

- [MAIN PAGE](#)
- [WORLD](#)**
- [U.S.](#)
- [WEATHER](#)
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- [SPORTS](#)
- [POLITICS](#)
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- [SCI-TECH](#)
- [SPACE](#)
- [HEALTH](#)
- [ENTERTAINMENT](#)
- [TRAVEL](#)
- [EDUCATION](#)
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- [IN-DEPTH](#)

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- [COMMUNITY](#)
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Dismay as U.S. drops climate pact

LONDON, England -- Dismay is being expressed across the world at the decision by U.S. President George W. Bush to abandon the 1997 Kyoto Treaty aimed at staving off global warming.

Under the treaty, the major powers agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions, which result mainly from burning coal and oil, by an average of 5.2 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

But the U.S. decision not to implement the cuts deals a blow to European hopes to salvage the pact.

The European Union led the hail of protests. The Swedish government, which currently holds the European Union presidency, described the move as appalling and provocative.

Sweden's Environment Minister, Kjell Larssen, told the BBC that the new U.S. administration seemed to be preparing to withdraw from the global community's effort to deal with a major threat to the future of the world.

EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom said in a statement: "It is very worrying if it is true that the U.S. intends to pull out of the protocol. The EU is willing to discuss details and problems -- but not scrap the whole protocol."

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder would urge Bush not to abandon the Kyoto accord when the two leaders meet for the first time in Washington on Thursday, a German government official said.

"We hope the Americans will change their mind, because we Europeans think we have the better arguments," said the German official. "The chancellor will explain the European position."

Schroeder wrote to Bush this month urging him to rethink his stand on pollution but has received no reply, the official said.

Pacific islands warned that rising seas could wipe them off the map. Island states already suffering devastation because of rising sea levels and severe storms and droughts said their very survival was at stake.

AUDIO

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer: There is no treaty

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British Environment Minister Michael Meacher said: "It was signed up to by every single nation on earth, and if America now tries to walk away ... I think this is not just an environmental issue, it's an issue of transatlantic global foreign policy."

Australian Environment Minister Robert Hill said the collapse of the Kyoto protocol would be "a major step backwards."

The country responsible for 30 percent of global greenhouse gases "cannot easily walk away from that responsibility," he said. "Time is against us, we are already starting to experience the consequences of climate change."

The tiny nation of Kiribati said it was already experiencing coastal erosion, droughts and severe storms as sea levels rose.

"It is a terrible economic problem, it is our very survival," said Baranika Etuati, acting director of the Department of Environment and Conservation in Kiribati.

Greenpeace climate campaigner Angie Heffernan, based in the Fijian capital Suva, said Bush's decision was driven by oil, coal and gas interests. "Greenpeace is disgusted and appalled at the United States," Heffernan said.

Japan said on Thursday that it will urge the United States, the world's biggest emitter of carbon dioxide, to rethink its plan to abandon the Kyoto treaty.

"In terms of the effectiveness of the Kyoto protocol, the U.S. participation is crucial," Yasuko Ishii of the environment ministry said.

Canadian Environment Minister David Anderson also voiced dismay but said through a spokeswoman that it was important to keep the U.S. engaged, since it was responsible for half of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Kyoto agreement was signed by former U.S. President Bill Clinton but never introduced to the Senate for ratification.

The criticism began after White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said on Wednesday: "The president has been unequivocal. He does not support the Kyoto treaty. It is not in the United States' economic best interest."

Asked whether the United States would withdraw from the treaty -- contrary to a Bush campaign pledge -- Fleischer said it had never come into force, meaning "there's nothing to withdraw from."

He added: "Given the fact that it was voted 95-0 against in the U.S. Senate, it's a clear sign that there is little support, if any."

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He was referring to a non-binding resolution, passed before the Kyoto pact was reached, that said the Senate could not support any global warming pact that did not bind developing countries along with developed countries.

Environmental activists say the United States has just six percent of the world's total population yet produces a quarter of the globe's carbon dioxide.

Bush has frequently expressed his opposition to the Kyoto accord, which the Clinton administration had viewed as essential to dealing with the risks of climate change. Bush has said he did not think mandatory controls on CO2 emissions are necessary.

Bush's statements have thrown a wrench into upcoming talks aimed at finding a solution as to how the protocol would be implemented. United Nations talks on implementing the Kyoto agreement and cutting greenhouse gas emissions resume in July 16 in Bonn, Germany.

The [Associated Press](#) & [Reuters](#) contributed to this report.

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