

# The New York Times

John M. Broder and Elisabeth Rosenthal, “U.N. Official Says Climate Deal Is at Risk”, **New York Times**, 21 January 2010

WASHINGTON — Just a month after world leaders fashioned a tentative and nonbinding agreement at the [climate change](#) summit meeting in Copenhagen, the deal already appears at risk of coming undone, the top [United Nations](#) climate official warned on Wednesday.

Facing a Jan. 31 deadline, major countries have yet to submit their plans for reducing emissions of climate-altering gases, one of the major provisions of the agreement, according to Yvo de Boer, the Dutch official who is executive secretary of the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), which organized the [climate meeting](#).

Fewer than two dozen countries have even submitted letters saying they agree to the terms of the three-page accord. And there has been virtually no progress on spelling out the terms of nearly \$30 billion in short-term financial assistance promised to those countries expected to be hardest hit by climate change. Still unresolved are such basic questions as who will donate how much, where the money will go and who will oversee the spending.

After a contentious two-week conference in the Danish capital last month, representatives of more than 190 nations issued a skeletal document, known as the Copenhagen Accord, that sets climate-related goals for developed and developing countries, but without enforceable targets or timetables. The participants failed to agree to even the minimum expectation of the meeting: setting a firm deadline for negotiating a binding international climate change treaty.

In his first news conference and interview since the conference, Mr. de Boer said he remained hopeful that the near-failure at Copenhagen would produce meaningful results as the year progressed and the parties resumed negotiations.

After a month during which many participants expressed disappointment at the outcome and ascribed blame to various actors, Mr. de Boer described the next several weeks as a “cooling-off period that gives countries useful time to work with each other.”

Next week, for example, the major developing countries that helped fashion the agreement — China, India, Brazil and South Africa — will meet in New Delhi to review the Copenhagen agreement and plan for the next phase of talks. None of them have yet inscribed their plans for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the Copenhagen document, Mr. de Boer said. Without a commitment to such plans, a major accomplishment at Copenhagen — pledges by large polluters in the developing world to cut emissions — will have been thwarted.

Mr. de Boer said several officials from those countries had told him that they negotiated the accord with the understanding that it would be formally adopted by all the nations at the conference. But in [a raucous conclusion to the meeting](#) in the early hours of Dec. 19, the conference agreed only to “take note” of the accord, not to endorse it. And five nations dissented even from that.

Mr. de Boer said he expected a number of countries to miss the Jan. 31 deadline, and he would not predict that they would ultimately submit their plans.

“Whether those countries do in fact decide to associate with it remains to be seen,” he said.

Connie Hedegaard, the former Danish environment minister who is soon to become the [European Union](#)’s commissioner for climate action, said it was critical for the United States and the large emerging economies to formally inscribe their pollution-reduction targets in the accord.

“I think much will depend on how countries treat that deadline,” she said. “If only Europe and Japan come up with plans, then you have a very different situation than if the U.S. and major emerging economies all step up.”

Todd Stern, the chief American climate negotiator, said the United States fully intended to enshrine in the accord [its declared target of a 17 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions](#) from 2005 levels by 2020. He, too, said it was “incredibly important” for all the other major emitters to submit their public pledges for inclusion.

But he also said that success of the accord hinged on the creation of a rigorous and enforceable system of monitoring and verifying emissions-reduction programs. The accord calls for such a system, but does not provide details.

The nations of the world, Mr. de Boer said, are counting on [President Obama](#) to follow through on the emissions-reduction pledge he made at Copenhagen, despite Congress’ reluctance to pass an ambitious climate bill. “Any self-respecting person,” he said, “would well like to deliver on what we promise.”