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Rio + 20 Brings Attention to Sustainable Development

This is the VOA Special English Economics Report.

Leaders from more than one hundred nations are in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for a three-day [United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development](#). More than forty thousand activists and political and business leaders are also there.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke at the opening of the event, known as the Rio + 20.

BAN KI-MOON: "We are now in sight of a historic agreement."

Rio + 20 marks the twentieth anniversary of the first UN Earth conference, also held in Rio de Janeiro. The conference helped build support for the nineteen ninety-seven Kyoto agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This year, officials are trying to reach final agreement on a document that details goals for reducing poverty while supporting clean energy and sustainable development.

The conference will draw attention to seven major issues. The UN says jobs, energy and sustainable cities are of top importance. It notes that food security, water, oceans and dealing with disasters are other issues basic to lifting people out of poverty.

The Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, took part in a discussion among mayors of some of the world's largest cities. They talked about measures to cut greenhouse gasses. These gasses are known to trap heat and have been linked to climate change. Cities are responsible for up to seventy-five percent of the gases. Mr. Bloomberg said the world's mayors are taking the lead on issues like the environment and sustainability.

MICHAEL BLOOMBERG: "Even as progress at national and international level has faltered, it's fair to say that world cities have forged ahead. And, the reason for that is clear - mayors, the great pragmatists on the world stage who are directly

responsible for the well-being for the majority of the world's people, just don't have the luxury to simply talk about change and not delivering it."

Mayors reported using electric vehicles, better street lighting and improved waste management to reduce cities' greenhouse emissions.

Bindu Lohani is a top official with the Asian Development Bank based in the Philippines. The bank has promised billions to sustainable development. Mr. Lohani said Asia's fast growth places heavy pressure on the environment and society.

BINDU LOHANI: "Asia is growing fast economically. We project by 2050, more than 50 percent of global economy will be in Asia. Asia is also rich in ecosystems, and therefore, very vulnerable."

Still, some environmental activists say the conference document is too weak. They say there are many promises of action but few clear targets for reducing pollution and the use of natural resources.

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