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Berlin climate meeting helps to pave way for Bali: UN official



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A 20-nation meeting in Berlin has helped lay the foundation for negotiations in Bali in December about a new climate change treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, a UN official said Tuesday.

"We have laid the foundation for formal talks," the executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Yvo de Boer, said in Berlin.

He said the two-day meeting of ministers of the Group of Eight plus 12 other major energy consumers that ended in Berlin on Tuesday had helped forge greater understanding between the haves and the have-nots on combating global warming.

"I have heard here in Berlin that all nations want to make progress in Bali, and that they want the conference there to establish clear goals and greater involvement on the part of developing countries," de Boer added.

"Everybody already has a climate change policy and everybody is ready to go further."

The UNFCCC hopes that its conference in Bali, Indonesia will deliver a roadmap for negotiating cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that will be implemented after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol runs out.

But deeply conflicting views between countries about how to act to stop the Earth from overheating means that the UN officials will have their work cut out to prevent it all ending in deadlock.

One problem is configuring a treaty encouraging cuts by the United States, which opposes the cap on emissions set down under Kyoto and is pushing for a voluntary, technology-driven approach.

Another problem is what kind of commitments large developing countries should make under post-2012 Kyoto.

German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel said there were encouraging signs that a global consensus was slowly emerging to avert a looming disaster.

This, and hardening public opinion, will "make it very difficult for nations to opt out of the process," Gabriel said.

"Recalcitrant governments are facing more and more pressure," he said, referring to the United States, the world's number one greenhouse gas emitter, which walked away from Kyoto in 2001.

Little detail was known about positions taken at the Berlin meeting -- the third and penultimate in the G8's so-called Gleneagles Process on climate change, clean energy and sustainable development.

Veterans of climate negotiations expect some of the major players in this process to declare their hand only at a time closer to the Bali conference or possibly at Bali itself.

That conference will be preceded by two major meetings in the United States.

On September 24, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will host a 30-nation meeting in New York.

Three days later US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will chair a meeting of 16 countries that together account for some 90 percent of global emissions in Washington.

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