

G8 commits to global agreement at Copenhagen

A pledge has been made by leaders of the world's largest economies to confront climate change, along with a commitment to seek an ambitious global agreement in Copenhagen.

A declaration presented at the annual summit of the Group of Eight in L'Aquila states that leaders recognise the broad scientific view that the increase in global average temperature above pre-industrial levels should not exceed two degrees Celsius.

Leaders from the US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the UK have agreed to join a global response to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in global emissions by 2050, and to a goal of an aggregate 80 per cent or more reduction by developed countries by that date. They have also called upon major emerging economies to undertake quantifiable actions to collectively reduce emissions significantly below business-as-usual by a specified year.

US President Barack Obama says that in addition to the G8 meeting, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change has made real progress through "a candid and open discussion about the growing threat of climate change and what our nations must do – both individually and collectively – to address it".

"We also agree that developed countries – like my own – have a historic responsibility to take the lead. We have the much larger carbon footprint per capita, and I know that in the past, the US has sometimes fallen short of meeting our responsibilities, Obama says.

"So, let me be clear: Those days are over. One of my highest priorities as President is to drive a clean energy transformation of our economy, and over the past six months, the US has taken steps towards this goal," he says.

However, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that the cuts in greenhouse gas emissions proposed by the world's largest economies are not deep enough, and warns that much more effort is needed if governments are to reach a meaningful agreement on climate change by the end of the year.

Ban says the climate change commitments made by the G8 leaders and other participants the Major Economies Forum meeting, "while welcome, are not sufficient".

"The time for delays and half-measures is over," he says. "The personal leadership of every head of state or government is needed to seize this moment to protect people and the planet from one of the most serious challenges ever to confront humanity."

The target agreed by G8 leaders for reducing emissions by 2050 is not credible according to Ban without "ambitious mid-term targets, and baselines".

"In order to achieve such a global goal, developed countries must lead by example in making firm commitments to reduce their emissions by 2020 in the order of the 25 to 40 per cent below 1990 levels that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us is required. It is disappointing to note that thus far, the mid-term emissions targets announced by developed countries in the MEF are not in this range."

Ban notes that the countries represented in L'Aquila are responsible for more than 80 per cent of global emissions, "and that is why they bear special responsibility for finding a solution to the political impasse. If they fail to act this year, they will have squandered a unique historical opportunity that may not come again... We stand at a historical crossroads. Business as usual is no longer viable."

Obama says that developed and developing nations have made further and unprecedented commitments at the MEF to take strong and prompt action. He says that developed nations have committed to reducing their emissions in absolute terms.

“We also agreed that the actions we take to achieve our reductions must be measurable, reportable, and verifiable. And we agreed to establish, at the earliest possible date, a peak year after which overall global emissions will start falling. And these are all very significant steps forward in addressing this challenge,” says Obama.

“Each of our nations comes to the table with different needs, different priorities, different levels of development. And developing nations have real and understandable concerns about the role they will play in these efforts. They want to make sure that they do not have to sacrifice their aspirations for development and higher living standards. Yet, with most of the growth in projected emissions coming from these countries, their active participation is a prerequisite for a solution,” he says.

The 17 economies that participate in the Major Economies Forum are Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, Denmark, as President of the December 2009 Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations are also participating in this dialogue.

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