

April 27, 2011

Outlook Dim for Climate Agreement by Year's End

By [JAMES KANTER](#)

BRUSSELS — Major greenhouse gas-emitting nations on Wednesday ruled out reaching a global agreement to limit such gases at a meeting this year in Durban, South Africa, but they pledged to continue working toward that goal in future.

“I don’t think anyone thinks there’s going to be an actual, completed legally binding agreement in Durban,” Todd Stern, the U.S. special envoy for [climate change](#), said at a news conference after a two-day meeting of the so-called Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate in Brussels. The forum holds discussions on climate issues in parallel to formal negotiations under the auspices of the [United Nations](#).

Rather than aiming for an accord in Durban, negotiators participating in the forum, which includes the [European Union](#), Japan, China, India and Brazil, discussed working on “decisions or language that would look toward negotiation of a legally binding agreement in the coming year” in South Africa, Mr. Stern said. Even so, he said there was no certainty that such a deal would eventually be reached.

“I think that there are different views about the sort of degree of necessity or not of a legally binding agreement,” Mr. Stern said. “Our view in the U.S. is that it is not a necessary thing to happen right away.”

The European Union’s climate commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, said at a separate news conference it was “highly unlikely” that nations would reach a deal at the South Africa meeting, which that takes place in December.

But Ms. Hedegaard emphasized that the European Union remained one of the strongest supporters for a binding deal. “We’re not putting on the brake here,” she said.

Ever since a climate summit meeting in Copenhagen broke up in acrimony at the end of 2009, climate negotiators have sought to tamp down expectations of a breakthrough. Many of the same factors that bedeviled the Copenhagen meeting still need to be resolved.

In particular, many developing countries have insisted on the principle that only developed countries should be required to reduce the greenhouse gases blamed for damaging the atmosphere. The United States has continued to insist that would be unacceptable.

“Our view is that any legally binding agreement would have to include all the major players, so that means China, India, Brazil, South Africa and any countries with significant economies,” Mr. Stern

said. Any deal failing to oblige those other countries to take measures to limit emissions “makes absolutely no sense,” he said.

Even so, many of the poorest and most vulnerable nations, including small island nations facing the threat of rising sea levels, are still likely to push strongly for a deal in December that would move beyond the existing voluntary accord struck in Copenhagen.