

China seeks to clear up summit deal (China Daily)

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China lauded the Copenhagen Accord, hailing it an agreement based on arduous negotiation and the "sufficient, transparent and smooth" communication with other countries.

In the aftermath to the United Nations climate change conference, which ended on Saturday and has drawn criticism for not doing enough to fight global warming, China's Foreign Ministry has called the outcome a "new beginning" to cooperation between rich and poor countries.

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said the summit in Copenhagen had produced "positive results". Chinese officials also defended the negotiations process, ruling out rumors that it was not transparent.

Some media said that there was only private consultation between the United States and Brazil, South Africa, India and China in the final days of the summit, and island states and smaller developed countries were excluded from talks.

"Such comments do not conform with facts and are irresponsible and driven by ulterior motives," ministry spokesman Qin Gang said in a press release yesterday.

Qin points out that in the Danish capital, Premier Wen Jiabao held long meetings with leaders from island states and least developed countries, listening to their opinions and supporting their requirements to an agreement.

In the nonbinding accord, China agreed to air its efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions every two years and list its commitments before Jan 31, 2010.

The agreement also includes the aim of limiting the global temperature increase to 2C, and pledges to deliver \$30 billion in aid to developing nations over the next three years. By 2020, poor countries could receive up to \$100 billion.

It also lists a method for verifying emissions reductions by industrialized nations.

Officials praised Premier Wen's swift diplomacy last Thursday and Friday in Copenhagen after he held talks with scores of leaders and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"Premier Wen Jiabao brought hope and confidence to the world in its fight against climate change," Yang said. "The conference yielded significant and positive fruits in three aspects."

First, it upheld the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle set by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, Yang said.

Secondly, he said the summit was a step forward in holding developed countries to their targets of emissions cuts and developing countries to their voluntary mitigation efforts.

Lastly, Yang said consensus was made on long-term targets for global emissions reductions, funding, technology support to developing countries, and transparency.

At least one expert said he is not convinced by promises from developed countries.

"I hope the promises to the developing countries are delivered fully," said He Jiankun, vice-president of National Expert Panel of Combating Climate Change, to China Daily.

"Rich countries should do that in an urgent manner and only this can demonstrate the developed countries are doing, not just talking."

Wen urged that the international community make effective institutional arrangements under the Convention to have developed countries honor commitments of providing financial support and the transfer of climate-friendly technologies to developing countries.

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China committed to emission cut: Wen (China Daily)

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COPENHAGEN: No matter what the outcome of the UN climate change conference is, China will remain committed to achieving and even exceeding the emission reduction targets it has said for itself, Premier Wen Jiabao said on Friday.

“We will honour our word with real action,” Wen told 119 heads of state and government attending the UN climate change conference, or COP15.

Before the conference began, China announced that it would reduce its carbon intensity emission per unit of GDP — by 40 and 45 percent by 2020, taking 2005 as the base year.

Speaking at an informal high-level meeting, hosted by Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, on the last day of the conference, Wen elaborated China’s achievements in developing clean energy and cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Stressing that this is a voluntary move taken by China, Wen said: “We have not attached any condition to the target, nor have we linked it to the target of any other country.”

In responding to developed countries’ insistence on transparency, Wen said: “We will further enhance the domestic statistical, monitoring and evaluation methods, improve the way for releasing emission reduction information, increase transparency and actively engage in international exchange, dialogue and cooperation.”

Wen then met US President Barack Obama for nearly an hour in what a White House official described as a “step forward”.

“They had a constructive discussion that touched upon ... all the key issues,” the official said. “They’ve now directed their negotiators to work on a bilateral basis as well as with other countries to see if an agreement can be reached.”

But Obama refused to commit to new GHG emission cuts, a move that many said could have salvaged the floundering climate talks.

Since not much headway has been made toward a deal, negotiations could continue beyond Friday, the official last day of the conference.

