

150 Nations Gather for UN Climate Summit

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September 24, 2007

UNITED NATIONS (AP) -- Rising global temperatures that are melting the Arctic and expanding the oceans are now drawing more than 80 world leaders to the U. N. podium for an unprecedented summit Monday on how to combat climate change. From California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a champion of climate-saving legislation, the presidents and premiers will hear that even an often-reluctant United States is pitching in.



Yvo De Boer, left, Executive Secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and Rajendra K. Pachauri, right, Chairman of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change speak to reporters at U.N. Headquarters in New York Saturday, Sept. 22, 2007.

"California is moving the United States beyond debate and doubt to action," he says in remarks prepared for the meeting's morning kickoff.

Fellow opening speaker Rajendra Pachauri, chief U.N. climate scientist, says there's now "much greater evidence of human influence on climate change," and therefore "it's time for action."

The one-day meeting, with more than 150 nations participating, also was scheduled to hear from such international figures as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, and from former U.S. vice president and climate campaigner Al Gore.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon organized the summit to build political momentum toward launching negotiations later this year for deep cutbacks in emissions of carbon dioxide and other manmade gases blamed for global warming. President Bush, who has long opposed such negotiated limits on "greenhouse gases," wasn't participating in the day's meetings but was to attend a small dinner Monday evening, a gathering of key players hosted by Ban.

Rather than accept treaty obligations, Bush has urged industry to cut emissions

voluntarily, and emphasizes research on clean-energy technology as one answer. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, leading the U.S. delegation, will address a technology session at Monday's conference.

While the Republican U.S. administration has resisted emissions caps, California's Republican governor and Democrat-led legislature last year approved a law requiring the state's industries to reduce greenhouse gases by an estimated 25 percent by 2020. Other U.S. states, in various ways, are moving to follow California's lead.

This first-ever U.N. climate summit looks ahead to December's annual climate treaty conference in Bali, Indonesia, when the Europeans, Japanese and others hope to initiate talks for an emissions-reduction agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. The 1997 Kyoto pact, which the U.S. rejects, requires 36 industrial nations to reduce heat-trapping gases emitted by power plants and other industrial, agricultural and transportation sources by an average 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Advocates say a breakthrough is needed at Bali - almost certainly requiring a change in the U.S. position - to ensure an uninterrupted transition from Kyoto to a new, deeper-cutting regime.

To try to spur global negotiations, the European Union has committed to reduce emissions by at least an additional 20 percent by 2020.

Bush has objected that Kyoto-style mandates would damage the U.S. economy, and says they should have been imposed on fast-growing poorer countries, such as China and India, as well as on developed nations. On Thursday and Friday, Bush will host his own two-day climate meeting in Washington, limited to 16 "major emitter" countries, first in a series of such U.S.-sponsored climate gatherings.

Many environmentalists fear this separate U.S. "track," which will involve China and India, may undercut the global U.N. negotiating process. But some hope it eventually helps draw those two big developing nations and others into a new, U.N.-negotiated emissions regime.

The U.N. summit follows a series of reports by Pachauri's U.N. scientific network that warned of temperatures rising by several degrees Fahrenheit by 2100 and of a drastically changed planet from rising seas, drought and other factors, unless nations rein in greenhouse gases.

The U.N.-sponsored scientists reported global average temperatures over the past 100 years rose 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit, and the planet's sea levels rose 6.6 inches, as oceans expanded from warmth and from the runoff of melting land ice. Just last week, U.S. scientists reported that warmer temperatures this summer had shrunk the Arctic Ocean's ice cap to a record-low size.