

# The war to combat climate change: Japan makes bold move to drastically cut greenhouse emissions

Frederick Baffour Opoku  
Accra, Ghana

The announcement by Japan that it is aiming for 25 percent emissions cut by 2020 should mark a bold and a positive step in the count down to the December United Nations Climate Talks in Copenhagen, Denmark.

According to a BBC report, Japan's next leader, Democratic Party leader Yukio Hatoyama, "has promised a big cut in greenhouse gas emissions, saying he will aim at 25 percent reduction by 2020, compared to 1990 levels".

This latest move is in sharp contrast to his predecessor; Taro Aso's pledged cuts of only eight percent.

Mr. Yukio Hatoyama is due to take over as Prime Minister on September 16, after resounding election victory in August. He says the planned emissions cut were dependent on other nations agreeing targets at the Copenhagen talks.

Mr. Hatoyama's target puts Japan alongside the European Union (EU) in pledging substantial greenhouse gas emissions cut by 2020.

As the BBC reports "Japan's plan is conditional on achieving a deal at the UN summit in December, so it presents an additional "carrot" to negotiators: the new Japanese leadership has not spelt out what will happen if a deal is not reached".

The new government now has some serious thinking to do about how to turn rhetoric into reality, notes the report, which also points out that the September 7 announcement sparked off resistance from Japanese business groups, and parts of the automotive industry are expected to lobby against the targets.

Japanese industry believes the country should focus on emerging properly from the recession it has just been through, rather than on emissions. Analysts say the plan unveiled at a climate change symposium in Tokyo, is more ambitious than those of many other industrialized nations.

No doubt Japan has won praise from the Climate Change Chief of the UN, which is recommending developed countries to commit to a 25 – 40 percent reduction by 2020.

"With such a target, Japan will take on the leadership role that industrialized countries have to take in climate change abatement", Yvo de Boer, head of the UN climate Change Secretariat, is quoted to having told the Tokyo forum.

Japan is the world's second largest economy and fifth – largest emitter of greenhouse gases which are a major contributor to global warming.

It is envisaged that the reductions will be achieved by bringing in emissions trading, renovating houses, subsidizing solar panels, and introducing low energy technologies in cars.

Without mentioning China or India, Mr. Hatoyama said, "We think developing countries are also required to make an effort to reduce greenhouse gases, as a global effort is needed on the issue of climate change".

## **Challenge:**

Japan's emissions reduction plan should pose a big challenge to other developed countries, especially those outside

the EU, who have been groping with the issue of emissions reduction for some time now. It is remarkable to state that Australia has also set a 25 percent reduction target by 2020, but conditional on what other countries will also commit to in a new agreement.

On the contrary, many industrialized countries including the United States of America, the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and Canada, another huge emitter are yet to pledge any substantial greenhouse gas emissions cut.

To these countries, it is now time to come out and pledge substantial cuts, like Japan has done and make the negotiation process smooth.

It is very clear that time is fast running out as the crucial Copenhagen talks is just round the corner. Japan's initiative should be an encouraging factor for the other industrialized countries to follow, to rekindle hope at the Copenhagen talks so that a new climate change agreement is reached to replace the first phase of the Kyoto protocol which expires at the end of 2012.

It is hoped that Japan's bold initiative will be a rallying factor for countries to make similar emissions cut at the September 23, UN Secretary General's special climate change summit for heads of states of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) member countries. The summit is to enable the countries who are the parties to the convention, to make for reaching pledges and decisions on emissions reductions to make further negotiations at the Copenhagen talks and a new agreement to become a reality.

The time for action is now for the world to keep tract in unity and boldly confront the menace of climate change, if the world is to avoid reaching the much projected dangerous climate change level, which will come with catastrophic consequences.

In re-echoing Japan's position, all countries must make conscious efforts to reduce emissions since a global effort is required to move the climate change agenda forward. And like Japan, pledges in emissions cut by countries must be backed by concrete action and not just rhetoric.