Focus-on-APEC #15 June 1997

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Focus-on-APEC #15, part 1 of 3

FOCUS-on-APEC

A regular bulletin produced by Focus on the Global South (FOCUS)

Bangkok, Thailand

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This really is the final issue of Focus-on-APEC. The next bulletin will be renamed Focus-on-Trade, covering a wider range of issues.

FOCUS was designated the NGO Information/Monitoring Center on APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum) by the participants of the 1995 NGO Forum on APEC in Kyoto, Japan. It was out of this commitment that FOCUS-on-APEC was created. FOCUS-on-APEC carries APEC-related news, the latest items of interest and concern, and informed and critical analysis from a progressive perspective -- with a broad geographical concentration on East Asia and the Western and South Pacific.

FOCUS-on-APEC is where you can learn about other people's APEC-related work and they can learn about yours. Please send us your APEC-related information (by e-mail, fax or snail-mail!) -- including news items, research papers, opinion pieces and information on grassroots activities happening in your respective country. Your contributions will be incorporated into the bulletins.

We welcome your comments and suggestions!

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APEC environment meeting makes little progress

TORONTO, June 11 (Reuter) - Environment ministers from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies closed a three-day meeting on Wednesday, having failed to produce any concrete or enforceable measures to address the environmental concerns plaguing its 18 members.

Canada's Ambassador for the Environment John Fraser, told the final news conference that simply holding the gathering was an accomplishment, given APEC's origin as a group focused on promoting trade between Asia-Pacific nations.

``I have to be encouraged,'' said Fraser who chaired the meeting. ``Do I think that there are magic answers? No, there are no magic answers but this goes a long way to making it obvious that you can start off talking about trade, but if you're talking about meaningful trade, real health to your people, you can't exclude the concepts of sustainable development.''

It was the third meeting of the environmental arm of APEC since the group's formation in 1989. Despite preparations for all delegates to address the news conference, representatives from just four APEC member economies -- Canada, the United States, Chile and Japan -- attended.

Fraser said the delegates were pressed for time.

``It's late this afternoon, they've come a long long way, and they have to catch planes to go elsewhere,'' he said.

The environment ministers will present their recommendations for sustainable cities, cleaner production and sustainability of the marine environment to the wider APEC summit to be held November in

Vancouver.

Act on pollution, APEC urged: Group's credibility called on the line

June 10, 1997 Paul Knox, The Globe and Mail

Pacific Rim environment ministers were told bluntly yesterday to stop avoiding serious ecological problems and turn their Toronto meeting into more than a chance for environmental businesses to network.

Delegates from the United States and New Zealand urged their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum to broaden their agenda to include global warming.

U.S. delegate Eileen Claussen said the credibility of eight-year-old APEC, a trade-liberalization forum that includes 18 countries and territories, is on the line.

"Many people have real doubts about whether APEC can evolve into a credible force for environmental protection," she told the meeting. "It is true that we certainly have not become one yet."

Echoing her concern, New Zealand Environment Minister Simon Upton noted that the United States and China, which together with European countries emit the bulk of the world's greenhouse gases, were both at the table.

"Our citizens are going to expect us to focus on common issues that affect us all," he said. ". . . If we can't talk about these issues at APEC, where can we talk about them?"

Their comments seemed likely to fuel controversy in Canada over APEC, whose summit meeting of heads of government will be held in Vancouver in November. The environment meeting is one of several preliminary gatherings.

APEC was born as a trade-liberalization group, and unabashedly promotes itself as a forum designed to make it easier to do business in the Pacific Region. "APEC has been business-driven from the start,"

a pamphlet produced by Canada's Foreign Affairs Department notes. Delegates are said to represent "economies," not "countries." This is primarily so that China and Taiwan -- both members -- can bring themselves to sit at the same table. But it nourishes the suspicion that APEC will undermine national sovereignty.

"The environment ministers have been conscripted to an agenda that is anti-environment," said Maude Barlow, chairwoman of the Council of Canadians and one of about 30 people who staged a demonstration yesterday in front of the hotel where the talks were held.

The forum also is criticized because it goes to some lengths to provide access to businesses while sharply restricting that of environmental and human-rights activists. Partly to counter such criticism, a parallel "youth forum" has been organized this year.

While Canada was instrumental in getting environmental issues on APEC's agenda, it has abandoned efforts to include discussion of human rights and democracy. Most members are electoral democracies, but APEC includes two famously repressive regimes, China and Indonesia.

In briefings with reporters, Canadian officials stressed the potential benefits for Canada of the meeting's three themes: the urban environment, marine ecosystems and clean industrial processes.

A senior Canadian official said meteorologists can trace toxic chemicals that show up in the Arctic region back to their countries of origin in Asia.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, added that Ottawa hopes to drum up sales for Canadian businesses that provide environmental technology or services. "There's a jobs element for Canada in this as well."

If the ministers endorse a draft program of action prepared for the Toronto meeting, they will agree to give antipollution technology special emphasis in talks on dropping tariffs and other trade

barriers.

The draft is heavy on exchanges of information and light on formal commitments. The closest it gets to emissions control is a U.S. proposal to hold workshops on cutting lead pollution in motor-vehicle exhaust.

Yet almost no progress has been made on cutting carbon emissions from autos and industry, which produce the so-called greenhouse gases believed to contribute to global warming.

In two weeks, when world leaders gather at the United Nations for a special General Assembly session, they will be forced to acknowledge that the emissions-cutting promise they made at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 has not been kept.

"The APEC economies contribute almost half of global carbon-dioxide emissions," said Ms. Claussen, who is the U.S. assistant secretary of state for international environmental affairs. "The problem cannot be solved without us."

In an interview, Environment Minister Sergio Marchi said the ministers would discuss climate change informally over dinner and lunch in Toronto. "The road to and from Rio also goes through APEC," he said.

He declined to say whether he expected to be Environment Minister when the meeting wraps up tomorrow. That is the day Prime Minister Jean Chrétien plans to announce a cabinet lineup for his second mandate.

Hour Magazine May 15-21, 1997

APEC Environment Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development Joint Statement Toronto, Canada, June 9 - 11, 1997

"Across borders we have managed to build a common vision on sustainable development. The time for action is now. We want to help you build our future."

We, the Ministers responsible for Environment and Sustainable

Development from the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) region

commit to sustainable development as a fundamental objective to

achieve human prosperity and a healthy environment.

Specifically, we: take up ..... APEC Leaders' call for a work program

for sustainable development in APEC that includes the themes of the

sustainability of the marine environment, cleaner production, and

sustainable cities; highlight .... our determination to make cities

in the region more sustainable, and commend our Plan of Action to

Leaders; challenge .... all orders of government, the private sector,

local communities, and individuals to join with us in transforming

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org