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Japan Economic Newswire

February 16, 2005 Wednesday

SECTION: INTERNATIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 516 words

HEADLINE: Kyoto Protocol on climate change comes into force

DATELINE: TOKYO, Feb. 16

BODY:

The Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty aimed at curbing emissions of greenhouse gases, entered into force Wednesday, seven years after it was adopted at a U.N. conference in Kyoto in 1997.

The pact, known officially as the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, took effect at midnight Tuesday in New York, where the United Nations is headquartered, or 2 p.m. Wednesday Japan time.

The occasion of the inauguration of the world's first attempt to control climate change was marked around the world.

In Bonn, Germany, the secretariat of the U.N. framework convention and civic groups will jointly hold a commemorative event.

In Japan, a symposium was held Wednesday evening in Kyoto with Kenyan Deputy Environment Minister Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and some 1,200 people attending.

Kyoto Gov. Keiji Yamada said, 'We will make the best effort to curb global warming as the birthplace of the protocol.'

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said in a live broadcast via the Internet, 'Japan wants to cooperate with international society to hand on a more beautiful earth to our children and grandchildren,' while U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan also sent a video message, in which he stressed the necessity of promoting the protocol.

Under the Kyoto treaty, industrialized countries are required to reduce their carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by an average of 5.2 percent between 2008 and 2012.

Japan is required to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 6 percent from the 1990 level.

The pact, however, remains a small step, as it covers only a third of total emissions in the world.

The United States, which accounts for 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, withdrew from the Kyoto treaty in 2001 after President George W. Bush took office. The Bush administration questioned the effectiveness of the treaty and said it would cause adverse effects on the U.S. economy.

Japan is expected to have difficulty achieving its target as its emission of such gases in fiscal 2003, which ended March 31, 2004, was up 8 percent from the 1990 level.

The ratification in November by Russia, which accounted for 17.4 percent of carbon dioxide emissions in the base year 1990, paved the way for the pact to come into effect. The pact requires ratification by 55 nations accounting for at least 55 percent of emissions in 1990.

The protocol had been ratified by 141 nations and territories as of Feb. 2 this year. China and India are among fast developing countries that have yet to join the treaty.

Given the expected limited impact of the pact, its supporters are already looking beyond it and have begun discussing post-Kyoto Protocol policies for 2013 and onward.

The key issues for the post-2012 steps will include how to win U.S. support for the new policies, and to reexamine the obligations and commitments to curb greenhouse gas emissions in China, India and other rapidly developing countries, which are exempted from the treaty's obligations.

LOAD-DATE: February 17, 2005