

G8 agrees to common 2050 emission cuts

In what was being hailed as an historic move, the United States and other leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised countries meeting in Japan agreed Tuesday to halve global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The groundbreaking deal, brokered by G8 host Japan and propelled by the European Union (EU), overcame the resistance of US President George W. Bush, who had refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and who continues to block plans for medium-term cuts.

The binding measures should be brought into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will culminate in a meeting in Copenhagen at the end of 2009.

In a statement, G8 leaders said they would 'consider and adopt' the goal of achieving 'at least 50 percent reduction global emissions by 2050.'

The leaders further said that such a challenge would require 'a global response' and the contributions from 'all major economies, consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.'

The agreement was hailed by Jose Manuel Barroso, the head of the EU's executive body, the European Commission.

'I am very happy about the results of the G8 on climate change,' he said.

'We have agreed a long-term goal of at least 50 percent reduction of emissions by 2050, and we have agreed that we should also set up mid-term targets.

'Now we need to go the extra mile to secure an ambitious global deal in Copenhagen,' he said.

Environmentalist groups were less pleased.

One pressure group said the G8 leaders had done little more than restate last year's G8 commitment.

'The G8 are crawling forward on emissions cuts at a time when giant leaps and bounds are needed,' said Peter Grant of Tearfund, a Christian relief and development agency.

At their meeting in the German resort of Heiligendamm last year, G8 leaders had agreed only to 'consider seriously' the 2050 target.

This time round, they said they 'shared' the UNFCCC's vision and that they would 'consider and adopt' the targets.

But critics were adamant that the G8 leaders had in fact failed by not specifying targets for 2020, merely postponing the problem to future generations.

'In the year 2050, (Canadian Prime Minister Stephen) Harper will be 91, Bush will be 104 and

(Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo) Fukuda will be 114. So we don't necessarily believe their commitments,' said Ben Wikler of AVAAZ.org, an environmentalist group.

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