

## UN climate change chief undaunted

By Fiona Harvey in London

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The Copenhagen climate change conference will not produce a new international treaty, the top United Nations climate change official has said, but the meeting will set out the political framework for cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

"A fully fledged new international treaty under the [UN Framework] Convention [on Climate Change] - I do not think that is going to happen," Yvo de Boer, charged with bringing December's negotiations to a successful conclusion, said in an interview with the Financial Times. "If you look at the limited amount of time remaining to Copenhagen, it's clear."

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting in London of 17 of the world's biggest emitters, Mr de Boer predicted governments would agree on the structure of a deal, the technical details of which could be filled in later.

To idealists, including those in some developing country governments and environmental groups, who hoped that this year's conference would produce a replacement to the Kyoto protocol, this might seem like a climbdown.

However, Mr de Boer pointed out: "If you look at the limited amount of time that remains to Copenhagen, we have to focus on what can realistically be done and how that can realistically be framed."

The need was to "concentrate on the political imperatives that make it clear how countries are committed [to tackling climate change] and engaging in cutting emissions, and what co-operative mechanisms they need to put in place", he said.

"That means an overarching decision at Copenhagen that sets out individual targets for industrialised countries, that decides how major developing countries intend to engage [in curbing emissions by] 2020, and hopefully that puts that in the context of a long-term goal [of cutting global emissions by 2050]."

Ministers meeting in Copenhagen should also "decide a deadline by which that architecture can be negotiated into something comprehensive", such as a legally binding international treaty, Mr de Boer said. He called on Barack Obama, the US president, to come to Copenhagen for the conference and to set clear emissions targets for the US. "The effect of President Obama would be an enormous increase in the chances of finalising agreement at Copenhagen, as he could put his personal political backing behind it." Other world leaders should also attend.

The US must set out its target for cutting emissions by 2020 for a deal to be struck, Mr de Boer said. "A Copenhagen agreement without the US would make no sense whatsoever." But the White House will find it difficult to commit itself to specific cuts before the Senate has considered the cap-and-trade bill now before it.

Todd Stern, US special envoy for climate change, is adamant that Mr Obama will not repeat the mistakes made over the Kyoto protocol, when the Clinton administration signed a deal that did not have Congress's approval.

At the weekend Mr Stern said there was "no huge mystery" over what the US target was likely to be, as the House had approved a cap-and-trade bill mandating a 17 per cent cut in emissions and the Senate bill aimed at a 20 per cent cut compared with 2005 levels.

Politicians from Europe and the developing world have condemned these commitments as too weak, but Mr de Boer said they could be acceptable. "The US has a lot of catching up to do on climate change," he said. That meant it could take on a lower target and still "make efforts which are comparable to those of other industrialised countries".

For a deal to be reached, the emissions target must be finalised or other countries would not agree.

Finance has also proved a big sticking point. Developing countries want funding from the rich world to help them adapt to global warming. But a Harris poll conducted for the Financial Times found that voters in the US and the UK were unenthusiastic about such aid. Mr de Boer said he did not believe rich countries were willing to see the poor world struggle to deal with climate change alone and warned that postponing agreement from Copenhagen to next year would be disastrous.

"Failure at Copenhagen really means ending up with nothing, because it will mean less confidence in this multilateral process and it will mean that new political priorities emerge on the horizon. I can just see it getting more and more difficult, not easier."