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US climate envoy Todd Stern said on Tuesday that there was little chance of November's Cancun UN climate conference resulting in a legal treaty to reduce greenhouse emissions. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)

New York. World powers are not aiming for a legally binding pact to fight global warming at a UN meeting in Mexico this year and are trying to stop backsliding from a 2009 agreement, the United States said on Tuesday.

US climate envoy Todd Stern, speaking after a meeting of the Major Economies Forum in New York, reiterated the US pledge to cut its emissions some 17 percent by 2020 compared to 2005 levels, but declined to outline how that would be done in the absence of US climate legislation.

The US position, weakened by the failure of the Senate and the Obama administration to pass a law requiring emissions cuts, is one of a handful of stumbling blocks ahead of the Nov. 29 to Dec. 10 UN meeting in Cancun, Mexico, which follows up on last year's chaotic session in Copenhagen.

Stern said some countries from the roughly 190-nation UN grouping had moved away from commitments made under the non-binding Copenhagen Accord last year to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and acknowledged what has become largely accepted among climate watchers: no treaty would come out of Cancun.

"Nobody is anticipating or expecting in any way a legal treaty to be done in Cancun this year," he told reporters.

He said the MEF, which groups 16 of the world's biggest economies, and the 27-nation European Union, representing some 80 percent of global emissions of greenhouse gases, had discussed that "backward movement" and agreed on the need to make progress on six core issues, including finance, and mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

"There was broad consensus on the need to have decisions ... on those issues and in a

balanced way, meaning that you don't move on two or three of them and make no progress on the others," he said. "This is obviously easier said than done."

The United States launched the MEF to augment UN climate change talks, but Washington's leadership has been called into question by the failure to enact a law to support President Barack Obama's pledge to reduce US emissions.

Stern said he would reiterate in Mexico that the United States was sticking to its goal, and said there were many tools at the US Environmental Protection Agency and elsewhere to make it happen.

"The most important thing is that ... we are standing by the submissions that we made" in Copenhagen, Stern said.

Pressed for specifics, Stern said most negotiators in the process, such as the Europeans or Japanese, did not lay out exactly how they would meet their targets, and he expressed optimism that US legislation would eventually be passed.

"We're at the beginning of a 10-year period between 2010 and 2020," he said. "I don't have any doubt that there's going to be legislation of some kind that will be meaningful. I can't say exactly when and I can't say exactly what the shape of it's going to be."

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