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G8: Trying to Move Beyond Debate on Emission Targets

By Keya Acharya

TOKYO, Jul 1 (IPS) - Approximately 133 parliamentarians from 23 countries along with prominent politicians under a caucus called GLOBE (global legislators for a balanced environment) have gathered here ahead of the Jul. 7-9 G8 meetings in Hokkaido. They hope to influence the G8 -- the world's most industrialised countries -- to adopt a policy for tackling climate change post-2012 when the current Kyoto Protocol ends.

The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 set a 2012 target for certified emission reductions (CERs) down to 2000-levels. It also allowed developed countries to buy some of these CERs from developing countries.

There are now active discussions at the U.N. among political groups to agree on what policy should be adopted after 2012, and whether prominent developing nations like India and China should be bound within emission reduction targets post 2012.

Japan, which is struggling to meet its target reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2012 -- in spite of its very energy-efficient technologies -- had Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda asking the parliamentarians gathered for a 'good' post-2012 plan, specifically mentioning India and China's inclusion.

There has been acrimonious debate in the global community on the 'common but differentiated' principle which sets differing emission-reduction targets on countries, based on their history of emissions.

Developing countries -- led by India and China -- have been resisting emission reduction targets, saying the developed world's responsibility was higher in the problem.

But the Fukuda said, "There cannot be a solution unless there is universal participation."

"China and India have the potential to pollute the air faster than any nation in history," said U.S. Republican candidate John McCain in a video message to the group.

"Undue attention was being focused on India and China in all climate change fora by the international community," explained Indian legislator Vijayendra Pal Singh, a member of the country's Lok Sabha, or lower house of parliament. "India emits 1.3 billion tonnes of carbon per year on a per capita basis, China emits 3.4 billion tonnes per annum, while Europe emits 12 billion tonnes and the USA 20 billion tonnes per capita per year," he said.

Chinese parliamentarian Wang Guangtao said China was trying its best to become energy-efficient, but that pressuring China into reduction targets was unfair when developed countries' emissions was the main cause of the problem. "We cannot appropriately focus on emissions of developing countries and we cannot commit to measures beyond our capability; it is unfair to link trade and climate change," he said.

But the U.S., with a long history of resisting all attempts at ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, appears to be finally agreeing to join the global climate-abatement movement.

"We must take our place at the table of leaders, not the backdoor chairs," read U.S. Democratic candidate Barack Obama's statement to the meeting. It is a "shared responsibility to limit future reductions," the statement read.

But former British Prime Minister Tony Blair -- now heading the Climate Group, a non-profit group of politicians and business leaders -- said nations needed to move beyond quibbling over emissions toward a practical interim solution for the next 30-40 years.

"Don't get fixated on targets, but focus on energy-efficiency, finding funds for these technologies and some informal mechanism for countries to talk to one another," Blair said, though he did admit that without agreement between major emitting nations there can be no success.

The South African official opposition party parliamentarian, Gareth Morgan told Blair that his country needed money urgently for technologies to check desertification and resultant water and food security.

Singh said India needed funding "in the millions and more" to help harness the country's ample solar resources as a method of energy-efficiency.

Blair agreed that finding the funds for new technologies for developing nations was the real challenge -- one that moved beyond the "overseas development-type" of negotiations. "My instinct is that we should look for ways to generate this money without looking to individual finance ministries," he said.

Graeme Wheeler, president of the World Bank, says the bank has the Clean Technology Fund, Strategic Climate Fund and the Catastrophe Bonds that offer "wonderful opportunities" for helping out.

The Clean Technology Fund has a 5 billion dollars in its kitty to provide grants and loans to developing countries for the transfer of low-carbon technologies, while the smaller Strategic Climate Fund is for small island states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) to help build their resilience to climate change.

The Catastrophe Bond has western investors buying them at higher interest rates, but the attractiveness according to Wheeler, is that these are diversified bonds that pose less risk of losing capital. The money is then paid out to governments in case of natural disaster. Currently Malawi has a partnership with the World Bank in case of natural disasters.



GLOBE meeting opening session.

Credit:Katsuhiro Asagiri/IPS



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"But the financing needs for climate change issues from developing countries are simply enormous, so a lot of the solutions have to link up with private partnerships," said Wheeler.

Indian parliamentarian and former Environment Minister Suresh Prabhu said that financing for adaptation is expected to grow to 86 billion dollars by 2015. "Adaptation in poor and developing nations is stemming from a history of industrialisation, so industrialised nations need to bear this responsibility."

Prabhu, who has chaired GLOBE's strategy on adaptation -- to be put before the G8 -- believes that levying a tax on carbon trading under the clean development mechanism could help build the funding needed.

GLOBE says its 2012 climate change framework, worked out after several discussions, is "nearing" total consensus from all its participants. "As legislators, we hold the purse-strings and we want to get direct feedback," Brian Wilfert, a Canadian member of parliament, told a group of journalists. "GLOBE gives us the advantage to push issues that may not be on the G8 agenda."

Wilfert told IPS that Canada -- which has so far faulted on its emission-reduction commitments under the Kyoto Protocol for even the first phase which ends in 2012 -- is now "trying a very aggressive green policy". Canada, said Wilfert at the meeting, has invested 2 billion dollars in carbon capture and storage systems.

(END/2008)

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