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UN climate envoy expects dual-track negotiations

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AMSTERDAM -- Talks on a new global climate change accord, bogged down for years in contested negotiations among nearly 200 countries, will increasingly move outside the sluggish U.N. framework and focus on a streamlined group of countries, special U.N. envoy Gro Harlem Brundtland said Tuesday.

The disappointment of the Copenhagen summit last December, which failed to come up with binding rules on reducing pollution blamed for global warming, likely will bring a shift in the way countries view the cumbersome U.N. process and the need for more informal contact among key players, Brundtland said.

Copenhagen concluded with a nonbinding three-page paper hammered out in an all-night private meeting among President Barack Obama and a handful of leaders, most importantly from [China](#), [India](#), [Brazil](#) and [South Africa](#). It fell far short of the summit's original objective, a full-fledged and legally binding accord setting emission reduction targets for major countries.

The Copenhagen experience "will serve as a base for discussions going on this year. It's not only going to be focused on the United Nations framework, but more on what these emerging economies and big economies are committing to," said Brundtland, speaking on the sidelines of a world conference on biofuels.

"You will have more of a double track system" in addition to the U.N. framework, she said.

Brundtland's comments reflect a growing admission that the U.N. process has proven dysfunctional. They add weight because of her 20-year involvement in climate issues and her current role as Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's special climate envoy.

The former Norwegian prime minister, who also has been director of the World Health Organization, authored the 1988 U.N.-sponsored report that made "sustainable development" a mantra for environmentalists, warning that the world cannot continue to grow while disregarding the impact on nature. The report, "Our Common Future," was a reference point for the first summit on climate change in 1992.

Yvo de Boer, who is retiring July 1 as head of the U.N. body that sets the framework for the talks, also has acknowledged the shortcomings of trying to reach a deal among too many countries, and hoped the process could be narrowed.

"You don't only rely on formal meetings, but through bilateral contacts and frequent meetings in a smaller setting and an earlier understanding of how the process can be advanced," he told The Associated Press last month when he announced his resignation. "At the moment it tends to be very much a stop-and-start affair with everything concentrated in the formal negotiations."

Delegates from some 180 countries are due to convene in Bonn, [Germany](#), in April and again in June, with more meetings likely to be scheduled before the next major conference in Cancun, [Mexico](#), in late November.

The negotiators are trying to draft the text of a global warming agreement to succeed and expand the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which required a list of industrial countries to reduce carbon emissions by a total 5 percent by 2012.

The talks have made progress on technical issues and on protecting the world's tropical forests. But they have been unable to find a formula for how industrial and developing countries should share the burden of limiting future emissions, or how to raise and distribute the billions of dollars needed to protect poor countries from rising sea levels, water shortages and shifting agriculture due to climate change.

While hard negotiations may move into smaller, informal settings, the results must come back to the U.N. talks, Brundtland said.

A double-track negotiating process already is in place. Last year Obama created the 17-nation Major Economies Forum which met behind closed doors more than a half dozen times to discuss a climate deal. Climate change also has been on the agenda of the Group of Eight and the G-20 summits for several years.

But Brundtland said that even in those informal meetings, "the mindset was influenced by, if not dominated by, the reality that the big negotiations were going on in the UN framework."

Copenhagen has changed that mindset, she said. "Whatever happened a year or two before Copenhagen is different from what happened after."

The European Union, which was among the prime movers in the negotiations, saw its ambitions whittled down at the summit.

"They got the message that it was much more complicated than (they believed), and that they have to work with Brazil and China and others, not only in the broad framework of UN negotiations but also more directly and pragmatically," she said. "The reality is different from half a year ago."

The Copenhagen Accord, which was "noted" rather than adopted by the full conference, called on industrial countries to voluntarily commit to emissions reductions targets and on developing countries to lower the growth rate of their own emissions. It also called for a \$30 billion fund over the next three years to help poor countries adapt to climate change, scaling up to \$100 billion annually by 2020.

The United States wants to use the accord as the baseline for future negotiations. China, India and a host of other countries have said they want to base all discussions on the draft texts being worked up at the formal conferences leading up to Cancun.