Till late on Friday night (Beijing time), Rasmussen was locked in talks with some heads of state and government and ministers to see whether a political declaration could be made. He was also trying to strike a deal on “Long-term Cooperation Action” and possible amendments to Kyoto Protocol.

Before the two leaders’ meeting, leaders of major developed and developing economies such as US President Obama, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, also addressed the informal high-level gathering.

Their speeches, though, showed their divergent views on how the world should work together to slow down global warming.

Singh, who supported China’s stance, said: “The vast majority of countries do not support any renegotiation or dilution of the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), especially the principle of equity and equitable burden sharing.”

Wen urged the international community to fight climate change on the basis of four principles. The international community should strengthen confidence, build consensus, make vigorous efforts and enhance cooperation, he said.

The countries should honor and follow the documents they have agreed to since 1992, that is, the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Bali Roadmap (2007), he said. They “should lock up rather than deny the consensus and progress already made at the negotiations”.

Upholding the fairness of rules is the second principle that Wen proposed. The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities represents the core ... of international cooperation on climate change”.

“It must never be compromised,” he said.

Industrialization began in the developing countries only a few decades ago and many of their people still live in abject poverty, he said. China alone has 150 million people living in poverty by UN standards.

“It is unjustified to ask them to commit to binding emission cut targets beyond their due obligations and capabilities in disregard to historical responsibilities, per capita emissions and different levels of development,” he said.

Third, we should pay attention to the practicality of the targets, he said.

“The Kyoto Protocol has set out clear emission reduction targets for developed countries for the first commitment period, until 2012. But a review of implementation shows that the emissions from many developed countries have increased instead of decreasing,” Wen said.

Fourth, the international community has to ensure the effectiveness of institutions and mechanisms. “Concrete actions and institutional guarantee are essential to our efforts to tackle climate change,” Wen said.

“I think Wen spoke with passion to seek a constructive and meaningful climate deal,” said Wu Changhua, Greater China Director of the Climate Group.

He made it clear that China was committed to pursuing a low-carbon economy despite the tremendous difficulties that it would face, Wu said.

Though China has a clear vision, some funds and technologies and is committed to the cause, aligning the vision, policy, money, technologies is still an uphill task for it, she said.

That Wen reiterated China’s position at the conference shows that the principles of UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan should not be compromised, Wu said.

This position is shared by most developing countries and many NGOs in China and abroad, she said.

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Wen meets Obama on day of whirlwind diplomacy (China Daily)

2009-12-19

Premier Wen Jiabao on Friday ended days of climate change diplomacy with a swift low-key meeting with US President Barack Obama, who stayed less than 10 hours in the snowy Danish capital.

Chinese delegation officials told China Daily that the heads of two largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world are likely to set up another meeting later in the day, but arrangement was still being made by press time.

Invited by the US side, Wen held a close-door meeting with Obama after they announced the two countries’ climate stance at the high-level segment of the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen.

It had previously been announced the meeting would have a final session open to media for interviews and photos. But the session was canceled without explanation by the US side.

The world has high hopes that the US can take the lead in coping with the global warming challenge. But Obama failed to offer new US commitments for deeper emission cuts that some see as crucial to a deal.

Reuters reported the NGOs, who were excluded from the Bella Center, the venue of the leaders' meeting, apparently booed throughout as they watched the broadcast of Obama's speech.

Andy Atkins, executive director of Friends of the Earth, said Obama has deeply disappointed not just those listening to his speech at the UN talks, "he has disappointed the whole world."

"If the (US) president's idea of action is to cut US emissions by 4 per cent on 1990 levels, then we're heading for climate catastrophe. Barack Obama should have taken the opportunity to up his proposed cuts to at least 40 per cent by 2020 and ditch carbon offsetting," said Atkins.

In contrast, as the first speaker at the plenary session, Chinese Premier Wen assured the world China will "honor its commitment" and "do its share regardless of the outcome of international negotiations."

