

CLIMATE COMMENT

Poznan Prognosis:

Key Questions and Answers with Jonathan Pershing



The latest negotiations on an international climate agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012 will be held in Poznan, Poland, December 1-12. Taking part will be 192 nations, including the U.S. – all parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). WRI's Climate Program Director Jonathan Pershing discusses the meeting's likely outcomes.

Q: Why should the American people care about a global climate treaty?

A: Our financial wealth will not exempt us from the consequences of climate change. Lake Meade, which provides nearly all of Las Vegas' water, and a significant percentage both for Phoenix and L.A., has a 10% chance of running dry as soon as 2014, and more than a 50% chance of running dry by 2025. Sea levels could rise three feet over the next century, displacing populations all along the Eastern seaboard. Linked to volatile and rising energy prices and increasing global concerns with energy security as well as to potential economic stimulus packages for advanced new energy technology, climate change is the pre-eminent cross-cutting issue facing the incoming president. A global agreement, backed by action from all nations, is the best hope for constraining greenhouse gas emissions within the limits to which humans can adapt.

Q: What is on the agenda at Poznan?

A: The Poznan Conference of Parties is a stepping stone to a critical international climate meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2009 which is supposed to deliver a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. There should be progress in areas such as technology support, adaptation and deforestation, and continued financing for the UNFCCC Secretariat. But the big political question – 'what will the new U.S. administration do and how will the world respond?' – will not be answered. A good outcome, given this holding position, would be for other countries to set the bar high, and commit to a concerted global effort to make a robust new agreement happen over the next year.

Q: What role will the U.S. play? Will the president-elect be represented?

A: The Bush administration has avoided significant climate change policy, leaving the U.S. so far a largely ignored observer at these international negotiations. In the final weeks of the Presidency, it would be surprising to see any change in this position at Poznan. President-elect Obama takes an entirely different view of the urgency of climate change, indicating that his Administration will actively participate in ongoing international discussions and negotiations. In the context of the financial crisis, he has stated that he will not interfere with the current Administration's efforts, and the same will be true in Poznan. However, considerable emphasis will be placed on any informal discussions with members of his transition team, several of whom are expected to attend.



Q: U.S. reluctance to act on reducing greenhouse gas emissions is partly driven by concerns that China and India will not take similar action. What will they offer at Poznan?

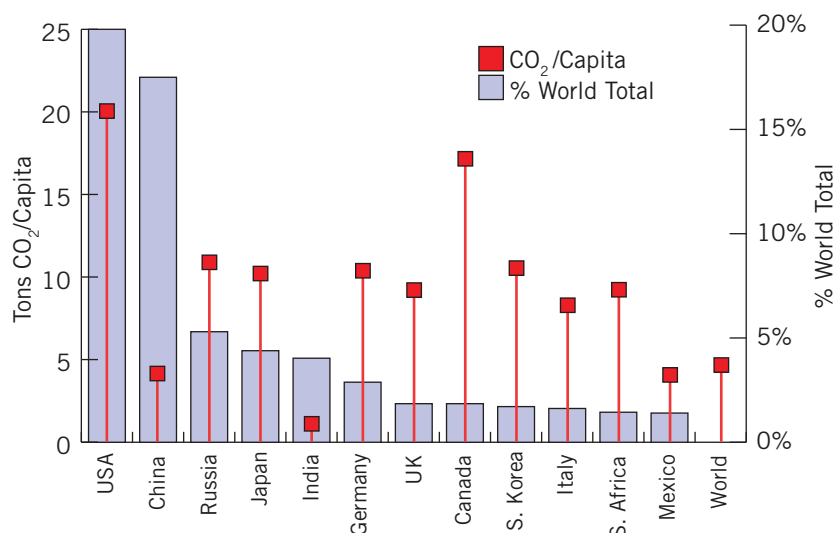
A: China has recently set aggressive domestic targets on energy efficiency, renewable energy and reforestation. With China recently taking over (from the U.S.) as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, many nations will be looking to Beijing to make a public commitment to taking a leadership role internationally. While India too has very large national emissions, its share, on a per person basis, is much lower than China's – and less than one tenth of those in the U.S. India is expected to continue to seek financial assistance from developed countries to undertake new policies and measures, although, given the current financial climate, it is unlikely that the scale of such contributions will meet their expectations. Developing countries are not expected to commit to mandatory emissions cuts and target dates as part of these ongoing negotiations; however, they are expected to further elaborate how they will undertake (and subsequently monitor, report on and have verified) national greenhouse gas reduction actions.

Q: Do you see the U.S. taking a leadership role in negotiating a new global climate agreement in 2009? What role would Congress play?

A: The U.S. holds the key to a successful global climate treaty. Without aggressive domestic action by the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter, other nations will not respond in kind and there will be no agreement in Copenhagen. Over the next 12 months, expect to see a joint exercise by the White House and Congress to enact substantial legislation to address climate change. This will likely include both funding for energy efficiency, renewables, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology development as part of an economic stimulus package, and separate climate legislation including a federal cap and trade bill. In parallel, I expect to see a re-engagement and reinvigoration of the U.S. role in the international negotiations.

Whether the domestic U.S. legislation can be completed in time for the December 2009 deadline for a new global climate treaty is uncertain, particularly in light of the global economic downturn. But with a Democratic president and sizable Congressional majority, the prospect of a U.S. president signing, and Congress ratifying, such a treaty in 2010 is a real possibility.

Top 12 CO₂-Emitting Countries & Their Per-Capita Emissions (2004)



Climate Analysis Indicators Tool: <http://cait.wri.org>

WRI at Poznan

WRI's objective is to see an effective international climate agreement in place by 2012, supported by effective national implementation by major countries, including the U.S. We will have a dozen experts at Poznan who will hold briefings and workshops for negotiators and observers. We will seek to influence the discussions on critical issues including climate adaptation funding, technology transfer and reducing deforestation.

Key Publications

- China: Taking Action to Mitigate Climate Change
- Leveling the Carbon Playing Field: International Competition and U.S. Climate Policy Design
- Slicing the Pie: Sector-based Approaches to International Climate Agreements
- Weathering the Storm: Options for Framing Adaptation and Development
- The Bottom Line: International Trade
- REDD and Beyond: Measuring, Reporting and Verifying Credible Forest-Related Climate Actions

Download these at www.wri.org/climatecomment/cop14

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