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President Felipe Calderon's Government Designates Cancun To Host Next Phase Of Global-climate-change Talks

by LADB Staff

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Mexico has designated the resort city of Cancun as the host city for the next phase of the Copenhagen negotiations on global climate change on Nov. 29-Dec. 10. As host of the gathering, President Felipe Calderon has promised to take a leadership role to try to broker the type of agreements that eluded participants at the gathering in Denmark in December. The results of the Copenhagen meeting and the prospects for a comprehensive accord this year will also be a topic of meetings in Cancun scheduled by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other organizations early this year.

Calderon decided to hold the meeting in Cancun despite heavy lobbying from Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard to have the meeting in the Mexican capital, which has recently implemented several changes to reduce contamination (SourceMex, December 16, 2009). The president did not say why Cancun was chosen over Mexico City or any other site, although the resort city has in the past hosted large international gatherings, including a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1993 (SourceMex, September 24, 2003). Administration officials have made few statements about the upcoming talks, with most official comments coming from Foreign Relations Secretary Patricia Espinosa. In various interviews, Espinosa has reinforced Mexico's intention to use its role as conference host to try to bring all sides together to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that would significantly reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

A new agreement would go into effect on 2013, replacing the Kyoto Protocol, which was initially adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997. While negotiations in Copenhagen in December yielded a compromise between the US and China, considered two of the most important parties in the talks, most world leaders, including Calderon, viewed the Denmark talks as a failure for not producing the coveted comprehensive accord. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Mexico's ambassador to the talks on climate change, said strategic mistakes were made before and during the talks in Copenhagen. Among these, he said, were allowing too much interchange of ideas, which superseded political negotiation. "We have to avoid these mistakes," de Alba said at a hearing in Washington in late January. "This is one of Mexico's goals." Negotiators from the US and Spain, which was representing the European Union (EU), also testified at the hearing organized by the US Congress.

Mexico pledges leadership role to build consensus In an interview with the Spanish news service EFE in early January, Espinosa pledged that Mexico would act with "decisiveness and vision" to try to build a consensus during the next several months. Espinosa repeated Mexico's pledge to take a leadership role in the climate-change talks during a speech to participants at the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) in Tokyo in mid-January. The organization comprises 34 countries in the Americas and East Asia. "The Mexican government, under the leadership of President Felipe Calderon, is making every effort to develop a process of consultation and ample negotiation that will be inclusive and that will incorporate all points of view," said Espinosa. As

part of the strategy, the foreign relations secretary said Mexico would be in close consultation with key countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Even before meeting with countries outside the region, Espinosa said there will be ample opportunity to discuss global climate change with neighbors from Latin American and the Caribbean. The Rio Group, which includes 23 countries in the region, is scheduled to meet in Cancun on Feb. 22-23 and will include climate change on its agenda.

The IDB, which is scheduled to hold a meeting of finance ministers and central-bank governors in Cancun on March 19-23, has also added discussions on global climate change to its agenda. The session will discuss both the progress made in Copenhagen and prospects for the follow-up negotiations in Cancun. Climate change was also a topic of discussion between Richard Jones, director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), and Mexican officials. Jones, who traveled to Mexico in mid-January, met with Energy Secretary Georgina Kessel and officials from the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE). In an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper Excelsior, Jones said that, despite the expected rapid growth in the use of alternative and environmentally friendly energy sources, consumption of hydrocarbons is expected to continue to increase in the long term.

The IEA is projecting a 23% increase in demand between now and 2030 because of economic development in countries like China and India. This, he said, creates the need for countries to continue investing in exploration and production of hydrocarbons. Jones noted that Mexico's reserves have fallen by 25% since 2004, and potential new reserves are in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico. To extract this oil, he said, a huge investment will be required. The IEA official said a major challenge for all oil-producing countries is to find ways to cooperate in all aspects of production. "The problem in general is that the main oil fields on the planet are declining by an average of 7% per year," said Jones. Jones pointed out that Mexico will be hosting another important meeting on March 29-31, the International Energy Forum, which will bring together energy ministers from 37 countries.

The meeting, which will also be in Cancun, will formalize a dialogue process between consumers and producers of energy resources. Also attending will be representatives from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the World Bank, and multinational oil companies, including Chevron, ExxonMobil, Statoil, Total, Shell, and Saudi Aramco.

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