



INTERVIEW - French Climate Plan May be Distraction - UN Official

OSLO - A French-led plan to create a stronger UN agency must not be allowed to sidetrack the world from the overriding goal of fighting global warming, the UN's top climate change official said on Tuesday.

Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat, said a study last week by leading scientists blaming human activities for global warming should spur governments to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

"The main priority is for political leaders to start coming to grips" with global warming, he told Reuters after a 46-nation appeal led by French President Jacques Chirac on Friday to create a new, powerful UN Environmental Organisation.

"If they feel that putting it in a different place would help towards that end, then fine. But political action is what is needed," he said in a telephone interview from Nairobi.

Chirac said the existing Nairobi-based UN Environment Programme, and the Bonn-based Climate Change Secretariat, lacked clout to combat threats ranging from species loss to global warming, widely blamed on human use of fossil fuels.

The European Union and some developing countries signed up for the French-led appeal but the United States, China, Russia -- the three top emitters of greenhouse gases and also among the most powerful in the United Nations -- did not.

"Quite honestly I think regrouping different bodies is going to be difficult," de Boer said, adding that it could be hard to get many member states to yield control over the governing councils of existing agencies.

"Organisational improvements can be important but the priority now is going to be to kickstart the negotiations beyond 2012," de Boer said. "I hope that an organisational debate doesn't detract from that."

De Boer wants more countries to take part beyond 2012 in the UN's Kyoto Protocol, which obliges 35 developed nations to cut emissions of carbon dioxide by at least 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2008-12.

The UN climate panel warned on Friday that global warming could push up temperatures, causing more droughts, floods, heat waves and rising sea levels for more than 1,000 years.

It said it was at least 90-percent certain that humans were to blame for most of the warming in the past 50 years -- up from a 66 percent probability in a last report in 2001.

Story by Alister Doyle, Environment Correspondent

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