

Beijing Makes Its Case

BY ZHENHUA XIE

President Hu's chief adviser on climate change argues that China has instituted pro-active reforms.

Climate change is a serious challenge to humanity and sustainable development, which requires both proactive responses and concerted effort by the international community. China attaches great importance to tackling climate change. In 2007, it established the National Leading Group on Climate Change, headed by Premier Wen Jiabao. That same year, China issued its National Climate Change Program, the first ever by a developing country.

In its National Climate Change Program, China set an objective to lower its energy consumption per unit of GDP by 20 percent or so of 2005 levels by 2010, and in its Mid-and Long-Term Plan for the Development of Renewable Energy, China also sets an objective of increasing the proportion of renewable energy in the primary energy mix to 10 percent by 2010, and to 15 percent by 2020.

To achieve such objectives, China has adopted a series of effective policies and measures, achieving remarkable progress. First, China succeeded in lowering its energy consumption per unit of GDP by 1.79 percent, 4.04 percent, and 4.59 percent respectively for 2006, 2007, and 2008, which strongly suggests the prospect of meeting the 20 percent objective by 2010.

Second, between 2006 and 2008, China shut down small thermal power-generation units with a total installed capacity of 34.21 GW, phased out 60.59 million tons of backward steel-making capacity, 43.47 million tons of iron-smelting capacity, and 140 million tons of cement-production capacity. All of these steps reduced pollution markedly.

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Third, between 2000 and 2008, China increased its wind power generating capacity from 340 MW to 10 GW, hydropower from 79.35 GW to 163 GW, and nuclear power from 2.1 GW to 9.1 GW. It has also made great efforts to reduce agricultural and rural greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, by the end of 2007, more than 26.5 million rural households were using household biogas digesters, thereby avoiding carbon dioxide emissions by 44 million tons.

Fourth, China has increased its carbon sinks by promoting reforestation. China's forest coverage rate increased from 12 percent in the early 1980s to 18.21 percent today.

For this year, China will complete the formulation of provincial climate change programs throughout the country, promoting effective implementation of the National Climate Change Program.

Furthermore, in China's economy stimulus package, ¥210 billion yuan is allocated for energy conservation, pollutants reduction, and ecosystem protection projects, ¥370 billion for economic structural adjustment and technology renovation, and ¥400 billion for new energy-efficient housing that will use environmentally friendly materials. Besides, ¥370 billion will be used to improve rural living standards in an environmentally sound manner and sustainable way.

China is making huge efforts to combat climate change despite the fact that it remains a low-income developing country with a per capita GDP of just about \$3,000. Indeed, by United Nations standards, China still has 150 million people living in poverty. China has no other choice but to pursue sustainable development in order to meet the basic needs of its people and to eradicate poverty. In this process, the world is assured that China will make every effort to address climate change.

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The international community has great expectations for reaching a positive outcome at the upcoming climate summit in Copenhagen. In China's view, the key to the success in Copenhagen lies in the realization of the full, effective, and sustained implementation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. Developed country parties to the Kyoto Protocol, collectively, must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25–40 percent below their 1990 levels by 2020.

For non-Kyoto Protocol developed countries, they should undertake comparable commitments with quantified emission reduction targets. Developed countries should also fulfill their obligations under the Convention to provide financial support and technology transfer to enable developing countries to effectively tackle climate change.

In addition, appropriate mechanisms and institutional arrangements should be established for adaptation, financial support, and technology transfer. Developing countries will, in the context of sustainable development and with measurable, reportable, and verifiable support in terms of financing, technology, and capacity-building, take nationally appropriate mitigation actions.

The global financial crisis has undoubtedly exacerbated the challenge of climate change. But since climate change is a more far-reaching and serious challenge, the world must not waver in its determination and commitment to addressing it. Indeed, the international financial crisis, if handled properly, may also be turned into an opportunity to reach a win-win solution for both climate protection and economic development.

With a deep sense of responsibility for its own people and the entire human race, China will continue to implement proactive policies and measures to address climate change and make unremitting efforts to the protection of Earth's climate. ◆