

The 2006 UN climate change conference in Nairobi: background and expectations

Background

What:

From November 6 to 17, 2006, the world's governments will meet in Nairobi, Kenya to resume critical negotiations on reductions of the greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution that causes climate change. The Nairobi conference¹ is the annual UN climate change conference – the year's most important intergovernmental meeting to address the world's most profound environmental challenge. Ministers will attend a high-level segment from November 15–17. Canada's Environment Minister Rona Ambrose is due to attend.

Why:

The key task of the Nairobi conference is to make significant progress in negotiating the extension and strengthening of the Kyoto Protocol. Under Kyoto's first phase, industrialized countries agreed to make modest initial reductions in GHG emissions during 2008–12. At the 2005 UN climate conference in Montreal, the global community agreed to launch negotiations on a second phase of Kyoto to begin in 2013. Kyoto phase II must place the world on a path towards the deep reductions in emissions that are essential to preventing devastating climate change impacts.

How:

Two key processes will take place in Nairobi:²

- The “Ad Hoc Working Group” (AWG) charged with negotiating national GHG targets for industrialized countries in Kyoto phase II will hold its second meeting from November 6–14 (the first meeting took place in Bonn in May 2006). It is essential that industrialized countries' phase II targets represent significantly deeper GHG reductions than in phase I.
- Under the Kyoto Protocol, the 165 countries that have ratified it are required to initiate, at this conference, a process of review of the protocol known as the “article 9 review”. Discussions are scheduled to begin on November 9. The review is a forum to discuss, amongst other matters, commitments key developing countries could take on in Kyoto phase II, taking into account their needs and circumstances.³ Such commitments, along with stronger targets for industrialized countries, are essential elements of Kyoto phase II.

¹ The conference's technical names are COP12 (12th session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) and COP/MOP2 (2nd Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol).

² A detailed schedule of the Nairobi conference is available at http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_12/agendas/application/pdf/cop12_overview_schedule0920.pdf.

³ Phase II commitments for developing countries could include “sustainable development policies and measures” and/or targets applying to specific economic sectors – accompanied by assistance from industrialized countries.

Expectations

Overall:

Agreement on Kyoto phase II must be reached by the end of 2008, or as soon as possible after the next US administration takes office in January 2009. It is critical to reach agreement as early as possible to give countries time to ratify the necessary amendments to the protocol, and to prevent collapse of the international GHG emissions trading market, commonly referred to as the “carbon market,” which is now creating a price signal for emission reductions around the world.

In Nairobi:

To reach agreement on a sufficiently strong Kyoto phase II by the 2008–09 deadline, the 165 Kyoto countries must:

- Give the article 9 review equal status to the AWG dealing with industrialized country targets.
- Agree to continue both processes beyond Nairobi, with sufficiently frequent meetings⁴ and close linkage to move forward as quickly and efficiently as possible. The two processes must ultimately merge to provide the forum for reaching agreement on the necessary amendments to the Kyoto Protocol for phase II.
- Agree on a sufficiently detailed and adequate work plan for the article 9 review. This should include a period of analysis lasting no more than one year. The analysis must address (i) the amount of emission reductions needed to hold the increase in global average temperature over the pre-industrial level to less than 2°C – widely agreed to be a dangerous amount of warming, and (ii) how to fairly and equitably divide commitments between industrialized and developing countries.⁵
- Ensure that the AWG dealing with industrialized country targets agrees on a sufficiently detailed and adequate work plan – something it committed to do in Nairobi at its first meeting last May.

Also, in Nairobi:

- Industrialized countries must begin to discuss openly the amounts of emission reductions they are willing to contemplate in Kyoto phase II and the longer term.⁶
- Canada must play a constructive role that includes acknowledgment of the need to limit global warming to less than 2°C. There must be no repeat of the May 2006 negotiations in Bonn, where Canada’s negotiators, according to documents leaked to the Globe and Mail and La Presse, were instructed to delay negotiations, push for the abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol after 2012 and block any discussion of tougher targets for industrialized countries.

⁴ Nine meetings over two and a quarter years between 1995–97 were required to negotiate Kyoto phase I.

⁵ A more detailed description of the issues that need to be covered in the analysis phase of the article 9 review has been prepared by the Climate Action Network, available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2006/smsn/ngo/022.pdf>.

⁶ The EU has already advocated reductions in developed countries’ GHG emissions of 15–30% below the 1990 level by 2020, and 60–80% by 2050. In contrast, in its recent Clean Air Act announcement the Government of Canada committed to reduce emissions to 31–56% below the 1990 level by 2050 but suggested that our emissions will not fall below current levels until after 2020. This is clearly very far from adequate.