

## **Cheers, and Concern, for New Climate Pact**

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BUENOS AIRES, Dec. 12 - With the United States keeping to the sidelines, delegates from more than 190 countries have gathered here both to celebrate the enactment of the Kyoto Protocol, the first treaty requiring cuts in greenhouse gases linked to global warming, and to look beyond 2012, when its terms expire.

Many delegates and experts concede that the pact, negotiated in 1997, is deeply flawed and that years of delays in finishing its rulebook mean that many adherents may have trouble meeting their targets for emissions cuts.

Its impact will also be limited because it exempts developing countries, including fast-industrializing giants like China and India, from emissions restrictions, and lacks the support of the United States, the world's dominant source of the heat-trapping gases.

Nonetheless, delegates and United Nations officials say the treaty, which has been ratified by 130 countries and international blocs, and takes effect on Feb. 16, is an important step. It is the first time industrialized countries have agreed to mandatory constraints on carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas and an unavoidable byproduct of burning the fossil fuels powering modern economies.

The treaty commits the three dozen industrialized countries taking part to cut combined emissions of the gases by 2012 to at least 5 percent below levels measured in 1990.

It also establishes for the first time an international trading system allowing countries to earn credits toward their treaty targets by investing in emissions cleanups outside their borders.

For example, European investors agreed last month to buy credits from a project that will produce electricity at a Brazilian dump by burning 31,000 tons of methane a year emanating from rotting trash. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas.

The meeting, which opened last Monday with informal discussions and culminates on Thursday and Friday with rounds of public debate among senior government officials, is equal parts international negotiations, trade fair, lobbying session and pulpit.

While global warming has long been portrayed mainly as an environmental problem, here it is also cast as an economic and even human rights issue.

More than 6,000 attendees are milling in convention halls that resemble a kind of greenhouse bazaar, where businesses are trumpeting the merits of everything from windmills to nuclear power, which do not add to the atmosphere's greenhouse-gas

burden. In a host of presentations, environmental and human rights groups have been showing how the accumulating gases stand to imperil some of the world's poorest countries and native cultures. More broadly, the conference reflects a world that remains deeply divided over what to do about the buildup of greenhouse gases that climate experts say has caused most of a 50-year warming trend.

Experts now largely agree that if oil and coal burning continue to increase at current rates, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will more than double in this century from pre-industrial levels, causing warming that could disrupt climate patterns and raise sea levels.

World leaders also agree that actions must be taken to avoid harmful human influence on the climate. Where agreement quickly dissolves is over how to accomplish that.

Many experts say the Kyoto pact will end up being just one facet of a decades-long shift toward limiting greenhouse gases, carried out in different ways in different places.

There are essentially three camps in the climate debate reflected in discussions here: those welcoming the Kyoto pact; those opposed to an internationally set cap on emissions; and the world's poorest countries and native cultures, which fear they will be the first to bear the consequences of climate shifts they did little to bring about.

Europe and Japan, where energy taxes and conservation have long been the norm, have been the biggest supporters of the pact. Experts in international relations say it has also helped to cement the European Union, which has already created its own internal "cap and trade" system for carbon dioxide and the other gases as a result of the treaty.

Russia waffled for years, but ratified the Kyoto treaty last month, in part to help forge economic ties with Western Europe and because it could gain billions of dollars in foreign investment and income under the treaty's trading mechanisms.

The treaty is also a focus for American companies with international operations or markets. Although the United States government has rejected the Kyoto pact, businesses must pay attention.

"Almost 40 percent of our production and 50 percent of our sales are outside the United States, and we're going to be under the European Union caps and trading and allocation system," said Mack McFarland, a DuPont company representative at the conference.

The United States and large developing countries, for different reasons, reject mandatory emissions restrictions and are unlikely to shift anytime soon, many experts and negotiators say.

China and India insist that wealthy countries, which generated most of the existing pollution, must take the initiative.

President Bush has focused on a long-term effort to find new ways to produce energy without harmful emissions.

Many of the world's poorest countries have come to demand aid and action in light of scientific projections that conclude they will be the first to bear the brunt of climate shifts.

"It all underscores the necessity of all the communities of the world to work together to solve the world's worst problems," said Enele S. Sopoaga, the ambassador to the United Nations from Tuvalu, a Pacific nation where the highest point is 15 feet above the waves.

Because of its rejection of the protocol, the United States government has emerged as the favorite whipping boy of many participants in the conference.

On the official level, however, other governments appear eager to find a way to re-engage the United States. The European Union has suggested a two-track approach to addressing what to do after 2012, using as frameworks both the Kyoto Protocol and the original convention to which the United States was a signatory.

That approach is intended "to assure that all parties participate in the discussions" about the future, said Yvo de Boer, a Dutch official who is the head of the European Union delegation. "By having the broad discussion, we are offering them an opportunity to participate and we would be very keen to see them do that."

Larry Rohter reported from Buenos Aires for this article, and Andrew C. Revkin from New York.