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China lowers expectations of Copenhagen deal

Chinese premier says he hopes internal greenhouse gas emission targets signal adequate commitment to tackling climate change

Tom Young, [BusinessGreen](#) 03 Feb 2009

Hopes of a global agreement on climate change at [Copenhagen](#) next year received a blow yesterday as Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao lowered expectations that China would commit to a cap in carbon emissions.

Whilst emphasising the work that China is already doing to cut emissions, Jiabao said his country's relative economic immaturity made it harder to commit to internationally binding targets.

"It's difficult for China to take quantified emission reduction quotas at the Copenhagen conference, because this country is still at an early stage of development," he said in an [interview with the *Financial Times*](#). "Europe started its industrialisation several hundred years ago, but for China, it has only been dozens of years."

At the same time as downplaying expectations that the country could sign up to binding emission cuts, Jiabao emphasised China's support for the UN-backed Copenhagen conference and the development of a global green economy.

"We are of the view that to develop a green economy is probably another area in the economy as we meet the international financial crisis," said Wen. "The Chinese government gives top priority to meeting the challenge of climate change. We have established a national leadership group on tackling climate change and I'm the head of the group."

In China's 11th five year plan, beginning in 2006, targets were set for saving energy and reducing pollution with a goal of cutting energy consumption per unit of GDP by four per cent every year up to 2011.

Although targets were missed in the first two years of the period, they were met in 2008 and China has recently won plaudits for a raft of new environmental laws and increased investment in clean technologies.

Jiabao said he hoped these targets, rather than any international goals set as part of a deal in Copenhagen, would demonstrate China's commitment to tackling climate change.

"I think this can be seen as a way that China is holding itself accountable to the relevant targets," said Wen.

The comments will further fuel fears that large emerging economies will prove extremely reluctant to sign up to binding emission targets as part of any successor to the Kyoto deal

Indian officials have already indicated that they are unlikely to agree to a mandatory cap on emissions in Copenhagen, while Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took a similarly non-committal stance on climate change in his keynote address at the Davos forum.

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