



International Federation of Environmental Health

International Briefing Paper for relevant parliamentarians and ambassadors

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) discussions

Copenhagen – December 2009

IFEH is an organisation whose full members are national associations representing the interests of environmental health professionals throughout the World. Current full members can be viewed at <http://www.ifeh.org/scripts/member.asp?type=1>. Through both its full and associate members IFEH represents more than 60,000 environmental health professionals worldwide.

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Executive Summary

Environmental health philosophy and practice is founded upon the critical inter-dependence that we as human beings have with our global and local environment. Natural assets such as air, water and food are essential prerequisites for life. As an international environmental health community we see climate change and its potential impacts on human beings as the most critical and urgent public health issue of our time, and in the history of mankind. We consider the term “health” to be a holistic concept, which does not merely describe the *‘absence of disease and good physical health’* but instead refers to the *‘entire wellbeing of an individual’*.

If as a species we cannot learn to live within sustainable limits and damage beyond repair the essential life support systems that we depend on they will fail catastrophically with horrific consequences for humanity. All credible, reliable scientific evidence suggests that without profound and significant change that is exactly where we are headed. In the Fourth IPCC Assessment Report (AR4) it is stated: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level” , and it is stated by the IPCC Chairman, Mr Rajendra Pachauri, 22nd September 2009 (UN New York) that “Climate change is already resulting in an increase in the frequency, intensity and duration of floods, droughts and heat waves”.

Conversely however, evidence also suggests that there is still time, albeit short, to avoid worst-case scenarios and to decrease climate change and its impacts.

This paper identifies key milestones for the Copenhagen climate talks. There are essentially 3 absolutely fundamental things that we believe must be agreed and delivered through these negotiations if the world is to have a chance of avoiding dangerous runaway climate change which is highly likely unless committed, decisive action is taken now. To that end governments should:

- 1. Agree that developed countries must reduce their own emissions by at least 40 % by 2020 (binding threshold) and 80% by 2050 (binding threshold) and reject all forms of offsetting, including proposals for new and expanded offsetting schemes.**

Rich countries must recognise their legal and moral responsibility to take the lead on tackling climate change. Investing in carbon offsetting is, essentially avoiding real action on climate change.

- 2. Negotiate a new financial mechanism under the authority of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to ensure adequate financial flows to developing countries to support their transition to low carbon development and fulfil their adaptation needs.**

The developed world must adequately support and invest in the mitigation and adaptation efforts that need to also take place in developing countries. Sufficient funding governed by and accountable to the UNFCCC, is the only workable solution to ensuring adequate global action on climate.

- 3. Keep Forests out of Carbon Markets: Reject plans to introduce REDD offsets, and instead negotiate effective and fair mechanisms to protect the Earth’s forests that do not involve offsetting.**

Proposals to allow developed countries to buy chunks of forest whilst continuing to pump out emissions won’t solve climate change. In fact such proposals could in

effect trigger a land grab which could not only leave millions of people worse off, but could also contribute to increasing global instability and even potentially conflict.

We would also urge governments to seriously consider the detailed proposals set out in the draft Copenhagen Climate Treaty¹ that has been collectively prepared by leading members of the global NGO community.

Finally, we believe that, despite the double crisis of climate change and global recession that the world faces at present, there is a tremendous opportunity to take decisive steps now to address these issues in a connected integrated way. There is anecdotal evidence that would suggest that many politicians and senior decision makers sometimes see these agendas as competing, rather than actually complementary – particularly the issue of revitalising the economy and dealing with climate change.

Investment in mitigating and adapting to climate change will, in fact, stimulate the economy through the creation of new goods and services. That in turn will assist in addressing the recession that the majority of the world finds itself in. And there are other real potential benefits too, particularly within developed countries in terms of building social capital and the rediscovery of core values that could improve society for all.

Background to the UNFCCC and context for forthcoming talks

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental treaty produced at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro 1992 and which sets an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenges posed by climate change. It has now been ratified by 192 countries. In 1997 it was supplemented by an addition to the Treaty – the Kyoto Protocol – which established legally binding measures for the reduction of greenhouse gases for developed countries.

The UNFCCC is based on the principle of equity, and common but differentiated responsibilities. Under Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration, and in the UNFCCC, developed countries recognised their greater responsibility for damage done to the environment and for actions needed to address this.

