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UN proposes voluntary scheme to cut aviation CO2 emissions

The United Nations, which has been working towards a global scheme to cap the aviation industry's carbon footprint, wants the scheme to start on a voluntarily basis in 2021. It would become compulsory in 2027 for most countries, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) - the UN's civil aviation arm – said.

China, the United States and Europe all pledged support for the deal. The timeframe is to take into account the difference in the maturity of aviation markets between developed and developing countries. Operational details have not been hammered out but the idea is for airlines to offset or neutralize their carbon dioxide (CO2) pollution by investing in carbon emission reduction projects, such as wind farms.

ICAO's proposal will be up for discussion and endorsement by its 191 member states at the organization's upcoming assembly from Sept 27 to Oct 7 in Montreal, Canada. The International Air Transport Association (IATA), the global voice of carriers, has already given the plan its backing. "I am optimistic that we are on the brink of a historic agreement - a first for an industry sector at the global level," said director-general and chief executive Alexandre de Juniac.

While the aviation industry would have preferred "a more ambitious timeline" than is currently outlined, what is most important is that the proposal calls for "meaningful management of aviation's carbon footprint", he said.

Airlines have said they want one global deal to reduce CO2 emissions despite the higher costs they would incur in order to avoid a patchwork of regulation that would be harder to manage. ICAO has been working overtime to put together a global scheme since the European Union announced in 2008 that it planned to launch its own carbon management scheme for all carriers flying to and from Europe.

The proposal received much resistance from carriers based outside Europe and industry bodies like the IATA. ICAO's initiative is off to a good start, with signs that countries including Singapore, Indonesia, Mexico, China and the US likely to join from the start, www.greenaironline.com reported.

Mr. Nathaniel Keohane, vice- president (global climate) at non-profit organization Environmental Defense Fund, told the online publication that "participation by China as well as other countries with significant aviation footprints - such as Japan, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and Brazil" will be crucial to ensuring the success of the scheme. Karamjit Kaur, Aviation Correspondent.

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