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Climate Change Meetings

Kyoto Protocol

'Experts Meeting' Begins Discussion
Of Post-2012 Period; No Agreement Yet

BONN, Germany--At a meeting here May 16-17, parties to the Kyoto Protocol took their first tentative steps toward developing an international climate change policy framework for the period following the treaty's first compliance period, which extends from 2008 to 2012.

The special seminar for government experts was the first formal meeting under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since the Kyoto Protocol took effect in February. Related UNFCCC meetings (known as the Twenty-Second Sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies, or SB-22) will continue here through May 27.

A provisional agenda calling for discussions of the post-2012 period was set at the last annual UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, which was held in Buenos Aires last December (28 INER 28, 01/12/05).

It was hoped that the Bonn meetings would pave the way for a fuller talks on the topic at the first full-fledged UNFCCC Meeting of the Parties (MOP-1) to be held in Montreal Nov. 28 to Dec. 9.

At the close of the meetings May 17, however, it was unclear whether this had been achieved.

Need for Formal Discussions

Most delegates said the Bonn meeting had been successful in terms of confidence building and information exchange, but some were lukewarm in their assessment, pointing to a lack of agreement between parties regarding how and when formal talks on the post-2012 period will start.

"I think that what happened here was good. Ideas were exchanged, and that is not bad," one Swiss delegate told BNA, asking not to be named. "But we also missed an opportunity for the issues to be pushed forward by delegations laying their cards on the table and starting some real discussions."

At a closing briefing, UNFCCC Secretary General Joke Waller-Hunter

cautioned that some expectations may have been unrealistic. "One of the features of this type of seminar format is that information is exchanged but no conclusions are reached, no negotiations take place," she said. "That can happen in Montreal, but not here."

Article 3.9 of the Kyoto Protocol calls for discussions on the post-2012 period to begin "at least seven years before the end of the first compliance period," meaning this year.

Many climate change experts, particularly those involved in greenhouse gas reduction projects that aim to earn tradable emissions credits, say the lack of a formal Kyoto framework beyond 2012 is already hurting the ability of government policymakers and private business to make appropriate plans and investments.

National Presentations

There were 27 national presentations at the Bonn meeting, most describing ongoing work in individual countries.

The European Union presentation, however, suggested some long-term emissions targets, such as a 15 percent to 30 percent reduction in emissions from industrialized country from 1990 levels by 2020. (The protocol itself calls for a 5.2 percent reduction from 1990 levels by the period 2008-2012.)

In addition, South Africa and Mexico--which are not currently included in the protocol's Annex I list of countries required to reduce emissions in the first commitment period--both suggested that more countries should be included in the list after 2012.

Another key topic discussed at the meeting was how best to engage the United States, which is the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter and is a party to the UNFCCC but is not a party to the Kyoto Protocol for implementing the framework convention.

Several European delegates suggested that talks over the post-2012 period could take place under the Kyoto Protocol and not the framework convention, which would prevent the United States and Australia from having a say.

The best hope for Montreal, delegates said, was to reach a consensus on the terms for discussion for the post-2012 period. This could become known as the "Montreal Mandate" and could lead to a agreement on new protocol for the period after 2012 at MOP-2 in 2006, which will probably be held in Africa. Such a development would parallel the way the 1996 Berlin Mandate gave birth to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, they said.

More information on UNFCCC meetings, including SB-22, is available at <http://unfccc.int/meetings/sb22/items/3369.php>