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Amid Gloomy Climate News, Doha Talks Enter Final Week

by Rosanne Skirble

High level officials from more than 200 countries are in [Doha](#), Qatar, for talks that began last week on the next steps after the Kyoto Protocol, the U.N. climate change treaty expires this year.

The ministers arrive in the face of bad news for the planet. A spate of new scientific studies finds worldwide greenhouse gas emissions rising and ice sheets melting rapidly, and predicts a planetary warming of as much as five degrees Celsius by the end of this century unless nations act immediately to reduce their industrial emissions of CO2 and other climate-changing greenhouse gases.

The executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change told a Doha news briefing Monday that nations are not moving fast enough.

“What gives me frustration is the fact that we are very far behind what science says we should be doing,” [Christiana Figueres](#) said.

Poor want wealthy to pay for climate problems

Figueres hopes ministers in Doha will extend the 1997 Kyoto agreement, under which the wealthiest industrial nations were obliged to cut their industrial emissions. At Doha, they're being asked to make further cuts.

[Dlamini Emmanuel](#), who heads the African Group of Negotiators in Doha, worries about the fate of poorer nations - those least able to protect themselves from climate change - should international ministers either fail to extend the Kyoto Protocol or craft a new treaty to replace it.

"This process is our only hope because we are likely to be doomed because the catastrophic impacts in our natural systems, eco-systems, particularly humankind in Africa cannot be imagined," Emmanuel says.

Poorer nations also want more funding to help them adapt to a warmer world, with its rising sea levels and more violent storms.

[Jennifer Morgan](#) directs the climate and energy program at the World Resources Institute. She says that funding will be in doubt when Kyoto expires. "There's no certainty of what will come next. And of course in these economic times it is a difficult discussion and it's definitely one that will go until the end game."

US wants all nations included

Many countries are looking for leadership from the United States. The U.S. signed but never ratified the Kyoto agreement in part because emerging economies like China, India and Brazil, which are now among the world's largest emitters, were exempted.

U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Change, [Todd Stern](#), told reporters in Doha that any new climate treaty must include emissions-cutting commitments from all countries and be scaled to the world of the 2020s, when it would take effect.

“It’s built on countries’ national circumstances and their capabilities and not built on their ideology, not built on an ideology that says we are going to draw a line down the middle of the world and countries are on one side or another and if you are on one side you have no obligations and if you are on the other side you have all.”

Domestic policies hold back US lead

While hopes are high that the U.S. will take the lead in Doha with new emission pledges, some experts doubt if the Obama Administration has the political support at home to significantly alter its climate policies. [Alexander Ochs](#), an energy and climate analyst with the World Watch Institute in Doha says the U.S. has its hands bound.

"On the one hand, having this high expectation here of other countries that the United States should be in a leadership role and on the other hand not being able to move more ambitiously to fulfill those targets and those commitments because of domestic resistance."

WRI's Jennifer Morgan agrees, but expects nations to press the U.S. to do more. "I think that the hope is that in a second term, the Obama Administration would become much more ambitious and progressive in these negotiations and build coalitions."

Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, says the progress she's seen over the past several years makes her optimistic about the process.

"What gives me hope is fully confidence that we will here in Doha deliver another firm step in the right direction."

But Figueres adds that negotiations to put the brakes on global climate change still face a long road ahead. The Climate Change talks in Doha are due to end Friday.

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