



76 Days Until Copenhagen

Blog posted by Barbara Finamore

NRDC China Program Director

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There are 76 days until Copenhagen.

This morning's UN Summit on Climate Change was a good example of just how far we've come in the global climate discussions. Every world leader who spoke mentioned our collective responsibility to reverse climate change and the serious ramifications for the planet if we do not.

The much-anticipated comments by China's President Hu Jintao were encouraging. President Hu announced to the UN General Assembly that China will reduce its CO₂ intensity by some notable margin by 2020 from 2005 levels, though he gave no specific number.

Our expectation is that this commitment will be included as an official "plan target" in the next Five-Year Plan. This has proven to be an effective strategy in China for achieving real results. Meeting plan targets has a direct impact on top Chinese officials' chances for promotions and work recognition. Including this measured target in the Plan would therefore ensure that these officials will actively work to reduce carbon intensity. The fact that President Hu made this announcement at such a high-level international forum also sends a strong signal regarding China's commitment to achieving it.

Capacity building, advocacy and education will still be important in order to strengthen China's ability to accurately measure, report and verify its CO₂ emissions. NRDC has been working on capacity building for enforcement as part of our China Program's [Environmental Law Project](#) and there has been much progress in this area over the years.

The significance of the carbon intensity target China adopts will depend on: (1) its stringency, based on the percentage reduction target and timeframe for achieving it, and (2) whether it is merely a domestic commitment or a commitment that China offers as part of the deal to be negotiated in Copenhagen (i.e., nationally appropriate mitigation action). If China proposes to include its carbon intensity target in the agreement in Copenhagen, then this would add a huge amount of credibility to what China does and create stronger motivation for assistance from developed countries to aid China in going even further.

A commitment to reducing carbon intensity means a commitment to reduce CO₂ emissions per unit of economic output (for example, RMB, dollars, or a ton of cement or steel). Given that China's economy in 2005 was more than twice as carbon intensive as that of the US, and more than three times as carbon intensive as the economies of Japan and the EU, a commitment to reduce by a significant percentage could be quite impressive. It also means that China has plenty of room to reduce its carbon emissions significantly while continuing to grow its economy.

China has shown that intensity targets can play an important role in mitigating its emissions. The 20% energy intensity target in its 11th Five Year Plan has led to policies and measures that have reduced its energy intensity by over 10 percent in the three years from 2006-08, representing an avoidance of several hundred million tons of CO₂ emissions. A carbon intensity target would help China to focus on the policies and measures needed to improve energy efficiency and reduce the carbon-intensity of its energy supply.

Today's Summit opened with a photo taken of Earth from Voyager and a voice which quotes Carl Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot* questioning, "What is our legacy?" - a poignant reminder of what humans can accomplish when we reach for the stars. Years ago, Professor Ian McHarg asked, as he studied a picture of the earth from space, whether we are parasites on the planet and if after apocalyptic destruction, amoeba would come back and agree; "next time - no brains". Voyager's glimpse of our planet makes me wonder: will our political posturing interfere with our ability to act? Will it be a battle of wits in December or will our world leaders show the courage we demand of them?

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