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## CHINA FOCUS: CHINA VOWS TO CURB POLLUTION, BUILD ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY SOCIETY

by Wang Jingzhong BEIJING

"Environment-friendly" will be a key word in China's future development as the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has set a target of building such a society in its recent plenum to battle pollution and sustain economic growth.

The the fifth plenary session of 16th CPC Central Committee proposed to "build a resources-saving and environment-friendly society", underscoring that it will be a strategic task for China's mid- and long-term economic and social development.

"This is a strategic option of China," said Liu Hongliang, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE), citing this as the only way to put the country on the track of sustainable development.

Environmental degradation negatively affects China's public health, stymies China's economic development and could destabilize society.

It could also "threaten the very subsistence and development of the Chinese nation," said Wei Fusheng, another CAE academician.

The Chinese economy's astronomical growth in the last two decades has been featured by high consumption of natural resources and severe environmental degradation.

Official statistics indicate that over one-third of the country's land territory has been ravaged by acid rain and most of its major rivers are polluted.

More than 300 million rural residents lack access to clean water.

Of the ten most polluted cities in the world, three are found in China and more than 100 million Chinese urban residents breath dirty air, with 15 million of whom suffering from bronchia-related diseases and respiratory tract cancers.

The World Bank estimated that after 2020, China will have to spend 390 billion US dollars annually to treat diseases caused by pollution from coal burning, accounting for 13 percent of the country's GDP.

"It has come to an dead end for the country to develop its economy at the cost of natural resources and environment," Wei acknowledged. "It is high time that the current

economic development pattern be transformed."

At the plenary session, the CPC Central Committee set the goal of doubling China's 2000 per capita GDP by 2010 while reducing energy cost per capita GDP by 20 percent.

The proposal passed at the plenum stresses the principle of putting equal importance on resources exploration and conservation, with priority given to conservation.

It urges industrial producers to phase out outdated techniques and products, and welcomes prices and tax policies in favor of the endeavor.

The proposal also encourages the production of water-saving devices and environment friendly vehicles and the building of energy- and land-saving structures.

"The building of an environment-friendly society is a must in transforming the current economic development pattern, which is distinguished by huge waste, low output and high pollution," said Chen Jining, a professor at Beijing's elite Tsinghua University.

"It is also a major step in building a harmonious society," he said.

The professor said an environment-friendly society should include environment-friendly production and consumption, non- or low-polluting techniques and products as well as all kinds of development that takes environment into account.

"The development of a recycling-based economy is the essential approach of building an environment-friendly society," he noted.

Chen also called for establishing a new system to evaluate the performance of governmental officials by considering how much they have done to protect the environment.

"If such system is instituted, governmental officials will be obliged to abandon their current practice of pursuing only economic growth figures," he noted.

In his explanation of the proposal, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said the goal of doubling China's 2000 per capita GDP by 2010 is "active and prudent", and the goal of reducing energy cost for per unit GDP by 20 percent in the coming five years is "attainable".

"This reflects the requirement for the building of an energy-saving and environmental-friendly society and sustainable development," he said.

Wen highlighted the "scientific concept of development," a term frequently used by Chinese leaders, indicating the shift in the government's development philosophy from growth-centered to people-centered.

"The proposal of the CPC Central Committee is based on the 'scientific concept of

development' that will also be the guide in the whole process of China's reform and opening-up," he said.