

De Boer warns of red card as time runs out for climate deal

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The UN's top climate official yesterday warned that time is running out to agree on a global, ambitious and fair deal on climate change, even as Bolivia revealed data which showed industrialised countries' greenhouse gas emissions would actually increase if accounting loopholes are allowed to proceed.

Climate talks in Bonn, Germany, began last week to prepare for a major conference in Cancun, Mexico, at the end of the year, with the smallest and poorest countries pushing hard for a binding deal this year.

"We got a yellow card in Copenhagen and the referee's hand will edge toward the red one if we fail to deliver in Cancun and beyond," Yvo de Boer, head of the UN climate secretariat, said in his farewell speech, referring to last year's conference which ended in disarray and has been widely perceived as a failure.

Christiana Figueres, Mr de Boer's successor, said she was confident governments would be able to agree on a global deal because "humanity has no other option".

She said she did not doubt that the Cancun conference would be successful, but that the form success would take was still under discussion.

Ms Figueres paid tribute to Marthinus van Schalkwyk, SA's candidate for the position and said she was confident SA would help facilitate discussions when it hosts the annual conference next year.

But much of this week has been spent discussing minor technical issues, with little progress on substantive political issues, such as the glaring gap between the pledges put forward by industrialised countries and the amount required by science to keep global warming below catastrophic levels.

"Negotiations are going in the wrong direction," said Lim Li Ling, from the Third World Network, adding that existing pledges from countries did not respond to the needs of science or equity and that developing countries' proposal for an aggregate target should be accepted.

Bolivia's sensational analysis, based on data calculated by the UN climate secretariat itself, shows that if arcane accounting rules for forestry and surplus emissions are passed, industrialised countries would be allowed to increase emissions by between 4 and 8% on 1990 levels by 2017, under the Kyoto Protocol.

The United States, which continues to reject the protocol, would not benefit from the loopholes, but the European Union would.

Industrialised countries' pledges fall far short of the estimated 25%-40% cut needed to keep world temperatures rising more than 2 degrees - a level which, if exceeded, is

thought to lead to catastrophic climate change. Currently only voluntary pledges of between 17% and 25% have been made.

Bolivia's ambassador Pablo Solan said his country had put forward a proposal to discuss the domestic commitments of countries, which would give greater clarity on what action is being taken to reduce emissions.

"This is not about clean development. This is about how you account for what you are doing," he said.

Mr de Boer warned participants could not afford to postpone action much longer, and admitted current pledges are insufficient to keep global warming from reaching dangerous levels.