Wen said China was determined to make "tremendous efforts" to meet its pledge to reduce carbon intensity by 40 to 45 percent by 2020 from 2005 levels, and "even exceed the targets".

The statement was appraised by Jeremy Hobbs, Executive Director of Oxfam International, "We are encouraged by China's determination to combat climate change, especially its unconditional effort to slash carbon emissions in China, despite huge poverty challenges. China's resolve to cut their own emissions regardless to the outcome of the summit is exemplary."

Chinese Premier Wen has been involved in whirlwind diplomacy since arriving in Copenhagen.

Within 24 hours, Wen met with 12 state leaders and the UN secretary-general before he delivered his speech.

In his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shortly ahead of the high-level session, Wen said the BASIC countries - Brazil, South Africa, China and India - need to stay unified and step up coordination on stances with other developing nations.

Wen also agreed with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva during their talks on Thursday that the two countries will stick to the same principles and stances during the talks.

Lula's speech at the high-level meeting, saying that Brazil would give money to help other developing countries cope with the costs of global warming, won continuous applause from the audience of more than 100 heads of state.

Some insiders also criticized Obama's unstable schedule at the historic climate negotiations, saying it is a sign that the US is not taking the issue seriously enough.

As a late-comer to the Copenhagen climate talks, Obama arrived in Copenhagen at 9 o'clock local time, only one hour before the high-level segment of the UN climate conference was scheduled to begin.

He then plunged into an unscheduled meeting with leaders and representatives from about 20 powerful nations before joining the high-level segment, which started almost two hours behind schedule.

Obama had already rescheduled his flight to Copenhagen from Dec 9 to the final day of the meeting. Sources close to the UN said that the US president previously invited world leaders to join him at the beginning of the summit, but was refused.

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China: Climate talks yielded 'positive' results (AP)

2009-12-20

China, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, lauded Sunday the outcome of a historic U.N. climate conference that ended with a nonbinding agreement that urges major polluters to make deeper emissions cuts — but does not require it.

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said the international climate talks that brought more than 110 leaders together in Copenhagen produced "significant and positive" results.

The Obama administration on Sunday also defended the agreement as a "great step forward" — despite widespread disappointment among environmentalists that the pact does not include mandatory targets that would draw sanctions.

"Nobody says that this is the end of the road. The end of the road would have been the complete collapse of those talks. This is a great step forward," White House adviser David Axelrod told CNN's "State of the Union" show.

Disputes between rich and poor countries and between the world's biggest carbon polluters — China and the United States — dominated the two-week conference. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets to demand action to cool an overheating planet.

The meeting ended Saturday after a 31-hour negotiating marathon, with delegates accepting a U.S.-brokered compromise. The so-called Copenhagen Accord calls for reducing emissions to keep temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees F) above preindustrial levels. It gives billions of dollars in climate aid to poor nations but does not require the world's major polluters to make deeper cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions.

"It's disappointing, that we didn't get binding reduction targets," said Danish ex-climate minister Connie Hedegaard, who led the negotiations in Copenhagen. "We've worked very hard to achieve that."

But Hedegaard said the conference was successful in the sense that developing countries are "acknowledging their responsibility for getting the world on track in the fight against climate change."

"Although we regrettably in Copenhagen did not manage to make commitments legally binding, that is a very important step forward, which will probably have far-reaching consequences in the years to come," she said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he would work with member states to convert the commitments into a global, legally binding treaty as soon as possible in 2010.

But the international response Sunday was not all rosy.

Former Cuban president Fidel Castro said the agreement was "undemocratic" and called President Barack Obama's address to the conference as "misleading." In one of his regular essays published Sunday, Castro wrote that only industrialized nations could speak at the summit, while emerging and poor nations only had the right to listen.

Bolivian President Evo Morales urged the world to mobilize against the failure of the Copenhagen summit and said that he would organize an alternate climate conference.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, however, defended the outcome as a first step toward "a new world climate order."

