

IAEA

Enforcement of the Kyoto Protocol through nuclear energy

Current Situation

Years ago scientists highlighted the growing problem of global warming. Contributing to this phenomenon of global warming are greenhouse gases which deteriorate the ozone layer. For years scientists argued whether or not greenhouse gases contributed to climate change. Today there is a general consensus among scientists and leaders throughout the world that global warming is a major issue. In 1997, The Kyoto Protocol was created by the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) to combat the effects of greenhouse gases that incur climate change.¹ The Kyoto Protocol has a distinct difference from the convention in that it is a commitment of countries to cap emissions, rather than simply encourage them to do so. This paper seeks to address the current situation of the Kyoto Protocol and whether there have been efforts to enforce it through the use of nuclear energy.

First the position of the United States will be examined, as well as its efforts- or lack of efforts to comply with or implement the Kyoto Protocol. In 2001, 165 countries reached an agreement in Morocco establishing mandatory reductions in greenhouse emissions.² The U.S. was absent from this session, as the Bush Administration was focusing its efforts on the War on Terror. Earlier that same year President George W. Bush withdrew U.S. participation in the Kyoto Protocol and stating that the U.S. economy would suffer from the compulsory reduction of greenhouse gases. Also, due to the absence of the U.S., other countries such as Russia, Japan and Australia who were major emitters of greenhouse gases, took the upper-hand and were able to obtain loopholes in the agreement that worked in their favor.³ Furthermore, up to this point the Kyoto Treaty itself still had not been ratified. Since President Bush withdrew US support for the Protocol in 2001, it became vital for Russia to ratify the treaty since it could only go into force if 55 Parties to the UNFCCC ratified it, including the developed countries whose combined 1990 emissions of carbon dioxide exceed 55 per cent of that group's total. Russia which had 17 percent, officially stepped in, pushing the total amount above the required percentage and putting in motion the Protocol which would soon go into force.⁴

In February 2005, after years of trying, there were enough countries that ratified the Kyoto Protocol so that it could go into effect.⁵ Under the Kyoto Protocol to the 1992 UNFCCC, industrialized countries would reduce their combined emissions of six major greenhouse gases between the years of 2008 to 2012 to below 1990 levels. As of 2005, 140 countries have ratified the accord. The European Union agreed to cut emissions by eight percent and Japan agreed to cut emissions by six percent. On the day the Kyoto Treaty came into effect, the U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan stressed that the world needed to come together to save the planet, and that the U.S government, the top polluter in the world still opposed the treaty.⁶ What was also stressed on that day was that though the U.S. government opposed Kyoto, the people in the U.S. understood the importance of reducing greenhouse gases. For example, the UN Environment Program (UNEP) Executive Director Klaus Toepfer stated, "many individual states in America

¹ http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

² *Bush Uses Global Coalition to Fight Terror But Not Polluters*, <http://www.alternet.org/story/11927/>

³ Ibid

⁴ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=13359&Cr=global&Cr1=warm>

⁵ <http://seattle.bizjournals.com/dallas/stories/2005/02/28/editorial5.html?q=kyoto%20protocol>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=13359&Cr=global&Cr1=warm>

are adopting or planning to adopt greenhouse gas reductions in line with the spirit of the Protocol.”⁷

Comprehending the sheer difficulty countries had in ratifying the Protocol is necessary to understand why till today, while there have been efforts to enforce the Protocol through the use of nuclear energy; progress has been slow on this matter due to objections to the use of nuclear energy. However, there are increasingly more and more effort to incorporate nuclear energy and nuclear plants into the industries of developing countries. In a press release from the IAEA, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei stated, "The more we look to the future, the more we can expect countries to be considering the potential benefits that expanding nuclear power has to offer for the global environment and for economic growth." He said this ahead of a conference of 500 nuclear power experts who would gather in Moscow for the "International Conference on Fifty Years of Nuclear Power - the Next Fifty Years" (27 June - 2 July).⁸ The conference would delve into the status and future of nuclear power since the first nuclear plant was started in the Soviet Union in 1954.⁹ Thus work is being done to use nuclear energy to help the environment and enforce the Kyoto Protocol.

The press release also states that Brazil, China and India which account for 40 percent of the world's population, have nuclear power programs. China and India are also planning significant nuclear expansion, and Japan and India have both highlighted nuclear energy as part of their solution to reducing greenhouse gases.¹⁰ The article also states in regards to disagreements on nuclear energy, "One of the outcomes of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was that all countries agreed that "the choice of nuclear energy rests with countries", but they agreed to disagree on the role of nuclear energy in sustainable development. Some consider the two fundamentally incompatible. Others see nuclear power as essential to their sustainable development strategies.”¹¹ Nations have qualms about the spent fuel that comes out of nuclear plants and where the spent waste will go. However, if there is multilateral discussions and agreement to pursue possible sources of nuclear energy to properly implement the Kyoto Protocol, much progress may be achieved and made on this matter.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/PressReleases/2004/prn200405.html>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid