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## U.N. Talks on Global Warming Open

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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BONN, Germany (AP) -- A U.N. conference on global warming opened Monday with its chairman pushing for progress in efforts to rescue a 1997 pact to curb pollution, abandoned by the United States as harmful to its economy.

Delegates from some 180 countries gathered for a new round of bargaining over a treaty meant to combat climate changes that many scientists fear will wreak havoc on Earth.

"It's crucial that we bring our four years of work to completion," said chairman Jan Pronk, the Dutch environment minister. "We need to get good results for ourselves, for the ministers and the public."

European nations have pledged to push ahead with the so-called Kyoto Protocol without the United States, saying it could join later. But recently Japan, which could sink the accord if it withdraws support, has also begun to waver.

Environmental groups urged international pressure on Japan.

"The protocol is clearly hanging by a thread, and that thread is only as strong as the Japanese government," Greenpeace climate expert Bill Hare told a news conference. "Japan's indecision is casting a big cloud over the negotiations here."

The accord calls for rich countries to cut emissions of so-called greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide from cars, factories and power stations. Contentious rules for achieving those goals, however, were left open at the Kyoto, Japan, meeting.

The last talks broke up last November. President Bush renounced the Kyoto pact in March, saying it was based on questionable science and unfair because it exempts big developing countries like China and India.

U.N. and European officials, as well as environmental groups, have reacted with frustration or outright anger.

"We can't let the country with the biggest emissions of greenhouse gases escape responsibility for protecting the global climate," German Environment Minister Juergen Trittin said recently.

Thousands of protesters were expected to converge on the quiet city on the Rhine for the two-week conference, and Bonn police say they are prepared for violence.

The situation was calm Monday, however, with a handful of activists dressed as polar




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bears handing out leaflets to delegates as they arrived at the Bonn hotel where the meeting was being held.

Government delegates will work on a 190-page draft by chairman Pronk that tries to offer solutions to complex disputes about the treaty's details. Following Monday's opening session, they were to work behind closed doors over the opening days.

To give the talks a push, environment ministers are due in Bonn from Thursday to Sunday. But the problems may well be kicked upstairs to a summit of leaders of the seven leading industrial countries and Russia starting Friday in Genoa, Italy.

"It's all about political courage," said Jennifer Morgan of the World Wide Fund for Nature, appealing to Japan to commit itself to the Kyoto accord.

Given the obstacles, even the 15-nation European Union is playing down hopes of a Bonn breakthrough.

"My expectations are not too high," EU Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom said in this week's issue of the German magazine Der Spiegel. "There probably won't be any definitive decision."

Yet this month brought more evidence that global warming is real. A new report by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change, a group of scientists convened 13 years ago, said the Earth is warming faster than at any time in the previous 1,000 years.

Already, the blanket of heat-trapping gases has raised ground temperatures by 1.1 degree Fahrenheit in the last 100 years, and scientists say the pace could quicken dramatically over the next 100 unless pollution is limited.

More than 80 countries have signed the Kyoto pact, which requires industrialized countries to cut greenhouse gas emission an average 5.2 percent from 1990 levels by 2012.

But no major polluter has ratified the treaty and its fine print sometimes baffles even experts.

The last round of talks in The Hague, Netherlands, deadlocked over how to credit countries for managing forest and farms that absorb carbon from the air. The United States wants wide leeway, while the Europeans see a ploy to keep U.S. industry from cleaning up.

The Kyoto accord can only enter into force if it's backed by 55 countries, representing 55 percent of the industrialized world's emissions. If Japan pulls out, the second target can't be reached.