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Mexico Strongly Endorses Kyoto Environmental Accord

by LADB Staff

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President Vicente Fox's administration has enthusiastically endorsed the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, highlighting one of the areas where Mexico has sharp environmental-policy differences with the US. The accord imposes limits on emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases scientists blame for increasing world temperatures, melting glaciers, and rising oceans. "The time has come to confront a reality that puts at risk the equilibrium of the planet and the very survival of our species," Fox said at a ceremony marking Mexico's support for the treaty, which went into effect Feb. 16.

Fox said Mexico was among the early signatories of the Kyoto accord, which has been ratified by 141 nations. The list includes Japan, Russia, Canada, and members of the European Union (EU), but not the US and Australia. Those two countries are concerned about the impact of the treaty on their economies and about what they consider favoritism toward emerging industrial powers like China and India, which are not required to reduce emissions by as much as the industrialized nations.

A stark contrast to US position

Instead of endorsing the Kyoto accord, the US government has proposed an alternative plan that offers incentives to the business community to reduce greenhouse-gas and power-plant emissions by 4.5% over a 10-year period. The US plan, however, falls dramatically short of the goals set by the Kyoto accord. Another difference is that the Kyoto accord's goals are mandatory, while those proposed by the US are voluntary.

The US refusal to ratify the Kyoto treaty prompted protests at various US Embassies around the world, including in Mexico City. Alejandro Calvillo, director of Greenpeace Mexico, faulted the US for creating obstacles that prevented the treaty from being implemented earlier. "It is fundamental that all nations, especially those that are more developed, reduce their emissions," Calvillo said in an interview.

Fox administration officials said Mexico has taken initial steps to comply with the accord by implementing a special program to clean up emissions at some facilities of the state-run oil company PEMEX and by promoting innovative projects like the one in Monterrey, where garbage gases are used to power street lights.

New projects launched

In addition, Mexico has created a special office to promote development of clean-energy technology (Mecanismo de Desarrollo Limpio, MDL).

The Fox government commemorated the start of the Kyoto treaty by awarding five permits for MDL projects on Feb. 16, with approval for another 15 permits pending. Some of these projects will be developed with financial assistance from Japan, Canada, and a handful of European nations. "We

are well aware that these actions should have been taken several years ago," said Environment Secretary Alberto Cardenas Jimenez. "What matters is that we have started to do something."

Cardenas said Mexico is developing a guide based on its own experiences to help other Latin American countries implement some of the recommendations in the Kyoto accord. The Mexican scientific community considers the Kyoto Protocol, and Mexico's efforts within the accord, as a necessary first step to help reduce greenhouse gases. Scientists note, however, that even with programs like the MDL, developing countries like Mexico lack the technology to implement the recommendations proposed under the Kyoto agreement. "Mexico requires a much wider, decisive, and aggressive vision," said Carlos Gay, director of the Centro de Ciencias de la Atmosfera at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM). "Technical and research opportunities must be created." (Sources: CNN, 02/14/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 02/16/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 02/17/05; Notimex, 02/16/05, 02/21/05; La Crisis, 02/18/05; El Financiero, 02/28/05)

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