

46 nations, minus U.S., sign on to call for new world body to protect warming planet

By **Angela Charlton**
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PARIS – Forty-five nations answered France's call Saturday for a new environmental body to slow inevitable global warming and protect the planet, perhaps with policing powers to punish violators.

Absent were the world's heavyweight polluter, the United States, and booming nations on the same path as the U.S. – China and India.

The charge led by French President Jacques Chirac came a day after the release of an authoritative – and disturbingly grim – scientific report in Paris that said global warming is “very likely” caused by mankind and that climate change will continue for centuries even if heat-trapping gases are reduced. It was the strongest language ever used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose last report was issued in 2001.

The document, a collaboration of hundreds of scientists and government officials, was approved by 113 nations, including the United States.

Despite the report's dire outlook, most scientists say the worst disasters – huge sea level rises and the most catastrophic storms and droughts – may be avoided if strong action is taken soon.

In his call to action at a French-sponsored environment conference on Saturday, Chirac said, “It is our responsibility. The future of humanity demands it.”

Without naming the United States – producer of about one-quarter of the world's greenhouse gases – Chirac expressed frustration that “some large, rich countries still must be convinced.” They are “refusing to accept the consequences of their acts,” he said.

So far, it is mostly European nations that agreed to pursue plans for the new organization, and to hold their first meeting in Morocco this spring.

Chirac, 74, is seeking to leave his mark on international affairs before he leaves office, likely in May, though his own environmental record over 12 years as France's president is spotty.

Former Vice President Al Gore, whose Oscar-nominated documentary on the perils of global warming has garnered worldwide attention, cheered Chirac's efforts.

“We are at a tipping point,” Gore told the conference by videophone. “We must act, and act swiftly ... Such action requires international cooperation.”

The world's scientists and other international leaders also said now that the science is so well-documented, action is clearly the next step.

“It is time now to hear from the world's policymakers,” Tim Wirth, president of the United Nations Foundation, said Friday. “The so-called and long-overstated 'debate' about global warming is now over.”

Granger Morgan, an energy expert at Carnegie Mellon University in the United States predicted the new climate report “will kick a few more folks to get on board.”

And Jason Grumet, head of U.S. bipartisan advocacy group, the National Commission on Energy Policy, said: “The debate has clearly shifted from a battle over the science to fighting over the scope and design of the solution.”

However, many questions remain about Chirac's proposed new environmental body, including whether it would have the power to enforce global climate accords.

Chirac's appeal says only that the group should “evaluate ecological damage” and “support the implementation of environmental decisions.”

Many countries have failed to meet targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions laid out in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The United States has never ratified the pact. And on Friday, the Bush administration reiterated its rejection of imposed cuts on greenhouse gases.

Earlier this week, Chirac warned in a published interview that the United States could face a carbon tax on its exports if it does not sign global climate accords.

The European Union, which agreed to the Kyoto Protocol curbing emissions, has committed to a 20 percent reduction in carbon pollution by 2020, said Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. And if others join them, they could even try for 60 percent cuts by 2050, he said.

The United Nations also is considering a summit of world leaders to tackle global warming, and de Boer said he would expect the United States to send high-ranking officials to it.

Despite White House resistance to carbon-cutting measures with teeth, de Boer and Carnegie Mellon professor Morgan said they see movement in the United States anyway.

“We are certainly building critical mass among opinion leaders and nontechnical folks,” Morgan said from Pittsburgh, citing recent calls to action by corporate CEOs, even in the energy industry. “We are at the point over the next three to five years where the U.S. is going to get quite serious about it.”

And in May, the same international panel that wrote Friday's report will wrap up a new document spelling out the benefits and costs of slowing global warming, setting up a buffet of choices for policymakers.

For now, scientists are energized that the world is finally listening to them.

Kevin Trenberth, an American co-author of the new climate report, marveled at the overflow crowd of more than 400 reporters on hand for the document's release on Friday. It was more reporters than he'd seen in decades of climate conferences. He took out a small camera, smiled and took a picture of the media.

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■ On the Net:

IPCC Report: ipcc-wg1.ucar.edu/wg1/docs/WG1AR4-SPM-PlenaryApproved.pdf

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