



COP-15 UPDATES

Reviewing and Verifying International Climate Action

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This is an important issue in the international climate change negotiations which will convene in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. One of the reasons the United States stands to benefit from an international agreement on climate change is that it can provide the needed system of verification to assure effort by all nations and a level playing field.

Other countries are acting or pledging action on clean energy. Examples include:

- Mexico has pledged to halve its greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- China's climate change program includes reducing energy intensity per unit of GDP by 20 percent between 2006 and the end of 2010 and increasing non-fossil fuel-based and renewable energy to 15 percent of the energy mix by 2020.
- Brazil has said it will reduce its deforestation rate 70 percent from recent levels by 2017.
- Indonesia announced in September that it would craft a policy to cut emissions by 26 percent by 2020 from "business as usual" levels.

As countries come forward with national commitments, the international community will need common procedures and processes to verify actions.

A structure of international verification is not a new concept. China and other countries participate in review under the Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion, the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Also, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is working in China and other countries to build capacity on monitoring and verification. These systems demonstrate that an international system of accountability is feasible and can provide a workable structure for verification of action on ambitious international goals. Copenhagen offers an opportunity to put forward a new climate policy verification approach.

REVIEW AND VERIFICATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FRAMEWORK

The United States is party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which requires that countries report on their efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and support emissions reduction (mitigation) in other countries. This reporting is done through national inventories and national communications. National inventories report quantitative information on countries' greenhouse gas emissions and their removal, while national communications report on a wider range of activities related to climate change, including policies, adaptation efforts, and research.

The concept of verifying what countries are doing to mitigate greenhouse gases has become known in UNFCCC language as the pledging of actions and commitments in a way that is "measurable, reportable and verifiable" (MRV). This term was coined in the Bali Action Plan, the roadmap for the current climate negotiations agreed upon by the United States and other nations at the UN climate meeting in 2007. The plan calls for mitigation (emissions reduction) commitments and actions by both developed and developing countries, as well as support for the actions of developing countries in the form of technology transfer, financing and capacity building. According to the plan, these commitments, actions, and support would all be "measurable, reportable and verifiable."

HOW INTERNATIONAL REVIEW HELPS THE UNITED STATES

Clear rules for how countries will measure, report and verify their actions will be useful in the U.S. climate and energy debate. U.S. stakeholders have wanted reassurance that other countries, including developing countries such as China, are acting. A strong international reporting and verification system can improve confidence regarding other countries' actions. U.S. legal compliance with future domestic climate policy must also be transparent and communicated internationally.

BUILDING ON REVIEW AND VERIFICATION IN THE UNFCCC

The UNFCCC's structure of national inventories and national communications forms a basis for a system of transparent measurement, reporting and verification. However, a new agreement will need to strengthen this framework, to ensure robust reporting from all countries, of commitments, actions and support. To help achieve such an outcome, developed countries such as the United States can provide financial and technical support to build the capacity for measuring, reporting and verifying actions in developing countries. There are several proposals being discussed under the UNFCCC climate negotiations on ways in which the current framework can be improved. Also, an international verification system needs to be harmonized across countries, and the methods used must be comparable in all nations.

An international climate agreement that has a robust global system of measuring, reporting, and verifying can provide assurances for the United States that other countries are implementing their commitments. This type of international assurance can complement and support U.S. domestic action.

