

Resistance builds to fight on greenhouse gases

By Elisabeth Rosenthal

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ROME

The world's leading climate scientists announced last week that global warming was "unequivocal" and predicted catastrophe if emissions caused by human activity were not curbed through swift political responses.

Representatives of 113 nations endorsed the report's conclusions.

But turning that unanimous support into political action is already running into intense resistance.

Reducing carbon emissions requires fundamental changes in how people live and financial risks for powerful industries, including airlines, car manufacturers, industrial farms and construction companies, scientists and environmental groups said. Even "green" politicians may have trouble following up on their good intentions.

In the days following the release of the report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 3 of the world's top 10 emitters of greenhouse gases — China, Germany and the United States — made clear the limits of their sacrifice.

Officials from the United States, the world's No. 1 greenhouse gas producer, congratulated the panel but reiterated the Bush administration's longstanding opposition to any caps on emissions.

Qin Dahe, China's top climate official and co-chairman of the climate panel, announced Tuesday that his country had set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 4 percent a year over the next five years.

But he added that China — the world's No. 2 emitter — lacked the money and technology for the task compared with more-developed nations.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the seventh largest emitter, said she supported reducing vehicle emissions but rejected imposing speed limits on autobahns and "one size fits all" mandatory emission limits for cars.

Catherine Pearce, spokeswoman on climate change for Friends of the Earth International, said: "There is always an excuse, it's really disappointing. The message of the report is we know what the problem is, now we need a solution. We need to speed up and have significantly increased commitment. Not more of the same."

Scientists say that a piecemeal approach to cutting emissions will not blunt the Earth's temperature rise and all its devastating ripple effects — from rising sea levels to more frequent and violent storms.

"It disappoints me to hear comments like these," said Julian Allwood, an expert on sustainable manufacturing at Cambridge University.

"Incremental change is not going to get us there. We will have to make a dramatic change in how we live and do business."

European Union environmental officials, who have pushed an aggressive agenda for curbing



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emissions, said they hoped to use the climate report as a lever to force action.

"This is a very useful instrument to help us push our policies, to help us transmit the urgency of the problem," said Barbara Helfferich, spokeswoman for Stavros Dimas, the European Union environment minister.

She said that Dimas would go to Washington next week to discuss climate change, bearing the message that the United States "can't go it alone — we need to walk together."

Unlike the EU, the United States has refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, which requires developed nations to comply with limits on emissions.

Western airline, automobile and oil industries have lobbied hard against emissions limits, saying that they would have a hard time competing with products from countries that do not have stringent environmental standards.

In response to Friday's report, the U.S. energy secretary, Samuel Bodman, said that Washington was "concerned" that emissions caps "would lead to the transfer of jobs and industry abroad."

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