

# World's top scientists to review climate panel

By JOHN HEILPRIN and SETH BORENSTEIN (AP) – 18 hours ago

UNITED NATIONS — At a tumultuous time in U.N.-led climate negotiations, one of the world's most credible scientific groups agreed Wednesday to plug the recent cracks in the authoritative reports of the United Nations' Nobel Prize-winning global warming panel.

"We enter this process with no preconceived conclusions," said Robbert Dijkgraaf, a Dutch mathematical physicist who co-chairs the group, the InterAcademy Council of 15 nations' national academies of science.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asserted "there were a very small number of errors" in the 3,000 pages of the beleaguered U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's last major synthesis of climate data in 2007.

But those errors, which include projections of retreats in Himalayan glaciers, have put public confidence in the panel's work at risk, and have been seized on by climate skeptics opposed to the U.N.-led efforts to conclude a legal international agreement on global warming this year.

The nonbinding Copenhagen accord brokered by President Barack Obama in the final hours of the December climate change summit in the Danish capital has the support of major polluters and economies such as the U.S., China and India. But it fell well short of its original ambition of a legally binding treaty controlling the world's emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases blamed for global warming.

Dijkgraaf said his Netherlands-based group, which agreed to the U.N.'s request to review the panel's work, "will definitely not go over all the data, the vast amount of data in climate science," but will instead focus on how the panel does its job, in light of the unsettling errors that have surfaced recently.

The review is being paid for by the United Nations, but Dijkgraaf said his group will operate completely independently. Its peer-reviewed final report, he said, is intended "to ensure the quality of IPCC reports in the future" including the U.N. panel's next scientific assessment report due in 2014.

The group will first pick a panel of outside experts and wrap up its independent review by the end of August, said Dijkgraaf, also president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Chris Field, a Stanford University professor who in 2008 took over as head of an IPCC group studying climate impacts, said the InterAcademy faces a challenge picking outside experts for the review since "almost anybody who has been involved in climate science has some connection with the IPCC."

Among the questions are: Whether the U.N. climate panel should consider non-peer reviewed literature? How governments review IPCC material? And even, how the IPCC communicates with the public?

No errors surfaced in the earlier and most well-known of the reports, which said the physics of a warming atmosphere and rising seas is man-made and incontrovertible.

But several mistakes have been discovered in the second of the four climate research reports produced in 2007, mainly owing to the use of reports by governments and advocacy groups instead of peer-reviewed research — resulting in fierce criticism of the U.N. panel's work.

For example, in the Asian chapter, five errors were spotted in a single entry saying Himalayan glaciers would disappear by 2035 — hundreds of years earlier than other information suggests — with no research backing it up. The chapter on Europe states 55 percent of the Netherlands is below sea level, when it's really about half that amount.

And a section in the Africa chapter that talks about northern African agriculture says climate change and normal variability could reduce crop yields. But it gets oversimplified in later summaries so that lower projected crop yields are blamed solely on climate change.

Ban said the mistakes in the IPCC reports, found in recent months, don't undercut the broad consensus on global warming.

"Nothing that has been alleged or revealed in the media recently alters the fundamental scientific consensus on climate change," the secretary-general said. "Nor does it diminish the unique importance of the IPCC's work."

That view was bolstered Wednesday by more than 150 U.S. scientists who wrote federal agencies and lawmakers to express support for the U.N. panel's work and main findings.

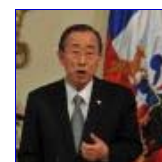
Ban did not respond to a question about how the errors might be affecting U.N.-led negotiations. IPCC Chairman Rajendra K. Pachauri said the panel is "receptive and sensitive to" criticism of its work.



Photo 1 of 3



Residents cross the road near a cooling tower of a coal-fired power plant in Shenyang in northeast China's Liaoning province Wednesday March 10, 2010. China told the United States on Wednesday, March 10, 2010 to make stronger commitments on climate change and provide environmental expertise and financing to developing nations. (AP Photo)



### Map



Pachauri told The Associated Press in a telephone interview he was surprised at the intensity of the criticism, which he said did not refute the U.N. panel's main findings.

He acknowledged, however, other errors might still be found, slowing lagging efforts to achieve a binding global climate treaty, since "clearly it has been driven substantially" by the IPCC's findings.

The errors have shaken the credibility of climate scientists and given skeptics of global warming ammunition.

Longtime climate skeptic John Christy of the University of Alabama said he wasn't familiar with the InterAcademy, but he cheered the outside review.

"I hope people like me have input, otherwise it's just the usual members of the establishment defending to themselves what's been done," said Christy, a researcher.

Global warming skeptic Patrick Michaels, a scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, had dim expectations.

"The whitewash that will be produced is predictable, because there is no mention of the problem of how systematic bias creeps into apparently objective science," he said.

The review will involve a mix of outside experts and climate scientists who have worked with the IPCC before but are "far enough removed to be truly independent," Dijkgraaf said in a telephone interview. The idea is to have expertise and insight into how IPCC works without including current leaders, he said.

"The full panel needs gravitas and I think scientific stature," Dijkgraaf said. The members of the panel haven't been chosen, but they likely will be 10 scientists. "The panel will have great liberty to function and work and write a report with an open mind."

The evaluation group will be chosen when the InterAcademy's board meets on March 22, Dijkgraaf said. The InterAcademy has done science reviews before for the United Nations.

The IPCC was formed in 1989 by the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organization to study global warming and its causes and effects.

Prominent mainstream climate scientist Kevin Trenberth at the U.S. National Center for Atmospheric Research said "climate science has become a political hot potato." He said the reviewers should not just look at the IPCC but the standards of its critics.

The IPCC, which is mostly a collection of volunteer scientists, shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 with former Vice President Al Gore.

AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein reported from Washington.

On the Net

The IPCC: <http://www.ipcc.ch>

The InterAcademy Council: <http://www.interacademycouncil.net/>

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