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No excuse for lack of action on climate change: UN

by Geraldine Schwarz

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Governments must act decisively to avert a global climate catastrophe, the UN's chief official on climate change after talks to lay the ground for a successor to the Kyoto Protocol.

"There is no remaining excuse for the governments not to act on climate change. We have the existing technology to reduce emissions," said Yvo de Boer, the head of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the end of a two-week conference in the western German city of Bonn.

A conference on the Indonesian island of Bali in December is supposed to thrash out a new treaty to limit greenhouse gas emissions and replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012.

Any new agreement will be redundant unless it includes the United States, which did not sign up to Kyoto, and other major developing and polluting nations such as India and China.

De Boer said the meeting of 1,800 experts in Bonn had helped pave the way to fruitful negotiations.

"The progress of the conference allows us to focus much more in Bali on what comes after 2012," he said.

"We have come closer to broadening negotiations on a post-2012 regime by resolving some of the outstanding issues and clarifying which building blocks of a future agreement need to be put in place."

Among the issues discussed by the 191 signatories to the UN convention -- of which 173 signed up to Kyoto -- were to enhance the transfer of 'clean' technologies and how to avoid deforestation, which is estimated to account for 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

"The fact that European, American and Australian business groups here in Bonn have been calling on governments to set long-term, legally binding emission reduction targets is a strong signal that they feel the carbon market will be a key element of any 2012 agreement," De Boer said.

Carbon trading operates on the principle that governments cap the level of greenhouse gas emissions, and the companies to obtain permits to emit a set level of pollution.

If they exceed the limit, they must buy permits from other companies which have reined in their emissions.

Companies with lower emissions are therefore rewarded by paying less.

As a non-Kyoto signatory, the United States does not participate in carbon trading.

A senior US official said this week that President George W. Bush believes privately-funded technology will do more to reduce global warming than the capping of carbon emissions favoured by the European Union.

"It is the president's view: technology is the solution," US Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman said at a meeting of the International Energy Agency in Paris.

The issue of climate change is likely to create clashes at a summit of the Group of Eight most industrialised nations.

Germany on June 6-8.

De Boer told AFP that G8 countries take the lead.

"To advance the (support of the) USA is absolutely essential and it is also essential to encourage major emerg take further action on climate change. But for that the major industrialised countries must show leadership," he

The head of China's delegation at the Bonn meeting, Ji Zou, said the reluctance of developed nations to supply developing nations -- the so-called transfer of technology -- was holding up efforts to curb emissions.

"Some progress has been made, but the industrialised countries are reluctant. Their position is not positive end AFP.

"We are missing opportunities for clean construction and clean production."

The Bonn conference was the first chance for experts to react to the findings of a fourth UN assessment report change released in Bangkok on May 4.

The report concluded that nations have the money and technology to save the world from the worst ravages of but warned they must act immediately to succeed.

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