

UN chief and U.S. climate envoy to mark return to Paris Accord

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UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has welcomed the US return to the climate agreement, from which Trump withdrew in 2017. (Photo: AP)

United Nations, February 18 (RHC)-- U.S. Special Presidential Envoy on Climate John Kerry and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres are to “celebrate” the US’s return to the Paris Agreement, the US state department has announced.

The event on Friday will mark Washington’s official return to the 2015 accord, from which former President Donald Trump withdrew on his first day in office in January 2017.

Guterres and several world leaders had previously hailed Biden’s initial move upon taking office on January 20 to rejoin the accord, saying he “looked forward to the leadership of the United States in accelerating global efforts towards net zero”, while adding “time is running out to limit temperature rise to

1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) and build more climate-resilient societies that help to protect the most vulnerable.”

Trump’s withdrawal made the US one of the largest carbon emitters to eschew the 196-country agreement, which seeks to limit global average temperature rise to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared with pre-industrial averages.

Accompanying the withdrawal, which per the agreement formally went into effect on November 4, 2020, was a cut to funding for the Green Climate Fund, which supports developing countries in combating climate change.

The Biden administration has said it will make the U.S. response to climate change a top priority, signalling that commitment by appointing Kerry, the former secretary of state under President Barack Obama, to the newly created climate cabinet position.

The administration promised to put the US on a track to net-zero emissions by 2050 to match the steep and swift global cuts that scientists say are needed to avoid the most devastating effects of global warming, using curbs on fossil fuels and significant investments in clean energy.

Friday’s official return to the Paris Agreement comes as part of a larger campaign to re-engage the US in international organisations and strengthen ties with traditional allies, after four year’s of Trump’s “America First” policies.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the US would pay \$200m in commitments to the World Health Organization (WHO), after Trump cut funding and began to withdraw the US from the UN health body last year. Biden halted the withdrawal on his first day in office.

“This is a key step forward in fulfilling our financial obligations as a WHO member and it reflects our renewed commitment to ensuring the WHO has the support it needs to lead the global response to the pandemic,” Blinken said.

He added the US would “provide significant financial support” to Covax, a global plan to distribute vaccines to the poorest nations.

The pledge came as Guterres on Wednesday decried global vaccine distribution so far as “wildly uneven and unfair,” saying 10 countries have administered 75 percent of all vaccinations. He called for a global vaccination plan.

Biden will also attend his first event with world leaders in a virtual G7 meeting on Friday, the first meeting of the world’s wealthiest democracies since April last year. The White House has said Biden will focus on a global COVID-19 response and efforts to “rebuild the global economy.” He is also expected to try to coordinate allies against China’s growing influence.

The U.S. president also set to address a virtual meeting of the Munich Security Conference, a major venue for transatlantic, foreign and security policy on Friday.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin met virtually with European allies as part of a NATO defence meeting.



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