The Bild am Sonntag newspaper quoted her as saying that "anyone who just badmouths Copenhagen now is engaging in the business of those who are applying the brakes rather than moving forward."

China's Yang said the outcome upheld the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" recognized by the Kyoto Protocol, and made a step forward in promoting binding emissions cuts for developed countries and voluntary mitigating actions by developing countries.

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol — that was rejected by the U.S. — 37 industrial nations were already modestly cutting back on their emissions of greenhouse gases. Under the new, nonbinding agreement, those richer nations, including the U.S., are to list their individual emissions targets, and developing countries must list what actions they will take to reduce the growth in their global warming pollution by specific amounts.

"Developing and developed countries are very different in their historical emissions responsibilities and current emissions levels, and in their basic national characteristics and development stages," Yang said in a statement. "Therefore, they should shoulder different responsibilities and obligations in fighting climate change."

"The Copenhagen conference is not a destination but a new beginning," Yang said.

China has said it will rein in its greenhouse gas output, pledging to reduce its carbon intensity — its use of fossil fuels per unit of economic output — by 40 to 45 percent. The European Union has committed to cutting emissions by 20 percent by 2020, compared with 1990 levels; Japan to 25 percent, if others take similar steps, and the U.S. provisionally to a weak 3 to 4 percent.

The Copenhagen Accord emerged principally from Obama's meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and the leaders of India, Brazil and South Africa. But the agreement was protested by several nations that demanded deeper emissions cuts by the industrialized world.

Its key elements, with no legal obligation, were that richer nations will finance a \$10 billion-a-year, three-year program to fund poorer nations' projects to deal with drought and other impacts of climate change, and to develop clean energy.

A goal was also set to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 for the same adaptation and mitigation purposes.

In a U.S. concession to China and other developing nations, text was dropped from the declaration that would have set a goal of reducing global emissions by 50 percent by 2050. Developing nations thought that would hamper efforts to raise their people from poverty.

Despite the lack of mandatory targets, Axelrod defended the agreement and credited Obama's leadership for winning the cooperation of other major economies.

"Now, China, India have set goals. We're going to be able to review what they're doing. We're going to be able to challenge them if they don't meet those goals. We're going to pursue this anyway, because the president understands that our future lies with a clean energy economy," he said.

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Climate change minister blames China for opposing Copenhagen deal (AFP)

2009-12-20

Climate change minister Ed Miliband Sunday blamed China for blocking an accord on legally-binding emissions targets and a 50 percent cut in greenhouse gases by 2050 at the Copenhagen summit.

Miliband admitted the results of the Copenhagen conference were "disappointing" but insisted that important progress was made in the fight against global warming.

"We got a lot of commitments, not just from developed countries, but developing countries like China and India as well," he told Sky News.

"The eventual outcome was disappointing. The most important reason actually is not so much to do with the commitments -- because there are actually quite important and good commitments on emissions and finances -- but on the issue of it becoming legally binding."

Efforts to give legal backing to the commitments in the Copenhagen accord met with "impossible resistance from a small number of developing countries, including China, who didn't want a legal agreement," he said.

"If leading countries hold out against something like 'legally binding' or against the 2050 target of 50 percent reductions in carbon emissions -- which was held out against by countries like China -- you are not going to get the agreement you want."

When asked about accusations that the watered-down agreement reached at the UN conference failed to protect poor people in developing countries, Miliband said: "The alternatives were no agreement or the agreement we have.

"The fact is that we have got fast-start finance of 10 billion dollars a year flowing as a result of this agreement.

"We have got important cuts for rich and developing countries in their emissions. We won't know the precise shape of them until the beginning of February and we are going to have to push for them to be higher.

"But the idea that walking away from agreement would have been better for people facing climate change is frankly ridiculous."

He added: "Even though there were things we didn't achieve, the fact is we have got for the first time developing countries coming together and saying that they are going to reduce emissions and the finance is flowing."