

UN climate talks marred by decision-making spat

June 14 2013, by Karl Ritter



In this Dec. 3, 2009 file photo smoke billows from a chimney of the cooling towers of a coal-fired power plant in Dadong, Shanxi province, China. The International Energy Agency says the world's energy-related carbon dioxide emissions rose 1.4 percent in 2012 to a record high of 31.6 gigatons, even as the U.S. posted its lowest emissions since the mid-1990s. In a report released Monday June 10, 2013, the IEA says China saw the largest emissions growth last year, but the increase was among the lowest seen in a decade amid investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, File)

U.N. climate talks have hit a stumbling block that some delegates say poses a serious challenge to their already slow-moving attempt to craft a global response to climate change.

As the latest negotiation session ended Friday in the German city of Bonn, one track of the talks was paralyzed by a request by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to review the decision-making procedure in the two-decade-long U.N. process.

Decisions in the U.N. [climate](#) discussions are supposed to be taken by consensus—but it's not totally clear what that means in practice. While many agree the decision-making procedure needs to be clarified, they worry that the issue could block the talks at a time when urgent action is needed to tackle climate change.

"If we're not careful, it could collapse the whole system," said Ronald Jumeau, a delegate from the Seychelles.

At several climate conferences, after overnight debates with endless interventions, decisions have been gaveled through despite protests from individual countries.

That happened in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010, when Bolivia was overruled. Last year in Qatar, it happened to Russia, when its objections to a package of decisions including an extension of the 1997 emissions treaty known as the [Kyoto Protocol](#) were ignored.

Russia was outraged by that snub, and backed by Ukraine and Belarus it used the session in Bonn to call for a discussion on the rules of procedure. It did so in a subsidiary body that was supposed to work on a "loss and damage" mechanism for aid to developing countries hit by climate-related disasters. That work never got started due to disputes over how to address the decision-making issue, which many countries

agree needs to be ironed out.

"Our process is very sick. We have constant problems with procedural matters and we are constantly forced to resolve problems in circumstances of haste and [apprehension](#) and anxiety," Russian climate envoy Oleg Shamanov told delegates earlier this week.

U.N. climate chief Christiana Figueres said Friday that she found it ironic that even though all governments agreed that the decision-making procedure needs to be discussed, they "couldn't figure out, how do they get to what they want to do?"

That's a familiar story in the [climate talks](#), where procedural disputes have often overshadowed the goal of saving the world from rising seas, more extreme weather events and other potentially catastrophic effects of [climate change](#).

Science shows they're falling short of that aim: emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases are growing. That's mainly because China and other developing countries expand their economies, but rich countries are also criticized at these talks for not cutting their emissions enough.

Negotiators said some progress was made in Bonn on the shape of a global climate deal that is supposed to be adopted in 2015. But many said Russia's concerns over decision-making must be addressed before the next climate conference in Warsaw at the end of the year.

"Time is very short. We can't have this kind of procedural difficulties that are wasting what is a limited and pressurized timeframe to get us to a deal," European Union delegate David Walsh said.

Russia didn't address the closing session, but Belarus said the stalemate

in Bonn just highlighted the problems in the process.

A negotiator from Tuvalu, an island nation that fears it's going to be wiped out by rising seas, said it was ironic that the three countries expressing concerns about the procedure were using that procedure "to make it even worse."

"It's like somebody deliberately crashing a car to show that the seat belts don't work," Ian Fry said.

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Citation: UN climate talks marred by decision-making spat (2013, June 14) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-climate-marred-decision-making-spat.html>

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