

China announces climate target for Paris deal

30 June 2015, by Karl Ritter And Jamey Keaten



Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, center, attends a welcoming ceremony at the Hotel National des Invalides in Paris, France, with his French counterpart Manuel Valls, upon his arrival for a three-day visit during which a raft of accords are expected to be signed on joint projects in Africa and Asia, Tuesday, June 30, 2015. (Stephane de Sakutin/Pool Photo via AP)

Top carbon polluter China confirmed it will try to cap its rising emissions before 2030 while the U.S. and Brazil pledged to boost renewable energy sources in a series of announcements Tuesday in anticipation of a global climate pact in Paris.

South Korea, Serbia and Iceland also presented climate targets for the deal that's supposed to be adopted in December as part of a U.N. effort to protect the planet from global warming.

Countries representing more than half of global emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have now announced their targets, leaving India as the only major polluter that still hasn't come forward with a pledge.

In a submission to the U.N., China repeated an earlier pledge to achieve a peak in emissions

around 2030 and promised its "best efforts" to make it earlier. Beijing, which releases more than one-quarter of the world's CO₂ emissions, also confirmed it will try to increase the share of "non-fossil fuels," meaning renewable and nuclear energy, in its energy mix to 20 percent by 2030.

In a new element, China pledged to reduce its carbon intensity—emissions per unit of gross domestic product—by 60-65 percent by 2030 from 2005 levels. Since China's emissions are still growing as its economy expands, it uses that measure to show that it's trying to decouple emissions from economic growth.

To achieve its goals China aims to limit the use of the most carbon-intensive energy source, coal, and expand the use of natural gas—the cleanest of the fossil fuels—as well as renewable sources.

In a detailed submission to the U.N., China listed a range of other policy measures including increasing energy efficiency, improving urban planning and public transport and even "promoting voluntary tree planting by all citizens."

China said it aims to increase the volume of its forests—which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere—by 4.5 billion cubic meters (about 160 billion cubic feet) by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.



French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, right, and his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang attend a welcoming ceremony at the Hotel National des Invalides in Paris, France, upon Li Keqiang's arrival for a three-day visit during which a raft of accords are expected to be signed on joint projects in Africa and Asia, Tuesday, June 30, 2015. (Stephane de Sakutin/Pool Photo via AP)

During a visit to the French capital, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang said the targets show that China is doing its utmost to address climate change. For a country with such a big population, he said, "it's going to be really difficult, but we'll do our best."

The submission was welcomed by the U.S. and other countries as well as environmental advocates pushing for a strong deal later this year. Li Shuo of Greenpeace called it a first step for China to take a more active role in the climate negotiations, though he added that "all players—including China and the EU—need to up their game" for a successful outcome in Paris.

Paul Bledsoe, a former climate adviser in the Clinton White House, said China was underplaying the pace of its emissions reductions.

"Their emissions are likely to peak well before 2030 already (probably around 2025), but their gamesmanship on this point suggests they are reverting to their traditional recalcitrant negotiating posture ahead of Paris—a worrisome sign," he said.

Meanwhile in Washington, the U.S. and Brazil jointly announced intentions to increase their share of renewable sources in the electricity sector to 20 percent by 2030—not counting hydropower, which is the biggest source of power in Brazil.

Brazil also pledged to restore and reforest an area roughly the size of England and "pursue policies aimed at eliminating illegal deforestation." About 75 percent of Brazil's carbon dioxide emissions come from destruction of the Amazon. Brazil still hasn't submitted its climate targets to the U.N.

Halfway through the year, the 28-nation European Union and 15 other nations have done so. Besides China, three other countries also entered their targets on Tuesday: Iceland, Serbia and South Korea.



President Barack Obama and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff participate in a joint news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Tuesday, June 30, 2015. The president and visiting Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff sought Tuesday to cast their nations as "natural partners" collaborating closely on critical issues like climate and regional diplomacy, glossing over recent tensions over spying that have strained relations between the U.S. and Brazil. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

The U.S. last year submitted a target to reduce emissions 26-28 percent by 2025 from 2005 levels.

China announced some of its climate goals last year in a joint statement with the U.S., injecting

momentum into the U.N. negotiations by signaling that two countries that had previously been at odds were moving forward together.

In its submission Tuesday, China reiterated its long-held position that developed countries need to take the lead in cutting emissions and helping poorer nations limit theirs.

But China also said it would establish a "south-south" fund to help the poorest and most vulnerable countries deal with climate change, showing it accepts that as a major emerging economy it has a special role to play.

That's a shift from the previous, failed attempt to craft a global climate deal six years ago in Copenhagen, when China insisted on a firewall between developed and developing countries.

"This is a clear sign that we're moving past the old developed-developing country divide to a new understanding that all major economies have to contribute their fair share to the global effort," said Bob Perciasepe, president of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, a think tank in Washington.

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