

G-20 environment meeting ends in India without agreement on climate crisis

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No consensus reached on key points, including curbing emissions and scaling up renewable

energy, despite record temperatures and wildfires across the globe.

New Delhi, July 28 (RHC)-- Environment ministers from G-20 nations have failed to agree on ways to curb emissions and other crucial measures to address the global climate crisis ahead of the UN climate change conference at the end of the year.

The European Union's environment commissioner on Friday criticised the outcome of the meeting of the world's largest economies in the Indian city of Chennai. He said it showed G-20 countries, which account for up to 80 percent of global greenhouse emissions, were "nowhere" on their commitments to address climate change.

"We were asked to make bold choices, to demonstrate courage, commitment and leadership, but we collectively failed to achieve that," Virginijus Sinkevicius said a day after UN chief Antonio Guterres said July was the planet's hottest month on record by far.

A blistering heatwave has been sweeping the northern hemisphere with record-high temperatures causing deadly wildfires in Greece, Italy and Algeria. Sinkevicius added that some delegations had even tried to walk back previous climate pledges. "We cannot be driven by the lowest common denominator or by narrow national interests. We cannot allow the pace of change to be set by the slowest movers in the room," he told his fellow ministers.

No breakthrough was possible on several key points, including reaching a consensus on drastically scaling up renewable energy use. The failure to reach an agreement comes just a week after the G20, a bloc made up of 19 countries and the EU, disagreed on phasing down fossil fuels.

Indian Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said his country, which now holds the rotating G20 presidency, will soon issue an outcome statement instead of a joint communique, which is released when there is unanimous agreement among member nations on all issues.

French Ecological Transition Minister Christophe Bechu told the Agence France-Presse news agency after the meeting that he was "very disappointed" with the outcome.

"Records of temperatures, catastrophes, giant fires, and we are not able to reach an agreement on the peaking [of] emissions by 2025," he said.

Peter Newman, a member of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, told Al Jazeera that the effects of global warming were now before everyone's eyes. "We're facing death and seeing that climate change is not an idea just of science. It is real, and it hurts," Newman said. He added that the present time was a "very critical period" for humanity, which faces the prospect of "baking in an oven."

Catherine Gamper, climate change adaptation specialist at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), said the response to this summer's climate emergency was a testament to the fact that not even developed countries are prepared to face the effects of a climate crisis. "Unfortunately, OECD countries are not ready; otherwise, we wouldn't see them scrambling to put out fires and get tourists out of places that are subject to wildfires," Gamper told Al Jazeera.

Legislation such as heatwave plans was put in place across Europe after an estimated 65,000 climate-related deaths last year, but that was done in reaction to an emergency rather than to prevent one, Gamper said.

Greece has been especially battered by heatwaves and wildfires this year. Thousands of people have been evacuated from the islands of Rhodes and Corfu as Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis declared that the Mediterranean nation was "at war".

Gamper said the effects of these wildfires will be especially felt by the Greek tourism industry and will have long-lasting repercussions on the environment. “The environmental impact is huge, and the more frequent these incidents are, the less time nature has to recover,” she said.

“This means [the soil] will absorb less water, for example, which means that we will see groundwater pollution increasing. They are all interconnected risks.”

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