

National interests hinder climate accord attempt

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(AP) -- Delegates attending a 194-nation climate conference agree the world needs to send less carbon into the atmosphere, but national interests and economic worries have so far hindered attempts to reach an agreement that would oblige governments to curb the emissions that are warming the planet.

The talks, due to wrap up Friday or early Saturday, are likely to finalize a massive fund to help poor countries cope with [climate change](#).

But the slow pace of dealing with the core problem of rising temperatures is dispiriting delegates from small islands on the edge of survival, and from activists impatient with the familiar posturing of [climate negotiations](#).

"Waiting is going to be a disaster for us," said Samuela Alivereti Saumatua, Fiji's environment minister, who said the Pacific island this month relocated its first coastal village because of climate-related flooding and unseasonable cyclones.

"We have cyclones now at any time of the year. We have flash floods in the [coastal areas](#). Water supply is being salinated. [Food security](#) is going to be a problem. We are desperately looking at how we will deal with the situation," he told reporters.

Much of the debate centered on a demand by [industrial countries](#), led by the European Union, to revise the 20-year-old division of the world into

rich and poor nations with two levels of responsibility: Rich countries are legally bound to reduce carbon emissions while developing countries take voluntary actions.

"This is the main issue. I don't know how it's going to be resolved," said Argentine Ambassador Sylvia Merega, who leads the 132-nation group known as G77 and China.

With so much at stake, activists have descended on the conference that began Nov. 28 and is being held in this [coastal city](#) along the Indian Ocean.

An American college student was ejected from the conference Thursday after disrupting a speech by U.S. delegate Todd Stern. Police escorted the student, Abigail Borah, 21, from the cavernous plenary of the conference as delegates applauded her removal.

A day earlier, six Canadians were thrown out for a similar protest against Canada's Environment Minister Peter Kent.

At a separate meeting Thursday attended by South African President Jacob Zuma, scuffles broke out between his supporters and environmentalists holding up posters reading, "Zuma stand with Africa, not with USA," and "Zuma don't let Africa fry."

By the conference ends, the delegates hope to have a document that lays out the way into the next stage of fighting climate change. At stake is the potential breakdown of the only treaty that has governed [carbon emissions](#) from the industrial world, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The European Union has said it will not renew its emissions reduction pledges, which expire in one year, unless all countries agree to launch negotiations on a new treaty that would equally oblige all countries -

including the world's two largest polluters the United States and China - to control their emissions.

The EU's failure to commit to another five-year reduction period would leave the landmark agreement in place, but gutted of its most important element, and would surely lead to Durban being branded as the protocol's burial ground.

Both China and the U.S. said they would be amenable to the EU proposal, but each attached riders that appeared to hobble its prospects for unanimous acceptance.

The United States, with its eye on Congress that is generally seen as hostile on the climate issue, is concerned about conceding any competitive business advantage to China. Beijing, too, is resisting the notion that it has become a developed country on a par with the U.S. or Europe, saying it still has hundreds of millions of impoverished people.

The global financial crisis has prompted concern among some nations that the envisioned climate aid for [poor countries](#), scaling up from \$10 billion a year now to \$100 billion annually in 2020, will have trouble raising mobilizing donations from governments.

"In a time of constraints, in a time of crisis, in a time of tough budgets, people are saying that charity starts at home, that we cannot deal with something noble but medium and long-term like the environment," said Angel Gurría, head of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

One negotiator from Latin America, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak about closed-door talks, said U.S. and Canadian negotiators had refused to allow any discussion on how to raise the promised \$100 billion, calling it "a real standoff."

Still, critical progress has been made on the structure and governance of the Green Climate Fund, which will handle most of the money.

"It's an area actually which is among the most advanced in the negotiations," said Stern, the chief U.S. negotiator. "I don't have any reason to think that that's not going to conclude."

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