

At COP 17 in Durban, Governments must

Listen to the people – not the polluters

A green energy revolution is happening. A critical and rapidly growing mass of people, companies, cities and private initiatives are taking on the climate challenge, investing and modernizing their lives and leading their businesses and the economy onto the pathway towards a green future. Since the late 1990s, wind and solar energy have grown faster than any other power plant technology.

But people power can only go so far. Unfortunately, many governments have fallen far behind in the race to this green future, failing to protect their citizens from dangerous climate change and allowing instead the corporate polluters to stand in the way of the green energy revolution. As a consequence, there is currently a complete lack of global cooperation to ensure an urgent, just, and efficient transition.

Without good renewable energy policies, a commitment to stop deforestation, adequate and predictable sources of international financing for climate action, promotion of green and decent jobs and regulation to control and adequately price greenhouse gas emissions, the transition to green economies powered by clean and safe energy will not happen fast enough to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Instead of making full use of the global financial crisis as an opportunity to shift investments, policies and subsidies from the outdated fossil fuel based energy system towards a green and sustainable one based on renewable energy, many politicians are using the financial crisis as yet another excuse for not taking action to prevent catastrophic climate change. Also when it comes to the introduction of a financial transaction tax, which can serve to both slow down harmful speculation in financial markets and generate funds for climate action, many politicians are hesitating. This short-sighted thinking means lost opportunities today and substantially higher overall costs in the future, in the form of higher energy bills, lost jobs and more severe climate impacts.

The combination of climate change and deforestation is a vicious cocktail, and protecting the world's remaining tropical forests is a key part of the solution to tackle the climate crisis. Currently, tropical deforestation is responsible for about 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change threatens to increase the pressure on the world's forests dramatically. The only way to ensure the resilience of forests to climate change is through zero deforestation, meaning to put an end to industrial logging of primary and intact forest landscapes, while ensuring sustainable biomass consumption and agriculture practices. The political initiatives to provide financial support for forest protection are a positive development. But this political momentum is under threat as heavy polluters are proposing REDD project offsets within carbon markets as cheap substitutes for their own emission reductions.

As we are heading towards a UN climate conference taking place in Africa, where the impacts of climate change are already strongly undermining social and economical development, threatening food security, biological diversity and costing the lives of many people, no one should dare to argue that they can't afford to cut emissions. Letting climate disaster unfold will serve no-one's economic, social or environmental interests.

The danger is imminent, the situation is clear, people have been demanding action but still the response of the decision makers shows a lack of ambitious and effective action.

The truth of the matter is that a powerful, globally linked lobby of polluting corporations, who have failed to adapt their business models to the 21st century, benefit from keeping the status quo. These companies continue to use their political ties, close relationships and financial muscles to support politicians who are blocking progressive climate legislation and securing an increase of public subsidies to fossil fuels. In some countries they even go as far as funding bodies that spread doubt about the existence of climate change and advocate inaction. Similarly, initiatives to introduce a tax on financial transactions are being obstructed by the ever powerful bank lobby, while the aviation and maritime industry have so far had success with their efforts to prevent climate regulation of international transport.

In the current political landscape, many politicians are not only failing to lead the transition of their country and become part of the solution, but they are actively supporting the polluters and thereby reinforcing the problem. Meanwhile, the people and progressive forces taking action on climate change are left without political leadership and facing an uphill battle. In the COP 17, which has been named as the "people's COP", governments must prove that they are putting people before the polluters' profits.

So far, most of the developed countries have completely failed to show the global leadership they are obliged to show due to their wealth, capability, responsibility and the commitments they have made under the Convention. They must urgently improve their emission reduction targets and ensure the delivery of the financial and technological support they have promised. Meanwhile, emerging economies have started taking action to mitigate climate change, but also their emission reduction pledges leave room for improvement. If we are to keep temperature rise below 2°C, let alone the 1.5°C recommended by scientists and supported by a majority of countries, all governments must increase their ambition.

