

US is accused of undermining Kyoto principles on emissions

Financial Times, 17 December 2004 - The US tried yesterday to ensure that future additions to the Kyoto protocol on climate change should avoid committing nations to reducing their carbon dioxide emissions, a move that other countries see as an attempt to undermine the principles of the landmark environmental treaty.



Paula Dobriansky, undersecretary of state, said it was "premature" to begin discussions of what should follow the current stage of the Kyoto protocol, the main provisions of which last only to 2012. She said: "We have programmes and initiatives (to tackle climate change) on the table and we need to concentrate on those programmes, not on future arrangements."

Ms Dobriansky said the US position did "not favour" mandatory goals for emissions reduction.

The question of what should follow the current protocol commitments in 2012 has been one of the main areas of discussion at this year's climate change talks, taking place in Buenos Aires under the auspices of the 10-year-old UN framework convention that gave rise to the Kyoto agreement.

Ms Dobriansky rejected any form of compulsion in cutting greenhouse gases, or any role for regulation of emissions, telling the conference: "We believe the convention could serve more effectively as a form for guiding efforts, strengthening the exchange of information and reviewing progress rather than acting as a regulatory structure."

Although the US has refused to ratify the protocol, which binds developed nations to reducing their emissions of greenhouse gases to below 1990 levels, it remains a signatory to the framework convention. This gives it a voice in discussions on the future direction of the framework.

Other parties have complained that the US has used its position to stop countries that have ratified Kyoto from continuing its provisions, and from talks of extending the provisions to developing countries. While the US believed climate change caused by human actions was a serious problem, Ms Dobriansky said, the key to tackling it was in fostering technologies rather than risking economic growth by cutting emissions.

Some senior voices within the administration privately cast doubts on the existence of man-made climate change, but Ms Dobriansky said President George W. Bush's commitment to tackling it was shown by the Dollars 5.8bn (Euros 4.4bn, Pounds 3bn) invested in science and technology.

There has also been widespread dissent in the US. Dennis Kucinich, a Democratic member of Congress, told the conference: "Environmental sustainability and economic growth go together. We are missing out on economic opportunities (by refusing to support Kyoto)."

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