

Kremlin Pushes Back on Biden's Climate Criticism

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President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference at the COP26 climate summit. **Evan Vucci / AP / TACC**

U.S. President Joe Biden has criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping for not attending the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow on Tuesday.

Putin, citing coronavirus concerns in his decision to avoid traveling to the summit, recorded a video address that was delivered at COP26. Russia's 270-person delegation was led by Putin's climate envoy Ruslan Edelgeriyev and Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk.

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"It just is a gigantic issue and they [Putin and Xi] walked away. How do you do that and claim to be able to have any leadership?" Biden said.

"[Putin's] tundra is burning — literally, the tundra is burning. He has serious, serious climate

problems, and he is mum on willingness to do anything," he said.

The Kremlin on Wednesday rejected Biden's criticism, saying Moscow is serious about climate change.

"We disagree," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about Biden's accusation that China and Russia were failing to show leadership on climate change.

"We are certainly not minimizing the importance of the event in Glasgow, but Russia's actions are consistent and thoughtful and serious," he said.

Peskov said Moscow was well aware of the effects of climate change and was in fact facing "more serious challenges" than other countries.

"The tundra really is on fire. But let's not forget that forests are burning in California, forests are burning in Turkey, and in other countries," he said.

Peskov said Russia had taken a "very responsible" position on climate change with long-term plans to reduce emissions and diversify energy sources.

He said Biden may not have been aware of these plans when he spoke and that when the two leaders next met in person, "President Putin will have a great opportunity to tell President Biden what we are doing on the climate."

Russia, as well as fellow major polluters China and India, did not sign the U.S. and EU-led Global Methane Pledge to cut methane emissions 30% by 2030 at COP26.

But Russia, the world's fourth-largest greenhouse gas emitter, did join over 100 countries earlier at COP26 in promising to end deforestation by 2030.

Putin, a longtime skeptic of manmade climate change, pledged this year that Russia will reach carbon neutrality by 2060 — a goal that relies heavily on its vast forests absorbing large amounts of greenhouse gases.

A series of record-breaking forest fires that experts attribute to climate change and illegal logging have seen Russia's estimated 800 million hectares of forest cover dwindle in recent years.

AFP contributed reporting.

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