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Progress toward compromise on climate change

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CANCUN, MEXICO - As they headed into a late-night session Friday night, delegates from 193 nations were making progress on a modest package of measures aimed at addressing climate change worldwide.

Mexico, which is hosting the U.N.-sponsored talks, appeared to break a logjam between the industrialized and developed world as it unveiled a proposal detailing how rich nations would help poor ones cope with global warming, as well as how major emerging economies could show they were cutting their own carbon output.

Observers from the environmental community applauded the outline, describing the compromise agreement as modest progress. "It puts us on a path so the process can keep moving forward," said David Waskow, climate change program director for Oxfam America, adding that although "it's not everything we want, we're pleased."

Mexico's proposal includes all the basic elements of what delegates had set out to achieve at the start of this year's talks, including the establishment of an international "Green Climate Fund" to help developing nations curb their emissions and respond to climate impacts; a framework for compensating rainforest nations for preserving standing forests; a new method for transferring clean-energy technology from industrialized nations to developing ones; an international registry of nations' emission-reduction commitments; and a process for monitoring the fulfillment of those pledges.

It appeared to satisfy key constituencies - including the United States, which had pressed hard for a measure to verify whether countries including China and India were making the voluntary emission cuts they have promised to do in the years ahead. But Bolivia continued to criticize the plan as insufficient and too tilted toward industrialized nations, and it remained unclear what final consensus would emerge from the negotiations.

Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa urged ministers here to build on the progress her government tried to capture in its proposal.

"We have to act with responsibility and resolve. Each of us will have to live with the consequences of our choices and of our actions," she said, triggering a standing ovation.

U.S. special climate envoy [Todd Stern](#) endorsed the proposal, saying its adoption would "put the world forward on a more hopeful path towards a low emissions and sustainable future," sparking applause.

Even as negotiators worked doggedly to finalize a climate accord, new temperature readings released by the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies show that 2010 now ranks as the hottest climate year on record.

An analysis of the combined land and ocean temperature readings from across the planet between Dec. 1, 2009, and Nov. 30 indicate that 2010 has surpassed what NASA scientists previously identified as the warmest climate year: 2005.

The accord is still a very long way from a legally binding international treaty, which could be years away, that would commit countries to steeply cut the greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are warming the planet, destabilizing the weather, and contributing to catastrophic flooding and sea level rise.

Connie Hedegaard, the European commissioner for climate action, said in an interview there is a real disconnect between the science and current level of ambition by the world's policymakers.

While U.N. negotiators pledged last year in Copenhagen to keep global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius, or by 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, above pre-industrial levels, the current level of emission cuts pledged by industrialized and developing countries will miss that goal. To hit that target, emissions will need to be cut 25 to 50 percent more.

"Of course, all of this is incredibly difficult. It is, in the end, about how we build the society of the future. We are in the middle of a paradigm shift," Hedegaard said.

Searching for metaphors to describe a complex topic riddled with jargon, Mexican President Felipe Calderon said global climate change is like a bus careering down a mountain road, with all aboard - all the countries of the world - wrestling to grab the steering wheel and hit the brakes. "It could crash," he warned. "But we want to avoid that."

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