Furthermore, we need the governments to stop making unclear pledges and start making real commitments. Real commitments are legal commitments in legally binding instruments which ensure the transparency and accountability of government towards their citizens, and thereby limits the possibilities of the polluter lobby to derail government action on climate change. In Durban this means adopting the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and agreeing to negotiate a legally binding instrument under the convention to be adopted no later than 2015. Until we get there, governments must agree to regularly measure, report and verify

their emissions and actions in a transparent way, to build mutual trust and understanding among governments, and to give citizens full knowledge about what their governments are doing to solve the climate crisis.

Unless politicians move away from unambitious mitigation targets and tax-paid subsidies to polluting industries, the world will be stuck in a system that promotes the interests of the polluters at the expense of ordinary people who will be heavily impacted by climate change. Losing the Kyoto Protocol and moving towards a system of weaker rules and less transparency would only increase the opportunities for multinational corporations benefiting from climate destruction to control the national political agendas and derail the politics even further.

COP 17 in Durban must be the start of renewed global cooperation to prevent catastrophic climate change and do away with the traditional divide between developed and developing countries. The governments must stop the blame game and using other governments as excuses for their own inaction, and instead make real progress in the negotiations, putting aside the reluctance of a few governments to take responsibility and do their fair share.

Prior to Copenhagen, Greenpeace together with a broad coalition of non-governmental organizations, called for a fair, ambitious and legally binding deal, with developed countries committing to reducing their emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2020 and delivering international climate finance at the scale of 150 billion US dollars, as well as developing countries committing to reducing their projected 2020 emissions by 15-30% below business as usual.

The science hasn't changed, and since much time has been wasted since Copenhagen, the urgency is even grater to achieve these same objectives. We are still calling for this, since this is the climate agreement the world urgently needs in order to solve the climate crisis before we lose control over the climate change system. Sadly, it is clear that our governments are not willing to deliver this in Durban, and therefore realistic hope is for the governments to make use of the opportunity at COP 17 to decide on the most crucial building blocks of a global agreement, which can provide the solution to the climate crisis.

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At COP 17 in Durban, governments must deliver

Building blocks of a global deal on climate action

In Durban, Governments must agree the following key building blocks towards the global agreement the world is waiting for:

Peak in global emissions by 2015

- Governments must agree to peak global emissions by 2015 and reduce emissions by at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050, in accordance with the recommendations of the IPCC¹ and in order to not lock in the world onto a path towards catastrophic climate change. Any delay of the peak year will increase the environmental and economic costs and diminish the probability of keeping temperature rise below 2°C, which governments adopted as a target at COP 16 in Cancun, let alone the 1.5 °C which is supported by more than 100 countries.

Emission reductions: Close the gap between politics and science

- Governments must establish a solid, time-bound process to close the gap between the current mitigation pledges and the reductions needed to prevent catastrophic climate change. In Cancun they acknowledged that the current level of ambition is inadequate and not in accordance with the recommendations of climate scientists; in Durban, they must close the gap between the political pledges and the science;
- Governments must also close the “loopholes” in the accounting rules for emissions reductions, to ensure that targets are honestly met. This includes improving the rules for accounting emissions from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) to make the rules reflect what the atmosphere actually sees; ensuring that carbon market credits are only counted once (avoid double counting) and minimizing the damage from the use of excess emission allowances (hot air).

Ensure that the Kyoto Protocol continues and provide a mandate for a comprehensive legally binding instrument

Governments must guarantee the continuation and further development of the only legally binding instrument to fight climate change: the rules based system of the Kyoto Protocol, as this is the only way to ensure clarity with respect to commitments and accounting methods, maintain a minimum international standard for emissions trading and promote, facilitate and ensure compliance with commitments.

