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Earth Summit to begin Wednesday in Rio



RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (AP) — The Earth Summit opens Wednesday with two minutes of silence for an endangered planet and a mission to agree on how to save it.

The 12-day United Nations Conference on Environment and Development would be the biggest meeting of world leaders in history. But it's not clear what the June 3-14 meeting will accomplish or even who exactly is coming.

The U.N. press office says 142 heads of state or government have confirmed their attendance. The Brazilian government says 83.

President Bush is expected for less than 48 hours at the summit portion of the conference starting June 11. He joins his colleagues from Europe, Canada, Japan, China and other nations.

A 35,000-member security force has swept Rio, a city of 6 million, of the beggars, urchins and vendors that normally swarm the streets. Residents have commented on the relative lack of street crime.

The world leaders are to sign documents

including a general statement of ecological principles and the so-called Agenda 21, a controversial list of measures for environmentally safe growth into the 21st century.

But they have been unable to agree on who will pay for the cleanup, which U.N. summit coordinator Maurice Strong has estimated will cost \$125 billion a year.

Optimists hope for a breakthrough consensus on goals or funding. But many ecologists accuse the Bush administration of blocking progress and watering down the documents.

During conference negotiations, which begin Wednesday, some 700 U.N. officials and 3,500 delegates from 185 countries will put the finishing touches on the documents to be signed, U.N. press coordinator Monique McClellan said.

The delegates will observe two minutes of silence for the Earth before President Fernando Collor de Mello opens the conference at the Riocentro convention complex, 25 miles west of downtown Rio next to an auto speedway.

The proceedings are closed to the public but will be televised live on a government channel.

Bush has refused to endorse a climate control convention that called for reducing carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by 2000. European leaders eventually accepted a draft that omits dates or levels.

The United States produces about one-fourth of the world's carbon dioxide, a gas some scientists say adds to global warming.

"The climate control convention was supposed to be the jewel in the crown," said Joshua Karliner, Greenpeace's top coordinator for the summit. "Now, it looks more like a rhinestone."

Across town on Guanabara Bay, a gathering of ecological non-government organizations will take place in Flamengo Park.

The Global Forum is expected to draw 12,000 participants from 164 countries. Some 5,000 groups will be represented, including Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Federation, members of the Baha'i religion and the YMCA.

Sen. Al Gore, D-Tenn., will attend. Former U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug, D-N.Y., will be part of a feminist ecological group. Actress Shirley MacLaine will introduce a speech by the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet.

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