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Rudd takes aim at the US over warming



Mr Rudd on the international stage in Bali.

Photo: *Glen Mccurtayne*

Michelle Grattan, Mark Forbes and Marian Wilkinson, Nusa Dua, Bali
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KEVIN Rudd has sent a pointed message to the United States that it must pull its weight in the international effort to combat climate change.

In a speech to the United Nations climate change conference — his first international address as Prime Minister — Mr Rudd also pledged that Australia would set "robust" targets for cutting emissions by 2020.

But he still declined to endorse the plan for a Bali conference declaration in which rich nations would nominate a target of 25% to 40% cuts by 2020.

In a clear reference to the US — now the only developed nation not to have agreed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol — Mr Rudd said all rich nations should embrace a set of binding targets.

"We need this meeting at Bali to map out the process and timeline for this to happen," Mr Rudd said. "We need all developed nations, those within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, and those outside that framework, to embrace comparable efforts in order to bring about the global outcomes the world now expects of us."

Mr Rudd's position has been that Australia accepts the science underlying the proposed 2020 cuts but does not want to adopt specific numbers until after the completion of Professor Ross Garnaut's study into what is feasible for Australia.

Despite Mr Rudd's failure to embrace specific targets, he received long and loud applause for ratifying the Kyoto Protocol when he took up his seat on the podium yesterday with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, UN climate negotiator Yvo de Boer and other government heads.

With just two days left for the conference to agree on a framework for tackling global warming past 2012, the UN chief issued a blunt warning about the importance of making a deal.

"If we leave Bali without such a breakthrough, we will not only have failed our leaders but also those who look to us to find solutions, namely the peoples of this world," Mr Ban said.

"This is the moral challenge of our generation. Not only are the eyes of the world upon us. More important, succeeding generations depend on us. We cannot rob them of their future."

He also put direct pressure on the US, calling on it to "exercise flexibility" in the negotiations.

But as Mr Ban and Mr Rudd were highlighting the importance of Washington's role, its representatives in Bali were hardening their opposition to endorsement of specific cuts.

The chief US negotiator, Hartan Watson, said any declaration had to be "neutral" and not include figures for potential emission cuts.

"Once numbers appear in text it predetermines outcomes and it can really drive negotiations in one direction," Mr Watson said, adding that America wanted to leave "all options on the table" for negotiations over the next two years.

The hardline stance was echoed by the head of the American delegation, Paula Dobriansky, who said numbers amounted to a "prejudgment".

Mr Rudd handed over documentation for ratifying Kyoto to Mr Ban shortly before addressing the conference.

He said the costs of action on climate change were "far less than the costs of inaction". He also conceded that tackling climate change would "require tough choices. And some of these at a political price". But he said that "unless we act, the long-term costs will threaten the security and stability of us all".

Mr Rudd said that when Australia sets short-term and medium-term targets for emission cuts, "they will be real targets. They will be robust targets.

"They will be cognisant of the science and they will set the Australian economy firmly on the path to achieving our commitment to a 60% reduction in emissions by 2050," he said.

Mr Rudd also said developing countries had to play their part "with specific commitments".

"We must all respect the aspirations of developing nations to secure their economic development and deliver rising living standards for their people. But failure to act on climate change will make the development goal even harder to achieve."

Mr Rudd said Australia recognised the responsibility of the developed countries to assist developing countries with technology transfer, financial incentives, and other support.

"The world expects us to deliver binding targets. It expects us to deliver specific commitments. It expects us all to pull together and for all of us to do our fair share," he said.

Later, speaking to an upbeat gathering of Australian delegates to the conference, Mr Rudd said he was surprised by the reaction to his announcement of ratifying the Kyoto Protocol.

"This is an important first step. We have a determination to resurrect the good name of Australia in the world," he said.

Climate Change Minister Penny Wong delivered a report to the conference on behalf of the Umbrella group of nations, which Australia chairs and includes Canada, Japan, Russia and the US among others.

Senator Wong said the group was committed to working towards "outcomes that are ambitious, comprehensive, equitable, have respect for national circumstances, and provide flexibility in combating climate change".

The group does not have a united stance on detail and no mention was made of the 2020 reference in the draft declaration.

Opposition climate change spokesman Greg Hunt criticised the lack of a concrete plan in Mr Rudd's speech for Australia to take the lead in tackling world deforestation. But the Opposition has backed the Government's refusal to specify a 2020 target for cutting Australian emissions until it receives a full analysis.

The chief executive of the Climate Institute, John Connor, expressed disappointment that the Australian Government was still not endorsing the 2020 negotiating range for cuts.

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