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'No one expects China or India to become carbon neutral'

Norway has stolen a march over other developed countries by declaring that it would reduce 40% of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and become carbon neutral by 2030. Its 49-year-old prime minister Jens Stoltenberg, in India for the Delhi Sustainability Development Summit, assures that Norway will do everything possible to make this happen. An economist from Oslo University, Stoltenberg spoke to Narayani Ganesh and said that carbon taxes, rather than subsidies, could better deliver on emissions reduction.

What is your view on the IPCC controversy?

We believe it is important to debate and criticize to enable transparent processes; therefore, we welcome criticism of the report but I wish to underline that we cannot see that any of the criticism or charges being leveled against IPCC and its chairman change the main conclusion of the panel that global warming is taking place. NASA's recent figures show that the last decade is the warmest recorded ever; that polar ice is melting and global temperatures are increasing. So those who try to use this criticism as an excuse for not acting — they are very wrong. I commend Dr Pachauri for his clear and strong actions

to correct any mistakes.

R K Pachauri needn't quit as chairman of IPCC?

No. When you have thousands of pages of documentation of scientific work, it shouldn't surprise us that there are some mistakes and some grounds for criticism, and we should welcome the scrutiny and criticism.

Norway has set an ambitious 40% emissions reduction target for itself but says that major emitters must come on board. Does that include countries like India and China?

Yes, in the long run we have to see reductions also in India and China. But we base our approach on the basis of the climate convention's principle of common but differentiated responsibility. So the rich countries have a huge responsibility because we have been emitting greenhouse gases for many years and we have no right to deny other people's right to development. The question is, how can we ensure that other countries like India and China continue to develop and lift people out of poverty and reduce emissions? I think this is possible.

How would this be possible?

Technology and financial flows from the industrialized world to emerging economies

can make this possible. I visited a village in Uttar Pradesh where solar power facilities are being installed... we work with the government of India and a private Norwegian company and we are building solar power in 30 villages in India. This is one example of seeking solutions through bilateral ventures. Clean Development Mechanism projects (CDMs) are important; but are project-based. They should be expanded to include sectors

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JENS STOLTENBERG

like power and agree to a baseline for emissions. Then we will pay.

Does this mean Norway wants the Kyoto Protocol to continue post-2012?

Yes, but all major emitters have to participate in the future. I believe the KP is important in many ways. But the problem is KP covers only a very small part, about 30% of total emissions. So even if KP becomes 100% efficient, it is not enough.

But at the 2009 Copenhagen summit the mood was to scrap the Protocol altogether.

No, I don't think so. We need binding commitments from all major emitters; it has to

be based on common but differentiated responsibility. The rich world has to take a bigger burden than the developing world, and that's what differentiated means. But they (developing countries) don't necessarily have to be included in the KP. We need an agreement that covers all emitters but in a differentiated way. Norway has said it will be carbon neutral by 2030. No one expects China or India to become carbon neutral!

How will Norway achieve carbon neutrality?

By reducing our own emissions and using offsets. We're part of the European emissions trading scheme. What we're not able to reduce in Norway, we reduce by financing emissions reductions in European countries. The best way of giving incentives is through taxation. It's cheaper and easier than giving subsidies. Since more than 70% of Norwegian emissions are covered by a CO2 tax or emissions trading, almost all our emissions are paid for. From 2012, carbon tax on air travel will be mandatory. Subsidising fossil fuels is expensive — we would rather pay for healthcare, for instance.

You are the third largest exporter of fossil fuel. Will you cut back production?

Oil and gas are a substantial part of our

total emissions, but we are trying to deal with this. We are investing \$1 billion in a Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) project, injecting methane from oil fields 1,000 metres into the continental shelf sea bed. Second, we take energy efficiency seriously. The oil industry is double taxed — they pay carbon tax and buy emissions rights, so compared to other countries, Norwegian oil and gas is clean.

Will your solar projects in India include setting up of grids?

No, this is for small villages where there is no grid. The reach depends on how many solar panels you establish. Right now they are able to use solar energy for lighting, computer, TV sets and for running flour mills.

India faces challenges of alleviating poverty and combating climate change. We cannot choose between development or environment. These have been the key issues in the dialogues being held during my visit to India.

