

China says tech transfer is a duty, not charity

Reuters, 13 December 2007 - Rich nations are dodging their moral obligation to provide clean energy technology to developing countries, even though collapsed talks on the issue have restarted, a top Chinese negotiator said on Thursday.

Yu Qingtai, China's climate change ambassador, told Reuters the key topic was back on the agenda at UN-led talks on fighting global warming because of fears that abandoning it would send a negative message to ordinary people following the meeting.

Asked if he was optimistic that a second attempt might produce some progress, Yu said developed nations' reluctance to share costly but clean technologies was a major stumbling block.

"I suspect that when it comes to technology transfer there are some fundamental problems in the thinking of the countries that possess these technologies," Yu said in an interview before heading into the restarted talks.

"They either view this as a gesture of charity or generosity, not as a moral or political obligation. They always try to shift the focus to the market, ignoring the fact that for developing countries we know the technologies are out there but these are the most expensive technologies and we cannot afford them."

Beijing told Reuters before the Bali talks that it would go "over and above" existing energy efficiency goals in return for such help. Along with cash for adapting to a warmer world it is a key issue for many other developing nations.

Talks on transfer broke down on Tuesday night over small technical issues, leading one Chinese delegation source to say he was disappointed and depressed.

The European Union said on Thursday that a lack of U.S. ambition was a key stumbling block to get a deal in Bali, and environmentalists warned that the United States was sabotaging the technology debate to try to derail the whole talks.

"They were actually very close ... and some parties moved tactically to prevent a conclusion of those negotiations," said Hans Verolme of conservation group WWF, which has delegates in the closed-door talks.

Intellectual property concerns

China has already set itself tight energy efficiency goals for the end of the decade -- though it so far fallen short -- and says it cannot do more without help from developed nations whose emissions-intensive growth it wants to avoid.

"It is not in our interests to be as wasteful as the OECD countries have become right now, we hope we will be able to learn from their experiences," Yu said.

But some rich nations say they cannot force companies that have invested in research and development to hand over their source of income, particularly to countries, such as China, where protection for intellectual property rights are weak.

Washington said it was already transferring technology, through the commercial methods that Yu criticised.

"The U.S. is one of the largest foreign direct investment countries in the world, and through that foreign direct investment we are massively transferring technology and skills all around the world," said James Connaughton, climate change advisor to the White House, when asked about the issue.

But he did not say how much investment was going to developing countries, and added that the United States imports more clean energy technology than it exports. (Editing by Alex Richardson)

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