

first progress report submitted by 1 January 2006. Overall, Annex I Parties succeeded in reducing their emission levels to their assigned amounts.

EIT countries have reduced their emissions, even while “Annex II Parties” (the original OECD member countries plus the European Union) increased theirs, although not very significantly.

It has been seven years since the Kyoto Protocol was elaborated and presented for signature. Since it was opened in 1997, there has been uncertainty about when the Protocol would enter into force, as its major condition has still not been fulfilled. As of April 2004, 124 countries have ratified, accepted, approved or acceded to the Protocol, but their total carbon dioxide emissions equal only 44.2 per cent, while 55 per cent is required for ratification. The ratification rate slowed in 2000-2001 due to the political debates and discontent about the Protocol’s implementation. However, this does not allow the Parties to abrogate their commitments to the UNFCCC. Nations must continue to fulfil their promises according to the Convention’s regulations.

The two main contributors to climate change—the Russian Federation and the United States—have not yet ratified the agreement. The United States has been the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases and is responsible for 36.1 per cent of the emissions; however, it withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001. The United States argued that scientific evidence of the climate change issue was not convincing enough for his country to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 7 per cent below the 1990 level, as this would burden the entire United States economy.

The next largest major producer of greenhouse gases is the Russian Federation, with a 17.4-per-cent share of emissions. During the World Climate Change Conference in Moscow in October 2003, the international community anticipated Russia becoming a leader in the emission-reducing process by ratifying the Protocol. However, that has not yet happened. Kyoto supporters argue that Russia would benefit from ratifying the agreement both by selling its carbon credits in the international market and becoming an efficient energy-user. At the same time, their opponents claim that the country’s overall agriculture and economy would benefit from the temperature rise, and if the world’s dependence on fossil fuels were significantly reduced once the Protocol is ratified, Russia would lose its oil-exporting profits.

Despite the common belief that there is only a small chance Russia will ratify the Protocol, Executive Director Klaus Töpfer of the United Nations Environment Programme strongly hopes that it will support the Protocol very soon, and the official announcement could take place as early as December 2004 during the annual meeting on climate change in Buenos Aires. If this happens, the 55-per-cent emission quota would be covered, and the Protocol would finally enter into force. □