Bolivian delegation at Saturday's open meeting, a sign of the contentiousness sure to mark the coming days.

Though a step forward, "this paper lacks sufficient ambition for the urgent protection of islands and the world," said Grenada's U.N. ambassador, Dessima Williams, speaking for small island nations.

In many important areas, Mukahanana-Sangarwe's text revisions retained multiple options - on the supervision of the proposed climate fund, for example - setting the stage for further sharp debate.

At last year's climate summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, richer nations promised \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer nations reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change by, for example, building coastline protection and shifting crops to cope with new precipitation patterns.

Firmly establishing a green fund at Cancun is a priority for developing-world delegations, who generally want a U.N. body overseeing disbursement of climate funds, rather than, for example, the World Bank, which is controlled by developed nations.

The issue of reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted by industry, vehicles and agriculture is the core dispute of the long-running climate talks, and will not be fully resolved at Cancun.

For 13 years, the U.S. has 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. The U.S. complained that it would hurt its economy and that Kyoto 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.

This impasse brought last year's Copenhagen climate summit to near-collapse. That conference ended with a nonbinding "Copenhagen Accord," under which the U.S., China and other nations inscribed voluntary pledges to scale back emissions. The agreement has been endorsed by 140 nations, not the treaty's full 193.

Two debates under way in Cancun stem from Copenhagen: how to "anchor" those voluntary pledges more officially under the treaty, and how to monitor and verify that pledges are being met.

Besides the green fund, negotiators hope for agreements on other secondary issues, including making it cheaper for developing nations to obtain climate-friendly proprietary technology from more advanced countries, and pinning down more elements of a complex plan to pay developing countries for protecting their tropical forests.

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