

Back-room negotiations begin on climate intentions

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Activists wear masks depicting the face of the European Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso, left, and Canada Prime Minister Stephen Harper, right, during a protest in Durban, South Africa, Monday, Dec. 5, 2011. As talks to shore up the international response to global warming entered their second and crucial week in the South African coastal city of Durban environmentalists led a tour of a wetlands area near Durban. Wetlands _ critical for the health of South Africa's coasts and river systems _ already have been degraded or seriously altered by human activity, and experts fear global warming threatens them further. (AP Photo/Schalk van Zuydam)

(AP) -- Back-room negotiations began in earnest Monday on a deal to rescue the only treaty governing greenhouse gas reductions and to launch talks on a broader agreement to include the world's largest polluters: China and other emerging economies, the United States and Europe.

Key players laid out their opening positions in public at U.N. [climate](#)

[talks](#) in South Africa, and were beginning a round of private meetings to probe each other's meanings and intentions - which remained murky.

As the 194-nation conference moved into its decisive week, negotiators were feeling the pressure of a looming deadline: the expiry in 12 months of commitments by [industrial countries](#) to reduce climate-changing [carbon emissions](#).

Among those countries that signed up to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol was Canada, but the Canadians have said they will not extend their commitments, and there are reports they may formally withdraw from the deal.

Canada's environment minister Peter Kent arrived in Durban on Monday and hastily called a news conference.

The European Union is championing a deal to get all major countries to agree to binding pollution targets in the future as its condition for renewing its commitments under the 1997 [Kyoto Protocol](#). It wants an agreement now to begin negotiations on a new all-encompassing treaty that would conclude by 2015 and take effect five years later.

"We do not need more thinking, we need more action," said Connie Hedegaard, the European commissioner on climate action.

The linchpins of such a deal are China and the [United States](#) - and both set hard conditions.

During the first week of the conference, attention honed in on China, and whether it was signaling new flexibility or reframing known positions.

China's top climate negotiator Xie Zenhua, in his first meeting with

reporters, said China wanted to ensure all previous commitments by the industrial countries were met before entering into the next phase.

If that happened, he said, China could discuss a post-2020 deal. "The framework, I think, should be a legally binding one, or some documents to that effect."

But Xie set several "preconditions," including an extension of the Kyoto commitments for industrial countries, honoring commitments on immediate and long-term financial aid to poor countries, and delivery on promises of new technologies to develop low-carbon economies.

U.S. envoy Todd Stern said the United States has no objection to a post-2020 treaty, as long as it treats everyone the same.

Countries must accept "obligations and commitments that have the same legal force," Stern said.

But he did not believe that China and others were prepared to unconditionally accept legal parity with everyone else.

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