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U.N. 2009 climate summit might spur treaty talks

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OSLO (Reuters) - A possible world climate change summit in 2009 could act as a deadline for governments to agree a new treaty to fight global warming beyond 2012, the head of the U.N. Climate Change Secretariat said on Thursday.

Yvo de Boer welcomed remarks by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that he was considering a high-level meeting on climate change in September 2007 that might pave the way to a summit in 2008 or 2009.

"The Secretary General is lifting the climate change debate to a whole new level of interest," de Boer told Reuters, denying disappointment after originally arguing for a summit this year to help kick off negotiations on a new treaty.

Among several options, a summit in 2009 could put pressure on government negotiators seeking to extend the U.N.'s Kyoto Protocol, the main U.N. plan for combating climate change whose first period runs out in 2012.

"A two-year negotiating process reporting back to a summit in 2009 is conceivable," he said in a telephone interview from the Bonn-based Secretariat. "That would be giving people a deadline."

Ban told the Financial Times in an interview published on Wednesday that a high-level meeting in New York in September, which could involve ministers and other top delegates, was the most "practical and realistic approach".

If the meeting on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly was a success, a summit in 2008 or 2009 could then be discussed, Ban told the newspaper.

TWO YEARS

De Boer said he hoped that environment ministers meeting in Bali, Indonesia, in December would agree to start two years of negotiations to widen Kyoto to include outsiders led by the United States and developing nations such as China and India.

It took two years from 1995-97 to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol, which binds 35 industrialized nations to cut emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2008-12. Kyoto has been weakened by a 2001 pullout by the United States.

Many investors want to know long-term international rules on emissions of greenhouse gases, mainly from burning fossil fuels, to help guide investments in everything from coal-fired power plants to aircraft engines.

President George W. Bush, who will leave office in early 2009, says Kyoto's caps on emissions would damage the U.S. economy and that the accord wrongly excludes developing nations such as China and India until at least 2012.

De Boer said that a series of U.N. climate reports this year, warning of rising seas, more droughts, floods, heatwaves and a spread of disease -- could help spur broader action.

He noted that developing nations such as China and South Africa were talking of a need to act to slow climate change.

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