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LADB Staff

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## **Mexico To Host Follow-up Conference On Global Climate Change In December 2010**

by LADB Staff

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Mexico has announced that it will host a summit on global climate change in December 2010 as a follow-up to this year's UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Dec. 7-18. The Copenhagen summit, the 15th such event organized by the UN, made very little progress because of major differences between industrialized countries and developing nations as well as between the US and China. Mexican officials sought to play a key role in the Copenhagen talks, authoring a document that proposed a plan of action to reduce contamination. Mexico also joined several countries in making a big push for creating a "Green Fund" to help finance anti-pollution projects in lesser-developed countries.

President Felipe Calderon led the official Mexican delegation to the summit, but Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard and Veracruz Gov. Fidel Herrera also attended, representing other organizations of elected officials. Talks in Copenhagen fall short Mexico had pushed hard to host the next stage of the talks in 2010, knowing all along that strong disagreements between wealthy industrialized nations and developing countries would present an obstacle to reaching a comprehensive agreement in Copenhagen. "It appears very doubtful that this conference will be able to put together a binding legal document," Luis Alfonso de Alba, Mexico's special envoy to the UN and point person in charge of Mexico's participation the climate-change discussions, said after more than a week of discussions in Copenhagen. "There is no doubt that some progress will be made, but any advances will have to be consolidated at a follow-up summit in Mexico."

The UN's decision to hold the follow-up meeting in Mexico in December 2010 was announced on Dec. 15, the day before Calderon was scheduled to address the tens of thousands of delegates from 192 countries. Ebrard is lobbying heavily for the 2010 gathering to be held in Mexico City. Other officials said Mexico City is just one of the possible venues. "We haven't given thought to an official site yet," said Environment Secretary Juan Rafael Elvira. "It could be Monterrey, Mexico City, or Quintana Roo. The only thing that has been decided is the country and the time period.

Former US Vice President Al Gore, who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for his activism to halt global warming, is pushing for the next round of talks in Mexico to be held sooner than December. But UN spokesperson John Hay said moving up the summit was not necessary because discussions would be ongoing, including another smaller-scale reunion in Bonn, Germany, in June. During his speech to participants, Calderon presented a document proposing a plan of action that included 140 steps to reduce air pollution, with the goal of lowering harmful emissions by 50 million tons annually. Other Latin American countries are also proposing significant carbon-emission reductions, including Costa Rica (NotiCen, December 17, 2009).

### *Mexico helps draft "Green Fund" proposal*

The Mexican president also said that Mexico is prepared to act as a bridge between developing and developed countries to help forge an agreement on climate change. Mexico is working with Great Britain, Norway, and Australia to put together a proposal for a "Green Fund," which will create a mechanism to provide financing for anti-pollution projects in poor countries. "The intention is for developing countries to recognize our own responsibility," said de Alba. "But we need international cooperation so that we can take much more comprehensive actions [than allowed by our limited resources]. Veracruz Gov. Herrera who attended the Copenhagen gathering as a representative of the Mexican governors conference (Confederacion Nacional de Gobernadores, CONAGO) pushed for creating the Green Fund. In a statement, Herrera, a member of the opposition Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), said the effort to reverse global warming is the correct step to take "not only from an ethical, ecological, social, and political standpoint but also as an economic necessity."

In pushing to host the next gathering, Mexico also sought to reinforce its commitment to addressing global climate change and to showcase some of the projects implemented since Calderon and Ebrard came into office in 2006. Calderon has made environmental protection, sustainability, and promotion of alternative energy important goals of his administration (SourceMex, June 10, 2009 and October 21, 2009). Ebrard, who was attending the conference as chair-elect of the World Mayors Council on Climate Change, highlighted his ambitious Green Plan, which includes reduced water consumption, construction of more bicycle lanes in the capital, a comprehensive waste-management proposal, and the promotion of solar-powered buildings. As part of his proposal to promote bicycle use, Ebrard and his aides have put together a system similar to ones operating in Paris and Madrid, which allow residents to rent bikes as an alternative to driving on congested boulevards. "We're interested in separating ourselves from cars as much as possible," the mayor said in January when the plan was first proposed. "It will be a fight, a battle, because people don't want their cars taken away, right?" Ebrard, a member of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), is also seeking to improve the public-transportation system in the Mexican capital, including adding another 200 km to the city's subway system. "The first priority is to increase the size of the public-transport system, to make it bigger and better, that's a very big investment," said the mayor.

Ebrard took the opportunity at the Copenhagen conference to criticize the wealthy developed nations, particularly the US, members of the European Union (EU), and some Asian countries like Japan, for not taking sufficient actions at the national level to address global climate change. He said many local and municipal governments are doing much more than their federal counterparts.

### *Mexican government criticized for not doing enough at home*

But Mexican officials also came under strong criticism at home for paying lip service to reducing emissions and cleaning up the environment but taking only token or ineffective actions. One of the strongest criticisms, directed primarily at the Calderon government, came from the Catholic Church. "Can Mexico in good conscience take a series of proposals to an international forum when it has failed to take actions like preventing the wasting of water and promoting energy conservation?" said an editorial in the weekly newspaper Desde la Fe, published by the Archdiocese of Mexico. The editorial urged Calderon to "halt the selfish interests of some local governments and of multinational corporations" that have caused great contamination in Mexico. Syndicated columnist

Sergio Sarmiento fustigated the government for touting emission reduction but not taking actions that would accomplish this goal in Mexico. "The government is maintaining a subsidy on gasoline that allows its consumption to remain at very high levels," said the columnist. But Sarmiento said Mexico is in the same boat as many other countries. "The most logical action would be to impose a global tax on fossil fuels, but no government wants to take this on," said the columnist. "Instead, they are proposing complex schemes pushing for carbon offsets." Sarmiento argues that the Kyoto Protocol, which was reached in 1997, failed because the system it established to reduce contaminants was too complicated. "We are facing the same situation now," he said, referring to the various proposals advanced by the wealthy nations at the Copenhagen summit.

Others are urging the Calderon administration and the Mexican government to make a greater commitment to the anti-contamination and sustainability efforts by allocating more money to fund environmental programs. A group of organizations, led by the Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (AMDA), has released a document proposing that Mexico spend about 1% of its GDP for programs that will help address global climate change at home. The proposal was published to coincide with the Copenhagen conference. Some Mexican legislators have joined the call for the Calderon administration to propose bold measures at the Copenhagen summit. The Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) said Mexico should be a leader in pushing the world powers to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions by 40% between now and 2020. The PVEM legislators made their sentiments known in a letter handed to Calderon just before he traveled to Denmark.

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