Third World blasts rich countries at United Nations climate talks

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Developing countries have blasted wealthy nations at the UN global warming talks, accusing them of hypocrisy and seeking to wrangle out of their commitments.

Nigerian Environment Minister Sani Zangon Daura, who chairs the Group of 77 (G77), a bloc of 133 developing nations and China, warned poorer countries would resist demands to limit their own emissions of so-called greenhouse gases so long as the richer world failed to live up to its own promises.

Output of these "greenhouse gases" is racing ahead in many developed countries just three years after they had signed the Kyoto Protocol, in which they pledged to reduce the emissions, Daura said in a speech Monday.

And the financial help they had promised the developing world to help it convert to cleaner technology had yet to show up.

"We do not believe that, on balance, they have performed their responsibilities... and we question whether they have the determination to meet their commitments," said Daura.

He added that promises of "appropriate" conversion aid under the 1992 Rio Convention, the parent treaty of Kyoto in which they pledged to reduce the emissions, had yet to show up.

"The amounts made available for this purpose since the Convention was adopted eight years ago are the proverbial drop in the bucket," he said. "We developing countries wonder whether any-body understands or cares that we have needs."

The Kyoto Protocol commits 38 developed countries to reducing fossil fuel gases by an average of 5.2 percent by 2012.

The agreement will not enter force until its contents have been hammered out -- the goal of the marathon talks in The Hague -- and then ratified by a minimum number of polluting countries.

Poorer countries have no specific target for limiting emissions as this could hurt their development. Instead, they are being offered financial help and technology transfer.

That approach has been slammed by Republicans in the US Congress, where the US Senate has voted overwhelmingly for developing countries to show a stronger, albeit unspecified, commitment.

Daura slammed the United States, without naming it, for what he said was an attempt last month to pressure developing countries into making "new commitments" on reducing gas emissions.

That approach was "categorically" rejected by the G77 and China group as contrary to all previous agreements on climate change, he said.

"If the developed countries truly share our hope that (these talks) will be a success, none of them should try to tamper with one of the basic pillars of our common effort."

Daura's speech reflected brooding resentment among developing countries as mounting scientific evidence says that poor countries in warm regions of the world will bear the brunt of climate change -- even though they are least to blame for its cause.

Robert Watson, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN's top scientific evaluators of the global warming threat, said those countries most at risk were the ones which were geographically most exposed and had the least resources and training to adapt.

"Therefore developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change than developed countries," he said.

Global warming is a man-made phenomenon, caused by the burning of oil, gas and coal.

Carbon dioxide and other gases released by these fuels builds up in the lower atmosphere, acting like a blanket that helps to store up the heat from the Sun, causing a potentially catastrophic rise in temperature.

The biggest single offender is the United States, which has only four percent of the world's population but accounts for a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Hague negotiations, scheduled to conclude on November 24, have been overshadowed by bitter squabbles between the United States and the European Union over US demands for "flexibility mechanisms."

The EU sees these as loopholes that would soften the cost for Washington of meeting its commitments.

In Your Face

How would you reform the voting process?

"Let them arm wrestle." - Chris Geier '01

"Votes of the electoral college would be awarded proportionately to the popular vote within the states." - Alison Milne '01

"The candidates should have a toothbrush duel." - Katie Bryan '01

"Everything." - Sarah Flounders '01

"Improve voter education to help people make informed decisions." - Susan Shumman '01

U.S. a "threat" in China's eyes

BY JOHN POMFRET
WASHINGTON POST

In 1998, when China issued its second white paper on national defense, representing the consensus view of the government, the document mentioned the United States 10 times, each time positively. Last month, China's third white paper mentioned the United States 13 times. All but two of the references were negative.

The numbers underscore an important shift that will likely vex the next US administration. Faced with what it feels is a shaky security environment and a strong and sometimes arrogant America, Beijing has increasingly viewed the United States as an obstacle to its rise as an Asian power.

In government pronouncements, stories in the state-run press, books and interviews, the United States is now routinely portrayed as Enemy No. 1. Strategists writing in the pages of China Military Science, the military's preeminent open-source publication, are grappling publicly with the possibility that the United States and China could go to war, specifically over Taiwan.

"A new arms race has started to develop," wrote Liu Jiangjia, an officer in the People's Liberation Army, a piece in the magazine. "War is not far from us now."

The new calculus is rooted in a belief that the United States does not want to see China strong and powerful -- a belief that has united officials of many political persuasions. Even moderate academics express the fear that the two countries, despite $95 billion in trade last year, are somehow headed for a showdown in Asia in the next 10 years.

"China's public view of the United States has changed quite seriously since 1998," said Shen Dingli, a prominent arms control expert at Fudan University in Shanghai. "The U.S. has been painted as a threat to Asia-Pacific security. We've never said it so bluntly before. . . . I think China is more clearly preparing for a major clash with the United States."

While few in China, except for some strategists in the army who think war is inevitable, the fact that conflict with the United States is openly discussed is a significant development in China's security thinking and in its relations with the United States.

The United States is now perceived as opposing Beijing's two premier goals in the region: unification with Taiwan, thereby ending what the Communist Party has called 100 years of humiliation at the hands of foreigners; and gaining control over the strategic shipping lanes in the South China Sea, through which the bulk of Asia's oil passes.

But while China is increasingly united in its view of the United States as a possible adversary, the leadership does not appear united on how to deal with the challenge. Beijing's current policy is a modification of the policy pursued by dictator Mao Zedong in the 1950s. The country supports many policies that the United States opposes -- regarding Iraq, Iran and former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic -- and questions some key policies that the United States supports -- such as humanitarian intervention in other countries and nonproliferation of missiles.

In some ways the tussles over how to handle Washington mirror those in the United States regarding China. Americans argue about engaging or containing Beijing; Chinese argue about engaging or confronting the United States. The United States has its "Blue Team," a group of politicians, academics and political sides who are concerned with the China threat. "And we have our 'Red Team,'" said Li Dongsi, a political scientist at People's University, referring to a vocal group of anti-American nationalists in research organizations, the military and security services.