

Stalemate in Nairobi

Washington

Two weeks of global climate talks in Nairobi ended last Friday (20 September) with little substantive progress, as the United States remains faced off against the rest of the developed world on whether to commit to limitations on the emissions of greenhouse gases. Participants reported some movement towards a consensus on the mechanisms for enforcing emissions agreements once those agreements are made, but what the eventual emissions convention will be is still unclear.

The meeting in Nairobi was a precursor to environmental talks next June in Rio de Janeiro, one goal of which is to sign a global agreement on greenhouse gases. With such a covenant nowhere in sight, the delegates decided they will meet in December in Geneva, and may also hold at least one other meeting before next June.

One outcome of last week's talks was an even greater isolation of the United States in the industrialized world, as Japan moved its position closer to that of the European Communities (EC). The EC wants industrialized countries to commit to holding their total emissions of carbon dioxide at 1990 levels after the year 2000. Japan, which previously had not agreed that such commitments should be part of a global climate convention, did put its weight behind commitments, but with a number of qualifiers. Industrial countries should, Japan proposed, make a "best effort" to stabilize emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases "as soon as possible, for example by the year 2000, in general at a 1990 level, recognizing the differences in approach and in starting point in the formulation of objectives".

The United States, according to the policy of President George Bush, does not believe that the scientific evidence for global warming is solid enough to commit to limiting greenhouse gases. "It simply

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Dead Sea Scrolls released to scholars

THE Huntington Library in the Los Angeles suburb of San Marino, California, announced last week that it will release to all qualified scholars photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The library has some 3000 photographs of the scrolls and claims that it is under no legal obligation to keep them secret, although its position may be challenged by scholars who have been working with the original scraps of parchment since the scrolls were discovered in 1947. The move by the Huntington follows publication three weeks ago of an unauthorized edition of the scrolls produced with the aid of a concordance and a computer (*Nature* 353, 96; 12 September 1991). B.J.C.

does not seem to us to make practical sense [to make commitments for emissions cuts] at this time in light of the uncertainties," said Robert Reinstein, a deputy secretary of state who led the US delegation to the talks, in a prepared statement. Furthermore, the US position holds that with the phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) by 2000, as agreed to under the Montreal Protocol, and with the provisions of the 1990 Clear Air Act and Bush's 'national energy strategy', which calls for increased energy efficiency and more nuclear power, the United States will keep its emissions of greenhouse gases effectively stabilized at 1990 levels from 2000 to 2030.

During the talks, the Japanese cleared up most of the confusion about their proposal of 'pledge and review', which they offered at this past summer's environmental talks in Geneva. At the time, the concept was attacked by environmentalist groups as a way to avoid making solid commitments (see *Nature* 352, 3; 4 July 1991). In the Nairobi talks, Japan and the EC both agreed that 'pledge and review' would be a method of carrying out commitments previously made — a 'pledge' would be a clearly delineated programme for meeting the commitments, which would be reviewed periodically to see that it was being met, although there is no agreement on who would do the reviews.

The delegates succeeded in putting together a set of 'working papers' that will be consolidated and used as a starting point for negotiations in December. That package, however, is no more than a 'wish list' with mutually contradictory proposals from the various delegations. Meeting participants say that the compromises made over this list will be the hard work of the next conference and will determine just what kind of global climate treaty will be possible in June.

There is broad enough consensus on certain issues that it seems likely that some agreement will be reached in time for the meeting in Rio. But these issues are the less challenging ones, such as the structure of the institutions that will oversee an eventual climate treaty and the question of technology transfer and financial aid for developing countries.

At present, given the US position, it seems certain that next year's climate convention will not contain specific commitments for greenhouse gas emissions, at least not for all industrialized countries. Some countries, however, have indicated that they will not agree to a treaty unless it has such commitments. The trick then will be to get enough consensus on other issues that some substantive covenant can be signed as a starting point for future agreements as needed. **Robert Pool**

Another major deal

Washington

WALL Street and the US biotechnology community were once again taken by surprise last week when American Home Products said it has agreed to acquire a 60 per cent stake in the Massachusetts-based Genetics Institute, in a transaction valued at \$666 million. The announcement comes hard on the heels of the decision two months ago by California-based Chiron to acquire neighbouring biotechnology company Cetus (*Nature* 352, 364; 1 August 1991). News of this latest deal serves to underscore the research- and capital-intensive nature of the industry.

The agreement, which shares many similarities with last year's marriage of Genentech to the Swiss health-care conglomerate F. Hoffman-La Roche, provides Genetics Institute with \$300 million in cash — money that should enable the company to accelerate drug development. At the same time, it allows American Home Products, a New York-based drug and consumer goods company with sales of just under \$7,000 million in 1990, to establish a strong foothold in biotechnology.

Genetics Institute has taken some knocks with its first two products, tissue plasminogen activator (TPA) and erythropoietin (EPO). In May 1990, under a licence agreement with Genetics Institute, Wellcome abandoned a six-year research effort to develop TPA (*Nature* 345, 194; 1990). But perhaps more devastating for Genetics Institute was a decision last March by the US Court of Appeals that overturned a lower court's decision and dismissed the company's US patent claims to EPO, a drug that stimulates the body's production of red blood cells. The decision left the rival company Amgen with a lucrative market monopoly for its EPO product in the United States (*Nature* 350, 99; 14 March 1991). A decision by the US Supreme Court on whether to review the appeals court's ruling is expected this autumn.

Although Genetics Institute has just turned the corner to profitability, Gabriel Schmergel, president and chief executive officer of the company, says he was still faced with the prospect of having either to cut or to postpone key projects. The \$300 million in cash "is a sum of money that we could not have raised any other way", says Schmergel, who was approached by American Home last spring. Over the next two years, Schmergel says he plans to increase the current 600-member staff with 125 to 175 new hires. He also says the additional resources will enable Genetics Institute to keep development of its three earlier-stage products in-house. These include a bone-inducing protein, BMP-2; the platelet growth factor interleukin-11; and the blood-cell growth factor macrophage colony-stimulating factor. Diane Gershon