



“From Thoughts to Action”

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3rd International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Chinese official offered guarded optimism of a climate-change breakthrough within Beijing’s leadership.

Davos, Switzerland – China’s star environmentalist holds out hope that his country’s inner circle will manage to reach a positive consensus and take the lead in coping with global climate change.

It seemed a cautious message for some 800 risk-prevention experts on the closing day of the biannual International Disaster and Risk Conference IDRC Davos 2010 here in the scenic Swiss Alps.

But the official, Dr. Liu Yanhua, ranks as an influential insider in his counsellor role on China’s decision-making State Council. This body stands as the nation’s highest executive organ of state power and administration.

According to the official *People’s Daily Online* [www.people.com.cn] the State Council in Beijing not only clusters together China’s premier and vice premiers but also state councillors, heads of ministries and commissions, the auditor-general, and the secretary-general. The Chinese website neglects to indicate the State Council’s precise size, but outsiders view the grouping as not only inscrutable and unpredictable but unwieldy.

The soft-spoken and research-oriented Dr. Liu has served since 2001 as vice minister and a member of the Ministry of Science and Technology’s “leading party group”.

Dr. Liu, a geographer, had hinted to another IDRC Davos 2010 panel earlier this week that the State Council remains undecided on its final stance. Yet it seems dead set against strict CO₂ standards that could curb its ambitious industrial growth targets. Still, the viewpoint of the collective leadership group appears in flux.

Addressing the IRDC’s Swiss founder, Dr. Walter Ammann, and a Stanford University engineering professor, Haresh Shah, the Chinese official offered guarded optimism of a climate-change breakthrough within Beijing’s leadership. And he said he thought conferences such as this expert gathering could help nudge negotiators toward compromise worldwide.



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The test will come in December when negotiators in Mexico City will try to pick up the jumbled pieces of the failed 2009 Copenhagen conference.

"I firmly believe," Dr. Liu said, "that where there's a will, there's a way."

Professor Shah shares the geographer's faith in the usefulness of high-level meetings like this one with what he called a "smorgasbord" of topics for specialists to discuss.

But he warned of a pitfall for the IDRC organizers: a future agenda either too broad or too narrow. Shah said he thought Dr. Ammann had achieved "about the right balance between breadth and depth" during the past five years. But the next Davos conference in 2012 will face new problems.

"You should be extremely bold," he advised the IDRC founder, "in letting outspoken keynote speakers set the agenda for each day. They should try to shape the issues toward expected outcomes. But don't try to achieve consensus if there is none."

The value of conferences like the IDRC's Global Risk Forum GRF Davos, Shah says, is their role in focusing on world-changing ideas. The mobile phone, for instance, meets this standard for disaster-risk prevention.

"You can do wonders with this technical device" he reminded his fellow experts. It will help save lives in cities and rural areas worldwide – especially in developing regions in China, India, and Central and South America.

"It's time for technology like these phones to play a role like transacting micro-insurance policies in risk-transfer mechanisms," he said. "If this happens, it will be a great feather in the IDRC's hat."

Lyn Shepard, Conference Journalist

Davos, 5 June 2010

