



19 May 2007 16:57

- [Home](#)
- > [News](#)
 - > [World](#)
 - > [Americas](#)

No, Blair! America's parting gift to Britain's PM

NO to CO2 emissions targets. NO to a successor to Kyoto. NO to a carbon trading market. As Blair leaves Washington, US hardens stance on climate change

By **Daniel Howden**

Published: 19 May 2007

As Tony Blair left Washington yesterday for his last visit as Prime Minister, the Bush administration was acting to scupper international efforts to combat climate change.

Less than 24 hours earlier, Mr Blair had basked in the apparent support of President George Bush for his stated aim of avoiding catastrophic global warming. But it seems his appeals have fallen on deaf ears. While Mr Bush was eulogising his friend in the White House rose garden, the President's delegation at a United Nations meeting in Bonn was working to stop any progress on setting up a carbon trading scheme and emissions caps.

Harlan Watson, President Bush's chief climate negotiator, rejected any caps on US emissions or participation in carbon trading. "That's not our agenda," he said.

Leading scientists and policy makers have been meeting in Germany over the past two weeks to lay the foundations for a new international agreement - a "son of Kyoto", the landmark protocol designed to reduce harmful emissions of greenhouse gases. The negotiations came after economists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported earlier this month that greenhouse gas emissions, which are causing the atmosphere to warm, can be brought under control - but only if governments act decisively.

Mr Blair has long been engaged in attempts to win over the climate change sceptics in the Bush administration. But progress so far has been restricted to a change in rhetoric.

Speaking on Thursday Mr Bush said he and Mr Blair had talked about climate change: "We spent a lot of time on climate change. And I agree with the Prime Minister, as I have stated publicly, this is a serious issue, and the United States takes it seriously." Mr Blair welcomed the comments and said in response: "The important thing is that we see that it's possible for people to come together on an agreement for the future that will allow us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Meanwhile away from the cameras, the US delegation to Bonn was scotching any prospect of the emissions caps and carbon trading that are needed to realise the rhetoric. "We don't believe targets and timetables are important, or a global cap and trade system," he said. "It's important not to jeopardise economic growth."

Speaking on condition of anonymity a senior climate negotiator, party to the talks, said that the US was even stalling progress on negotiations on a successor to Kyoto which had been due to get under way at a summit in Bali later this year.

"We were not expecting a big change of stance but we need them to stop obstructing all progress across the board," said the source.

But once again Mr Watson, described off-the-record by international colleagues as a "climate change dinosaur", said it would be "premature" to open talks on amending the rules of how Kyoto works, a vital step to extending the pact which expires in 2012.

Kevin Conrad, the chief negotiator for Papua New Guinea, which has emerged as a leading voice among poorer nations, said the US was "impotent" on climate change and that the impotence came from the top.

"There is a huge gap between rhetoric and reality," said Mr Conrad. "Saying 'we're taking it very seriously' but not putting any serious tools in place to do anything. The missing link is the White House, where there's no vision and no direction."

There is now a broad consensus that markets - in the form of a globally regulated trade in carbon - are the way to achieve the reductions in emissions. However, the US delegation has this week insisted that further technical work is needed before talks can begin on a son-of-Kyoto agreement, a move that could delay any progress for a further year. Such a delay could be disastrous for efforts to halt deforestation, which was highlighted this week in *The Independent* as one of the main causes of global warming. The world's forests, which are being destroyed to feed our markets with cheap timber, palm oil, soya and beef, contain twice as much CO₂ as that already in the atmosphere but were not included in the Kyoto agreement. The Bonn meetings had been intended to make the first step to creating incentives to halt that destruction.

Andrew Mitchell, director of the Global Canopy Programme, an alliance of leading rainforest scientists, said: "This is a climate change cop-out. America must stop using technical objections to obstruct the process and concentrate on visionary means of reaching our goal. Each year that agreement is not reached raises the stakes on global warming and is a tragedy for the world's rainforests with a further 8 billion tonnes of CO₂ and biodiversity going up in smoke."

© 2007 Independent News and Media Limited