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## A NEW SPECIAL REPORT The Climate Agenda

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## Global demonstrations to push for reduced carbon levels

U.S. officials, experts lowering expectations before December talks

By [Juliet Eilperin](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer  
Saturday, October 24, 2009

Activists around the globe are staging thousands of demonstrations Saturday aimed at prodding policymakers to cut carbon concentrations to below their current levels, at a time when many U.S. officials and experts are trying to dampen expectations for international climate talks that culminate in Copenhagen in December.

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U.S. soldiers deployed in Afghanistan gather to participate in a global-wide effort to call attention to climate changes and to urge policymakers to cut carbon concentrations to below their current levels. From left to right: Senior Airman Greg K. Moulton, 23, Specialist Jesus 'Doc' Sanchez, 37, Specialist Keith 'Spoon' Bailey Jr., 23, Specialist Pierre 'Huckleberry' Perry Jr. (Simon Lim)

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The more than 4,500 events in 173 countries include such activities as children racing through the main square in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to Chinese university students sporting full scuba gear in popular shopping districts. It underscores the disconnect between the international community's push for aggressive action on climate change and the political reality of what the United States and some other major greenhouse gas emitters are willing to undertake.

The protests are organized by the 350.org movement, whose name refers to the goal of reducing carbon concentrations in the atmosphere from its current level of nearly 380 parts per million to 350. That goal has been endorsed by prominent figures ranging from Rajendra K. Pachauri, who chairs the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. But the U.N.-sponsored climate talks aim to keep carbon concentrations from rising no higher than 450 parts per million, and the current proposals on the table fall far short of even that more modest climate goal.

### 'You have to be realistic'

"We need to do as much as possible as fast as possible," said Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. "But you have to be realistic about what can be achieved in Copenhagen, and we're not going to get specific targets from everybody. And

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even if we did, it would be hard to get to 450 [parts per million], let alone 350."

There will be events in all 50 states and the District -- where a free go-go concert and rally in Malcolm X Park will be followed by a march on the White House -- but most of the activities are taking place overseas. The intensity of activity abroad reflects, in part, growing impatience with the United States' reluctance to identify what emissions cuts it will make in the next decade and how much money it will give to developing countries as part of a climate pact.

"The Copenhagen meeting will fail, unless America changes," said Sunita Narain, director of the New Delhi-based Center for Science and Environment. "From what America is proposing nationally, it is clear that it plans to do very little. . . . Let us see if the man who was elected to bring change in the world's biggest polluting country will do anything different."

In China -- which now ranks as the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter -- around 300 events will take place, including performance art at the Great Wall and students taking tables to the beach to demonstrate how much sea levels are rising.

"Now is the time," said Zhao Xiangyu, international director of the China Youth Climate Action Network. "I hope Chinese youth in the future can take the lead for a lower carbon environment. . . . Definitely, we can do more."

The coordinated events are unusual in China, where the ruling Communist Party is generally leery of independent efforts to organize gatherings, especially by students. But many students share the Chinese government's views on international climate issues, and the government is taking voluntary steps to restrain the growth in greenhouse gas emissions.

White House spokesman Benjamin LaBolt said the administration welcomed the day of activism as a way to "help underscore the urgent need to tackle this challenge. . . . Not only have we taken action on the domestic front, but this administration has helped lead a robust diplomatic effort to encourage countries around the world to drastically reduce their carbon emissions and to transition to a clean-energy economy."

Both President Obama and Senate Democratic leaders have endorsed bringing by 2020 U.S. emissions to just below 1990 levels, which is well below what climate negotiators from the European Union as well as China and India have sought. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will hold its first hearing on its climate bill next week, but the measure will probably reach the Senate floor next year, making it harder for Obama officials to sign off on a reductions target in Copenhagen.

### **Ensuring a target**

Bill McKibben, 350.org's co-founder and director, wrote in an e-mail that he and his fellow activists are hoping to ensure the target that some scientists say is needed to avert dangerous climate change "will be fixed firmly in the public debate."

"We're under no illusions that we will change the politics overnight," he wrote. "But the most widespread political event in the planet's history is a sign that in our new electronically-wired age, we can make disparate actions count, even across the enormous divides of wealth and poverty."

Other groups are trying to mobilize support for the Senate bill. On Tuesday, more than 13,000 U.S. hunters and anglers participated in a "virtual town hall" teleconference organized by the National Wildlife Federation and other groups that back the measure.

"It will be easier to steer to the final destination when we have forward motion with national and global plans to reduce pollution," said Jeremy Symons, the federation's senior vice president for conservation and education. "We can't lose sight of the fact that we have been stuck in the rut of inaction for years, and you can't get anywhere if you aren't moving forward."

*Staff writer Steven Mufson in Beijing and correspondent Rama Lakshmi in New Delhi contributed to this report.*

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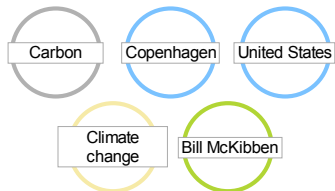
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