



## U.N. Welcomes U.S Led Partnership on Climate Change

January 10, 2006 — By Mike Corder, Associated Press

SYDNEY, Australia — A U.S.-led partnership to combat global warming through cleaner energy technologies is the latest sign that the debate is shifting away from caps on emissions of greenhouse gases and toward voluntary measures, experts said Monday.

The United Nations cautiously welcomed the inaugural Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, which starts Wednesday. It brings together the United States, Australia, China, India, South Korea and Japan -- which collectively produce half the world's greenhouse gases.

"From our perspective, the whole exercise of international cooperation on climate change is designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which are causing the problems," Richard Kinley, acting head of the U.N. Climate Change Secretariat told The Associated Press.

"One has to watch the partnership over the next few years," he said. "If one puts money into it and developments concrete implementation action, it can deliver real results."

Washington and Canberra have refused to sign the 1997 Kyoto climate treaty, saying the caps on greenhouse gas emissions it demands would damage their economies. As developing countries, China and India are exempt from the treaty but have indicated they won't agree to setting mandatory controls on gasses like carbon dioxide and methane.

The new partnership was attractive to countries that "want to demonstrate they are doing something" about global warming but that don't like emission targets, said Alan Oxley of Australia APEC Study Center, a free-trade think tank.

The United States has said the partnership will complement the Kyoto treaty, focusing on voluntary measures to create new investment opportunities and provide financing for so-called clean technologies such as solar power and geothermal energy.

But environmentalists have dismissed the meeting as a "trade show" for business interests, saying it avoids the crucial issue of setting targets for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

Most scientists agree that the so-called greenhouse effect -- gases trapping heat in the atmosphere -- is a major contributor to global warming, which is blamed for rising sea levels and melting polar ice caps and believed to be contributing to a rise in severe weather events like hurricanes.

"Kyoto is a first step -- and a very small first step -- but at least it points in the right direction," said Greens party climate change campaigner John Kaye. "The problem with the Asia Pacific Partnership is it's not a first step and it points in the wrong direction."

Alan Moran, an energy economist who has estimated it would cost Australia billions of dollars each year to comply with the targets set out in the Kyoto agreement, said the new partnership reinforces the view that Kyoto is unworkable.

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"What binds this partnership together is a knowledge that Kyoto, taken in its strictest sense, cannot apply because it would have catastrophic implications of economic well being of these nations," he said. "It's an insurance policy in case carbon dioxide levels become so high that they cause global warming and create (an) imperative for nations to act."

Environmentalists say that point has already been reached, and that governments are hesitating to curb emissions because it might prove expensive, trim growth rates, and result in politically unpopular rises in fuel and other costs.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in November that mandatory targets limiting pollution made people "very nervous and very worried" and were incompatible with economic success. A framework more sensitive to these fears would need to replace Kyoto when the agreement expires in 2012.

Among developed nations, only the United States and Australia have rejected the 1997 treaty negotiated in Kyoto, Japan, that mandates specific cutbacks in emissions of carbon dioxide and five other gases by 2012 in 35 industrialized countries.

Australia's Environment Minister Ian Campbell said new technologies needed to be developed before countries were required to meet emission cuts.

"The consensus of scientists around the world is that we need 50 to 60 percent lower emissions this century," Campbell told The Associated Press by phone.

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AP environment writer Michael Casey in Bangkok and reporter Meraiah Foley in Sydney contributed to this report.

*Source: Associated Press*

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