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USA is named a 'Fossil' at UN climate talks

Barcelona, Spain, November 4, 2009: At the halfway point of the UN climate talks in Barcelona this week, the USA was named as 'Fossil of the Day', with Canada coming in second, by a vote of the Climate Action Network International (CAN-I) – a global coalition of over 450 leading non-government organisations. The daily award is given to those nations judged to be the 'best' at blocking or stalling progress in the global climate negotiation that day.

The first-place 'Fossil Award' was given to the USA for delaying passage of domestic climate change legislation.

The US ratified the UN's 'Framework Convention on Climate Change' in 1992, promising to reduce its greenhouse gases emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. But it has failed to meet this promise. The US delegation to the international negotiations now says they will follow the lead of the Congress – so the delay in climate legislation hamstrings the US delegation's negotiating ability.

Earlier this year, when the House of Representatives pushed forward climate legislation, it seemed likely that domestic legislation would be passed before the crucial Copenhagen climate summit this December. Recent delay tactics in the US Senate – boycotts and commissioning redundant economic analysis – leave the world wondering whether the US will get it done.

“Other countries – developed and developing alike – have moved forward, committing to emission reductions and advancing prospects of a global deal,” said Sara Svensson, a youth climate activist from Sweden.

“It is time for the US Administration and for those on Capitol Hill to get the job done. Their lack of action undermines international trust in the UN negotiations and endangers the prospects of reaching a global solution to climate change.”

The second-place 'Fossil of the Day' award was given to Canada, completing a picture of north-American delay tactics at the UN. The award was given for the announcement of Environment Minister Jim Prentice that, for a third time in so many years, Canada was going to postpone the adoption of the regulatory framework for large polluters in Canada – until after the Copenhagen Climate Summit.

As recently as September, Minister Prentice promised a full suite of regulatory policies by Copenhagen. This additional delay prompted CAN-I to send a message to Canada: "Third strike, you're out".

The current Canadian commitment is to reduce its GHG emissions by 3% below 1990 levels by the year 2020, falling well short of its commitment under the Kyoto protocol. According to the UNFCCC, Canada has one of the worst emission records of all the industrialised world.

The satirical awards were presented in a game-show style ceremony – complete with a presenter adorned in a bright Spanish flamenco outfit – at the conclusions of the day's negotiations. is described as 'the most fun you can have at a UN conference,' where the dominant dress code is the grey suit.

The Climate Action Network (CAN), a coalition of over 450 NGOs worldwide dedicated to limiting climate change to sustainable levels, regularly judges and presents three 'Fossil of the Day' awards to the countries who perform the worst during the past day's negotiations at UN climate change conferences. The Fossil-of-the-Day awards were first presented at the climate talks in 1999, also in Bonn, initiated by the German NGO Forum.