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Review Finds Flaws in U.N. Climate Panel Structure

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations needs to revise the way it manages its assessments of climate change, with the scientists involved more open to alternative views, more transparent about possible conflicts of interest and more careful to avoid making policy prescriptions, an independent review panel said Monday.

The review panel also recommended that the senior officials involved in producing the periodic assessments serve in their voluntary positions for only one report — a statement interpreted to suggest that the current chairman of the climate panel, Rajendra K. Pachauri, step down.



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A review has been interpreted as hinting that Rajendra K. Pachauri, chairman of a climate change panel, step down.

Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the United Nations, has been struggling to make the United Nations the main stage for addressing climate change. Errors in the 2007 assessment report, including a prediction that the Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035, have threatened to overshadow the United Nations' message that climate change is a significant threat requiring urgent collective action.

"I think the errors made did dent the credibility of the process," said Harold T. Shapiro, a former president of Princeton University and professor of economic and public affairs there. Being more open about the process will help the report withstand the public scrutiny it now endures, Mr. Shapiro, the chairman of the review committee, told a news conference.

Although there is widespread scientific consensus that human activity is heating the planet, critics used the mistakes — which emerged at the same time as the unauthorized release of hundreds of e-mails from a climate research center in Britain — to question all the science involved. The e-mails opened prominent climate scientists to charges that they had manipulated some data. Numerous investigations have largely cleared the scientists.

The review committee, which did not evaluate the scientific conclusions made by the United Nations panel, said the way the panel went about its work was “successful over all.”

The review committee’s major recommendation is that, after nearly 20 years of periodic reports produced by scientists volunteering their time, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) should become a more professional organization, paying salaries to its top management. The panel shared the Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice President [Al Gore](#) in 2007.

The committee noted that some climate panel leaders had been criticized for public statements perceived as advocating specific policies. “Straying into advocacy can only hurt I.P.C.C.’s credibility,” the report said.

It also suggested that the panel revise the way it rates doubts about some of the science, that the process of choosing the scientists who write the report be more open and that the panel require that any possible conflicts of interest be revealed.

Mr. Pachauri himself has been accused by two British newspapers of profiting from his position by accepting large consulting fees. An independent assessment by KPMG auditors released this month showed that he had, as he claimed, turned over all such fees to a nonprofit organization he founded, the Energy and Resources Institute. The Sunday Telegraph has since apologized to him for the allegations.

The review committee suggested that the top eight officials involved in producing the assessments step down every eight years, hinting that Mr. Pachauri, who has served since 2002, should not direct the fifth assessment report, due in 2013-14.

Asked if he would resign, Mr. Pachauri said that he wanted to see through the reforms but that the ultimate decision lay with the member states. Representatives of the 194 such states that control the panel are scheduled to meet in South Korea in October.

Initial reaction from scientists to the review by the [InterAcademy Council](#), a multinational organization of science academies, was positive. “These are solid recommendations that people would agree with,” said Andrew Weaver, a climatologist at the University of Victoria and longtime panel author.

In the review process for the 2007 report, some 90,000 comments were submitted. The overwhelming number contributed to the fact that a scientist’s offhand remark in an interview about the Himalayan glaciers made it into the final report, Mr. Shapiro said.

Hans von Storch, a climate researcher at the Institute of Meteorology at the University of Hamburg and a frequent critic of the climate panel who has called on Mr. Pachauri to resign, said past mistakes tended to dramatize the effects of climate change.

Carrying out the recommendations would make the climate panel much less aloof and help the climate change debate, Dr. von Storch said. He added, “I am pretty optimistic that all this will lead to a much more rational and cooled-down exchange.”