

Media Briefing

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CHINA'S FUTURE ENERGY NEEDS

Major International Renewables Conference in Beijing, China, November 7-8 2005

The Chinese Government is hosting a major international conference on renewable energy in Beijing on 7 and 8 November, supported by the German Government as part of an international commitment to drive forward renewable energy. The conference comes as global attention is focused on energy demand and the urgent need to tackle climate change. Later this month, ministers will meet in Montreal to discuss international action to tackle climate change. China's growing economy is fuelling huge demand for energy – making the need for clean sustainable solutions even more urgent.

The conference, which follows an international process agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, will address the global expansion of renewable energies and how technology can be successfully shared and transferred. UN member states, with international organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector will attend.

Two billion people currently have no access to modern energy services. Friends of the Earth believes that introducing clean and affordable renewable energy services can help alleviate poverty, reduce regional and local air and water pollution, generate jobs and income, empower local communities and promote gender equity.

Chinese Energy Demand

China's projected emissions in 2025 will reach 3 billion tons of carbon, overtaking the US as the world's biggest emitter at just under 2.7 billion tones of carbon. Coal is abundant and cheap in China. With the world's third largest deposits, China leads in its production and consumption, mining 1.8bn tons in 2004. The International Energy Agency has said that China and other developing countries will become the world's greatest polluters by 2030 [1].

Moves to clean energy in China

China announced earlier this year that it had passed a renewable energy law to increase production of energy from sustainable sources. The law, which will come into force early next year, seeks to increase the usage of solar and wind power to 10 per cent of China's total consumption by 2010. This would equate to around 60 gigawatts. The target was introduced due to rising oil prices and concerns over rising emissions.

The EU China Summit in September announced two major areas in a continuing partnership:

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- To develop and demonstrate in China and the EU by 2020, advanced “zero-emissions” coal technology. This technology will allow for the capture of CO₂ emissions from coal-fired power plants and its subsequent storage underground, for example in exploited oil or gas fields or in sealed geological strata, thereby avoiding CO₂ emissions into the atmosphere.
- Support EU and Chinese efforts to reduce the energy intensity of their economies. China has set the goal of halving the energy intensity of the Chinese economy by 2020. In the recently adopted Green Paper on energy efficiency, the European Commission has proposed to reduce the EU’s energy consumption by 20% over the same period by increasing energy efficiency.

China also attended the G8 summit in Gleneagles in July and produced a joint declaration with Brazil, India, South Africa and Mexico. The declaration set out their concern that climate change has and will continue to have a profound impact on development prospects of their societies.

The declaration called for the developed world to act first and take the lead in international action on climate change and to provide additional financing and transfer of cleaner, low-emission and cost-effective technologies to developing countries. They proposed a new paradigm shift to ensure that technologies with a positive impact on climate change are both accessible and affordable to developing countries and will require a concerted effort to address questions related to intellectual property rights.

What is needed:

Friends of the Earth is urging governments and other key constituencies to overcome the obsolete fossil-based energy system and adopt clear, strong policies towards renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Friends of the Earth's International Climate Campaigner Catherine Pearce said:

"Developing renewable energies such as biomass, wind, tidal, solar and photovoltaics will have wide-ranging benefits for the entire global community. They can contribute to security of energy supply, reduce fuel imports and dependency, cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve environmental protection. It's time politicians and decision-makers across the world embraced these technologies for the benefit of us all.

"Clean technologies and renewables must be deployed as soon as possible. If the world is locked into a carbon-intensive development path, the impacts will fall most heavily on communities in fossil fuel producing regions and those most vulnerable to climate change. Resources and money, particularly public funds, must be channelled away from dirty, inefficient fossil-fuels and towards the clean, green energy of tomorrow".

Notes:

[1] International Energy Agency, World Energy Outlook 2005

See: http://www.iea.org/Textbase/press/pressdetail.asp?PRESS_REL_ID=163