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French Plan Would Tax Imports From Non-Signers of Kyoto Pact

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin of France on Monday proposed introducing punitive taxes on imports from countries that refused to sign the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol, which is aimed at curbing global warming.

The protocol requires 35 developing nations to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases, but the world's top two polluters, the United States and China, have not signed the pact.

A group of 189 countries are debating how to create a united response to the threat of climate change at a two-week conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

But Mr. de Villepin said Monday that the talks were struggling, and he urged Europe to devise ways of pressing reluctant nations to support the Kyoto pact.

"Europe has to use all its weight to stand up to this sort of environmental dumping," Mr. de Villepin said at a sustainable-development meeting, according to the text of his speech published on his official Web site.

"I would like us to study now with our European partners the principle of a carbon tax on the import of industrial products from countries that refuse to commit themselves to the Kyoto Protocol after 2012," he said.

Mr. de Villepin added that France would make concrete proposals about how such a tax might work in the first quarter of 2007. French officials are also expected to promote the plan at the meeting in Nairobi, which will continue until Friday.

"The environment is a global issue," Mr. de Villepin said. "Our efforts will be worthless if we are the only ones fighting for the future of the planet."

He said that in France, his government would impose a tax on coal usage and would increase taxes on industrial pollution and on aircraft noise pollution by 10 percent.

He also suggested that trucks in "sensitive zones" like the Alpine regions might face higher taxes or tolls. By contrast, tax breaks would be offered to families who renovated their houses to make them more energy efficient. Environmental issues are moving up the French political agenda ahead of the presidential election set for next year.

The Kyoto Protocol has become something of a litmus test of international willingness to avert what many scientists say will be severe climate disruptions, including heat waves, floods, desertification and rising sea levels.

President Bush pulled the United States out of the accord in 2001, contending that it lacked targets for developing nations and that it would be too costly.

Correction: November 17, 2006, Friday A Reuters article on Tuesday about a plan by France to tax imports from countries that have not signed the Kyoto treaty to reduce greenhouse gases misstated the positions of China and the United States. Both have indeed signed the treaty and China has also ratified it, but the United States has not.

