

China presses for US help on climate change

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China wants US help rather than complaints on climate change, and could be finding a receptive audience as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton readies to visit Beijing.

With international talks on global warming intensifying this year, China's ambassador here Thursday appealed to US commercial self-interest to assist his government's efforts to combat the problem.

Zhou Wenzhong said China must focus on industrial growth to lift millions of its citizens out of poverty but was not stinting in the global warming fight, outlining a national government plan on efficiency and renewable energy.

And he said China and the United States, the world's two biggest polluters, could profitably work together and set an example for the international community leading up to a December climate meeting in the Danish capital Copenhagen.

"China and the United States have many shared interests and extensive areas for cooperation on energy and climate change," he said at a Brookings Institution forum.

The United States should offer its "advanced technologies and a rich experience in energy efficiency and clean energy" to boost China's own plan, the ambassador said.

"Cooperation between our two countries on energy and environmental issues will enable China to respond to energy and climate change issues more effectively while at the same time offering enormous business opportunities and considerable return to American investors."

President Barack Obama has pledged to reverse the resistance of his predecessor George W. Bush to action on climate change in the run-up to the Copenhagen talks, designed to forge a successor to the Kyoto climate treaty.

Democrats who control the US Senate and House of Representatives have said they hope to have major legislation creating a "cap-and-trade" system for limiting "greenhouse gases" before the Copenhagen talks.

And they have said the paralyzing US recession is no excuse for inaction -- noting that Obama's massive economic stimulus package contains ambitious steps to promote clean and renewable energy.

But Republicans have signaled they will not sign on to any system that imposes restrictions on the US economy while letting developing competitors such as China and India off the hook.

US officials will present their case in person when Clinton visits China on February 20-22 as part of her first overseas trip as secretary of state.

Clinton's new special envoy for climate change, Todd Stern, is to join her in Beijing, a State Department official told AFP, underlining the Obama administration's post-Bush determination to tackle the issue cooperatively.

"We need to put finger-pointing aside and focus on how our two leading nations can work together productively to solve the problem," Stern told the New York Times.

Brookings experts Kenneth Lieberthal and David Sandalow presented a new report proposing incremental steps by the United States and China to cooperate between themselves and so give a push to the Copenhagen process.

Among their recommendations was a climate change summit by Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao, joint work on clean energy, and the promotion of burgeoning anti-warming initiatives by local governments in both nations.

"It's clear that if the US expects cooperation from China, the US will have to lead," Stuart Eizenstat, the lead US negotiator at the Kyoto talks in the 1990s, told the think tank's forum.

But he also stressed that without well-publicized initiatives on the Chinese side, including a less hardline approach to the needs of developing nations, any successor treaty to Kyoto would be dead on arrival in the US Senate.

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