



UN agency says G-8 leaders 'missed opportunity' on climate change

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Commenting on the outcome of the Group of Eight (G-8) Summit in Japan, the head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said the world's richest countries had shown insufficient leadership on climate change. "We are under pressure to act. We have no time left to waste," said UNEP Executive Director-General Achim Steiner. "However, I think the G-8 leaders missed an opportunity to provide the kind of signal that would accelerate the international negotiation process," he added.

Mr. Steiner noted that the G-8 countries' agreement to reduce carbon emissions by at least 50 per cent by 2050 was a positive outcome of the Summit, but said that it did not go far enough.

"I think the G-8 delivered what it could. But in terms of what the world needs, what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has asked for and what is necessary in view of the Copenhagen meeting in 2009 the results fall short," he said. "The South African Minister of the Environment called it empty slogans – where is the substance?"

"The G-8 Summit has not delivered enough leadership. We have some 500 days until we meet in Copenhagen to reach a global agreement," the Executive Director said, referring to the meeting next year where the goal is to agree on a new global climate change treaty under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), once the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012.

"We have less than seven years to stabilize emissions globally. The absence of short- and medium-term targets and commitments by the leading industrialized nations is a shortfall of the Summit," Mr. Steiner added.

"We are beyond the rhetoric of climate change. We must now put numbers on the table. We must also give developing nations the clear conviction that industrialized nations are taking their responsibilities seriously," he said.

Mr. Steiner noted that a number of countries including Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom, as well as South Africa and Indonesia, are now committing to targets.

"But when we look at the implementation of emission reduction targets under the current Kyoto Protocol, a number of industrialized nations are not even delivering on these relatively small targets. So what incentive is there for developing nations to make major investments if developed nations are not willing to take these significant steps forward?"

"We will continue to be stuck until all industrialized nations commit to firm targets – ones to be met by 2020 not in 42 years time," he said.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who attended the Summit in Hokkaido, welcomed the G-8's statement on climate change, food security and development as a good start, but also stressed the need for speedier action in the days ahead.