

Climate negotiators say global deal is close in Paris

December 11 2015, byKarl Ritter And Angela Charlton



US Secretary of State John Kerry, left, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon meet on the sidelines of the COP 21 United Nations conference on climate change, in Le Bourget, on the outskirts of Paris on Friday Dec. 11, 2015. (Mandel Ngan, Pool via AP)

Talks on a global pact to fight global warming appeared to make progress late Friday, with some negotiators telling The Associated Press a deal was close.

Negotiators emerged from meetings with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, the host of the talks, amid an air of optimism that had been lacking just hours earlier.

Fabius was expected to present a new, potentially final draft of the elusive accord Saturday morning at 9 a.m. (0800 GMT).

"We are pretty much there," Egyptian Environment Minister Khaled Fahmy, the chairman of a bloc of African countries, told the AP late Friday. "There have been tremendous developments in the last hours. We are very close."

Negotiators from more than 190 countries in Paris are aiming to create something that's never been done before: an agreement for all countries to reduce man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and help the poorest adapt to rising seas, fiercer weather and other impacts of global warming.

This accord is the first time all countries are expected to pitch in—the previous emissions treaty, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, only included rich countries.

The talks, originally scheduled to end Friday, dragged into an extra day as the French hosts said they needed more time to overcome disputes.

A French official expressed confidence that the draft to be presented Saturday would be the final one. The official was not authorized to speak publicly because the negotiations were ongoing.

Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu was also upbeat.

"The signals that have come to me give me encouragement that we are

going to have a very ... comprehensive and strong agreement in Paris," Sopoaga told the AP.

Liu Zhenmin, deputy chief of the Chinese delegation, was more cautious. Asked by the AP whether the draft would be the final one, he said only if "it's more or less acceptable."

Earlier Friday, Liu stood firm on his nation's demand that rich countries should assume most responsibility for the costs and argued against an agreement that sets too-tough goals for weaning the world off using oil, gas and coal—the biggest source of carbon emissions.

The U.S. and European countries want to move away from so-called "differentiation" among economies and want big emerging countries like China and India to pitch in more in a final climate deal.



The slogan "CLIMATE SIGN" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the

COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

Liu told reporters that issue is "at the core of our concern for the Paris agreement." He said he wants different rules for different countries "clearly stipulated" in the global warming pact.

China is among the more than 180 countries that have submitted emissions targets for the new pact but is resisting Western proposals for robust transparency rules that would require each country to show whether it's on track to meet its target.

Liu also argued against sharply limiting the number of degrees the planet warms this century, because that would involve huge lifestyle and economic changes.

"We need heating. We need air conditioning. You need to drive your car," he said.

Indian Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar also said differentiation was the biggest dispute and accused developed countries of not showing enough flexibility in the talks.

However, signs of divisions among major developing countries surfaced Friday as Brazil joined an informal coalition of Western countries and some developing ones in a "high-ambition coalition" that is calling for a strong deal.

Liu dismissed the coalition as a "performance."

U.S. Secretary of State Kerry, on his fifth straight day in France trying to

iron out differences with developing countries, said he's "hopeful" for an accord and has been working behind the scenes to reach compromises.

U.S. climate envoy Todd Stern declined to comment after a meeting with Fabius late Friday.

The talks are the culmination of years of U.N.-led efforts to create a long-term climate deal. U.N. climate conferences often run past their deadlines, given the complexity and sensitivity of each word in an international agreement and the consequences for national economies.



Climate activists carry a red banner during a demonstration at the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. Hundreds of climate activists have stretched a block-long red banner through the Paris climate talks to symbolize "the red lines" that they don't want negotiators to cross in trying to reach an international accord to fight global warming. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Analysts said the delay until Saturday was not necessarily a bad sign.

"This needs consensus," said Michael Jacobs, an economist with the New Climate Economy project, speaking to reporters. "There's a lot of negotiating to do."

A 27-page draft released Thursday said governments would aim to peak the emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases "as soon as possible" and strive to reach "emissions neutrality" by the second half of the century—a vague term generally understood to mean no more emissions than the Earth can naturally absorb. That was weaker language than in previous drafts, which included more specific emissions cuts and timeframes.

China's Liu said negotiators don't understand what is meant by "neutrality" and argued for an even softer "low-carbon" goal.

The draft didn't resolve how to deal with demands from vulnerable countries to deal with unavoidable damage from rising seas and other climate impacts. One option said such losses would be addressed in a way that doesn't involve liability and compensation—a U.S. demand.



Yellow paint is poured on the street during a protest by activists from environmental group Greenpeace on the Champs-Elysee in Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 . The protest is one of many activist actions linked to the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

Sopoaga, the Tuvalu leader, said he had discussed the issue with Kerry and that he was optimistic that a solution would be found.

Fabius said the world would not find a better moment to reach a global climate deal.

"All the conditions are met to reach a universal, ambitious agreement," he said.



Yellow paint is poured on the street during a protest by activists from environmental group Greenpeace on the Champs-Elysee in Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 . The protest is one of many activist actions linked to the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)



This photo provided by environmental group Greenpeace shows the Arc de Triomphe roundabout painted with yellow by activists, Friday, Dec.11, 2015. The protest is one of many activist actions linked to the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. (Greenpeace via AP)



A man rides his bicycle on yellow paint poured on the street during a protest by activists from environmental group Greenpeace on the Champs-Elysee in Paris, Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 . The protest is one of many activist actions linked to the COP21, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)



Oxfam activists wear masks of from left, U.S. President Barack Obama, Chinese President Xi Jinping, French President Francois Hollande, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull as they stage a protest during the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

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