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INTERVIEW - Russia must end uncertainty over Kyoto - UN

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GERMANY: June 12, 2003

BONN, Germany - Russia should end the uncertainty over whether it will ratify the Kyoto Protocol and finally say when it plans to accept the international agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions, a U.N. official said.

Most industrial nations, with the notable exception of the United States, the world's biggest polluter, have ratified the 1997 protocol which seeks to reduce richer nations' emissions of gases blamed for global warming.

But the targets to bring such emissions below 1990 levels by 2012 will only take effect if Russia signs up.

Joke Waller-Hunter, executive secretary of the United Nations' Climate Change Convention, told Reuters she remained confident Russia would ratify, saying a climate conference in Moscow in September could be pivotal.

"It provides an excellent opportunity for the Russian federation to give the clear indication that the international community needs, not on the if but on the when," she said on the sidelines of a climate conference in Germany.

A breakthrough by September 13 would mean the Kyoto Protocol would take effect by the forthcoming Milan summit in December.

It comes into force when countries accounting for 55 percent of emissions have signed up. Russian ratification would push the figure to about 60 percent of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases.

The Milan summit, the ninth such event, will focus on the issue of carbon sinks, Waller-Hunter said. Trees absorb CO2 and developed countries may earn credits for planting forests which they could offset against their emission cutting targets.

It will also seek to enhance observation of the effects of climate change, particularly in the developing world, and aim to push climate change policies higher up governments' agendas.

A U.N. report released last week showed that emissions in

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the industrialised countries were set to increase by 10 percent from 2000 to 2010 after a three percent fall in the 1990s.

"The picture is not so rosy," Waller-Hunter said, adding that the transport and energy sectors had made little or no inroads into their gas emissions.

Story by Philip Blenkinsop

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**TOP
OF
PAGE**

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