- Developed countries who are parties to the Kyoto Protocol must accept to inscribe their targets under a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol;

¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded in its 4th Assessment Report, published in 2007, that reaching the lowest range in concentration stabilization levels assessed (445 to 490 ppm of CO₂-equivalent, leading in the long term to a temperature increase between 2 and 2.4°C), would require global CO₂ emissions to peak before 2015.

- Developed countries who are not parties to the Kyoto Protocol must undertake a emission reduction commitment which are comparable to other developed countries. These commitments must be inscribed in a COP decision and subject to a robust and compliance-oriented regime;
- All governments must agree on a mandate to negotiate a comprehensive legally binding instrument under the convention to be adopted no later than 2015 and in force by the end of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

Deliver the necessary international climate finance

- Governments must identify specific innovative sources of finance, such as a financial transaction tax and auctioning of emission allowances, and establish a time-bound process for the operationalization these specific sources of finance;
- Based on a review of the scale of finance required to meet the objectives of the UNFCCC, the level of finance must be scaled up starting from 2013 to 2020 and beyond, keeping in mind that developed countries have committed to mobilizing US\$ 100 billion per year by 2020 and acknowledging the key role of public sources of finance;
- Governments must agree on mechanisms which can generate finance for developing countries as well as provide incentives to reduce emissions from international transportation (aviation and shipping), while addressing common but differentiated responsibilities, for example by providing a rebate mechanism for developing countries;
- Governments must agree to phase out all subsidies to fossil fuels and nuclear energy with time-bound and socially just transition plans.

Set up a framework for protecting forests in developing countries

- Governments must ensure that a forest funding window is established within the Green Climate Fund to ensure adequate and predictable funding to halt the destruction of forests in developing countries;
- COP 17 should lay out a strategy that focuses on ending deforestation at the national level (through national reference levels and monitoring efforts), since subnational projects and approaches merely shift deforestation from one part of the country to another;
- Governments must strengthen safeguards to ensure the protection of biological diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Address the needs of the most vulnerable countries and communities

- In addition to identifying the sources of the long-term funding needed for adaptation to climate change, governments must agree modalities and guidelines for the composition of the Adaptation Committee and the development of National Adaptation Plans;
- Governments must ensure that the work programme on loss and damage evolves into permanent long-term solutions;
- Governments must address the impacts of climate change on food security in developing countries.

Ensure global cooperation on technology and energy finance

- Governments must agree to operationalize the technology mechanism by 2012 as envisioned in the Cancun agreements;
- Governments must design an environmental integrity framework for technology selection within the technology mechanism;
- Through the technology mechanism, governments must give equal prioritization for adaptation and mitigation technology;
- Developed country parties must expedite capitalization of the technology mechanism for effective delivery on its objective;
- Governments must avoid promoting false solutions such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) or nuclear energy through the clean development mechanism (CDM) and other international mechanisms.

Ensure international transparency

- Governments must agree on the broad contours of the International Assessment and Review (IAR) and the International Consultation and Analysis (ICA) in Durban;
- The IAR must be compliance-oriented and fill one of the main gaps in the current Kyoto compliance regime – namely the early warning of non-compliance;
- The ICA for non-annex 1 countries must be facilitation-oriented and focus on overcoming any capacity constraints they may face as they implement mitigation actions and improve on their reporting systems;
- Both the IAR and ICA processes must be open and public after the initial in-country expert assessment or analysis, and full NGO participation must be ensured.
- Governments must adopt preliminary guidelines for biennial reports for all countries and a common reporting format for the support commitments of developed countries in Durban. These guidelines should be reviewed and updated regularly;
- The guidelines for the biennial reports should include reporting on fossil fuel subsidies and their reform, which should be mandatory for developed countries and encouraged for all others.

Ensure transparency, democracy and full participation in the UNFCCC process

The civil society has a right to know how our governments are responding to the international climate crisis, and be heard in the political discussions.

- Governments must improve the transparency of the UNFCCC negotiations, and ensure meaningful participation of the civil society;
- Governments must not allow to the polluters privileged access to the political processes.

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