

Kyoto 2012 greenhouse gas goals still in reach - U.N.

By Alister Doyle, Environment Correspondent

OSLO (Reuters) - Industrialised nations can reach 2012 United Nations goals for reining in gases blamed for global warming but many will have to take tougher measures, the U.N. climate change bureau said on Tuesday.

A year after the U.N.'s Kyoto Protocol on reining in emissions from burning fossil fuels entered into force, it said information filed in early 2006 by rich nations showed "significant progress" in working out new policies and rules.

"Industrialised countries that have ratified the ... Kyoto Protocol can still reach their legally-binding emissions targets," the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) said to mark the Feb. 16 first anniversary.

Weakened by a U.S. pullout, Kyoto is meant as a small first step to force about 40 rich nations to cut emissions of carbon dioxide from factories, power plants and cars that are blamed for blanketing the globe and pushing up world temperatures.

Richard Kinley, acting head of the UNFCCC, said Kyoto nations were "on their way to lower their emission levels by at least 3.5 percent below 1990 levels" by the 2008-12 target.

With extra measures, they could reach the overall target of at least a 5 percent cut below 1990 levels, he said.

Extra measures include investing in clean energy projects in the developing world, ranging from hydropower plants in Honduras to solar energy schemes in China. Under such projects, firms can win credits that count against emissions back home.

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Even so, Kinley said many Kyoto backers would have to "sustain or even intensify their efforts". "More is needed," he said.

Many scientists say that rising temperatures will spur an ever more chaotic climate likely to spawn more droughts, heat waves, floods and drive up sea levels by almost a metre by 2100.

The UNFCCC said last year that overall emissions by rich nations had fallen to 17.3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2003 from 18.4 billion in 1990.

It warned that most of the fall was due to the collapse of Soviet-era smokestack industries and could rebound.

On Tuesday, it said extra measures for investment in the developing world, known as the "clean development mechanism", had the potential to cut 700 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions by the end of 2012 or about the annual amount emitted by Canada.

It said the 15 European Union member states before the bloc's 2004 expansion to include eastern European nations, had cut emissions by 1.7 percent from 1990 levels -- roughly the equivalent of Denmark's annual emissions.

U.S. President George W. Bush pulled out of Kyoto in 2001, saying that it would cost U.S. jobs and wrongly

excluded developing nations from the first round of cuts to 2012.

Last month Bush stressed more spending on cleaner energy technology, including solar and wind power, to break what he called the United States' addiction to oil.

Separately, the WWF environmental group said the Kyoto anniversary and high oil prices were a chance to spur a shift to cleaner energies.

"We are still far from winning the fight against global warming," said Jennifer Morgan, head of the WWF's climate change programme.

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