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## Gore blasts US obstruction

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FORMER US vice-president Al Gore has made a dramatic 11th-hour intervention at the faltering climate change talks in Bali, accusing his own country of obstructing progress and calling on other nations to forge a new deal without Washington.

With less than 24 hours to today's conference deadline, the newly-awarded Nobel laureate last night made an impassioned plea to conference delegates to leave an "open space" in a new climate change deal, and to hope it will be filled later by President George Bush's successor.

"I am going to speak an inconvenient truth: my own country, the United States, is principally responsible for obstructing progress here in Bali," Mr Gore said, to rapturous applause.

Declaring that "change is possible" for the US, Mr Gore cited Australia's quick move to ratify the Kyoto Protocol soon after Kevin Rudd's election as Prime Minister last month.

Mr Gore backed up his appreciation of Mr Rudd's actions on Kyoto by dining with him last night.

But as the Bali talks teetered on the brink of failure, the Prime Minister was also accused of being part of the problem after he indicated that Australia would back the US in its fight with Europe.

Drawing Mr Rudd into the middle of the battle between the US and Europe, a senior European official demanded to know where Australia stood and accused the Prime Minister of missing an opportunity in Bali.

The main obstacle to consensus in Bali has been the refusal of America and several other developed nations to endorse a non-binding statement saying rich nations will need to cut emissions between 25% and 40% by 2020 to avoid the most severe effects of climate change.

Mr Rudd yesterday signalled that Australia would back the US push to have these references to percentage figures removed from the draft declaration.

He said he had instructed Australia's negotiators to do "everything humanly possible to bridge the gap" between the disputing parties. "I would be deeply concerned if any party was to walk away from these negotiations," he said.

But the EU's Environment Minister, Stavros Dimas, said the wording in the draft agreement was "indispensable" and that Mr Rudd should have committed to it in his speech on Wednesday. "The Prime Minister lost an opportunity in his speech to commit to this range of 25 to 40%," Mr Dimas said.

He said that if Australia refused to back the European stance, Mr Rudd's much-applauded ratifying of the Kyoto Protocol "will not have the substance we hoped for".

As Mr Rudd dined last night with Mr Gore, his Climate Change Minister, Penny Wong, was in a

closed-door meeting of key players, including the US, the EU and Indonesia. The meeting was trying to find a compromise before today's United Nations-imposed 3pm deadline.

The conference is supposed to create a "road map" to launch formal negotiations on a new global climate agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol after 2009.

But hopes that the map would include an "ambitious" agenda for a 50% cut in global emissions by 2050, with rich countries taking the lead, were fading.

Instead, key players including the US, Canada and Japan, supported by Australia, were calling for a consensus that would at least launch the negotiations.

With the grim prospect of failure hanging over the talks, the UN's chief climate negotiator, Yvo de Boer, highlighted four persistent sticking points.

Apart from the dispute over the reference to percentage cuts in emissions, arguments over the transfer of clean technology from developed to developing countries remained, including the method of financing transfers.

"We are in an all-or-nothing situation in that if we don't manage to get the work done ... then the whole house of cards basically falls to pieces," Mr de Boer said.

The tension was underlined by German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel, who hit out at the US and other nations trying to amend the draft resolution.

"Some political leaders here lack the courage to transform into decisions what experts have elaborated," Mr Gabriel told a German radio station.

The EU's chief negotiator in Bali, Portuguese Environment Secretary Humberto Rosa, also accused Washington of being the main obstacle in Bali and threatened a European boycott of talks in Hawaii next month to discuss long-term greenhouse gas curbs.

"If we would have a failure in Bali it would be meaningless to have a major economies' meeting (in the US)," he said.

A spokeswoman for major environment groups at the conference, Jennifer Morgan, said: "There is a wrecking crew here in Bali led by the Bush Administration and its minions.

"Those minions continue to be the governments of Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia and others, with, unfortunately, Australia shadowing that group of minions."

Washington says the guidelines in the Bali draft would have prejudged the outcome of the conference, and that the 25% to 40% range of proposed cuts before 2020 is based on relatively little scientific study.

Mr Rudd has said he accepts and respects the science behind the figures, but will not endorse them before the completion next year of a study by Professor Ross Garnaut, who is examining what would be feasible for Australia.

With REUTERS

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