Article 2 of the UNFCCC contains the ultimate objective of the Convention and any related legal instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol: to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

UNFCCC parties meet annually to progress plans and action on climate change at the international level, and the next conference of the parties – COP 15 – is critical as it is due to finalise new international agreements aimed at engaging the United States and developing countries into commitments and actions on climate, as well as finalise a new round of commitments from industrialised countries who ratified the Kyoto Protocol.

At the talks in Copenhagen in December, the UNFCCC signatory countries are tasked with:

1. Agreeing new emissions reduction targets for Annex 1 (industrialised) countries for the next commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol starting in 2013.
2. Fulfilling the commitments made as part of the Action Plan agreed in Bali in 2007 to address:
 - New technology and financing flows to support climate actions in developing countries;
 - Ensuring the United States takes comparable commitments to other developed countries;
 - Methods for supporting and financing adaptation needs in developing countries; and
 - Methods for supporting and financing efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation.

IFEH interest in and perspective on the Copenhagen talks

“Good health and wellbeing require a clean and harmonious environment in which physical, psychological, social and aesthetic factors are all given their due importance. The environment should be regarded as a resource for improving living conditions and increasing wellbeing.”¹

Environmental health philosophy and practice is founded upon the critical inter-dependence that we as human beings have with our global and local environment. Natural assets such as clean air, unpolluted drinking water and food supply are essential minimum prerequisites for life. Without a sustainable ecosystem to provide for us – including the needed diversity in flora and fauna - all our essential minimum prerequisites will be put at risk. Therefore Environmental Health is just as much to preserve and protect the environment on all aspects.

Climate change poses an extreme risk to all the above mentioned aspects. On top of that ‘desertification’ and lack of drinking water and habitable space etc.. will undoubtedly lead to refugees and conflicts between people and even nations.

As an international environmental health community we see climate change and its potential impacts on human beings as the most critical and urgent global public health issue of our time. We consider the term “health” to be a holistic concept, which does not merely describe the absence of disease, and good physical health, but rather refers to the entire wellbeing of an individual.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts that climate change will lead to a series of significant health impacts. These include: higher levels of some air pollutants and concomitant increased respiratory disease; the spread of a range of infectious diseases such as cholera, malaria, dengue; the compromising of agricultural production and food security is some of the least developed countries leading to greater malnutrition; an increase in extreme weather events like floods and droughts with dramatic impacts especially on the health of people living in coastal communities who will also be affected by predicted sea level rise.

IFEH believes that the UN Copenhagen climate talks are the last real opportunity that the international community has to secure a safe and fair future for all. **As such we regard these talks as arguably the most important international diplomatic event in the history of mankind.** The science and evidence, particularly from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is clear and unequivocal. Unless we secure a profound reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions and quickly, then there is a high probability that global temperatures will eventually rise more than 2 degrees Celsius. If this proves to be the case then there is a real danger that climate change will become unstoppable and unmanageable and the resultant impacts catastrophic, and in some scenarios lead to the end of mankind. It is for that reason that there is now widespread acknowledgement of the imperative to contain temperature rise to no more than 2 degrees above pre industrial levels. We accept and concur with that evidence and analysis.

Failure to effectively tackle climate change will result in massive human rights violations impacting on the world’s most impoverished people first and foremost, but ultimately everyone.

¹ WHO European Charter on Environment and Health, 1989

What is fair and effective international action on climate?

We believe that an international agreement can only work practically and politically if it is fair, giving due legal and moral regard to the priorities of developing countries pursuing sustainable development and poverty reduction ambitions, as well as adequately compensating those suffering climate impacts who have done least to causing climate change. **A just and truly equitable approach is essential in tackling climate change globally. The rich developed countries should take into account that “Mother Nature” is not open for debate or negotiations. If the rich countries do not deliver a proper result, She will respond without hesitation and feelings.**

While rich developed countries represent only one fifth of the world's population, historically they have emitted three quarters of global CO₂ emissions. This means that they have already consumed more than three times their fair share of atmospheric space, representing a disproportionate contribution to climate change. In contrast, the poorest 10% of the world's population have contributed less than 1% of these emissions. Even in relation to the big developing countries, it is important to note that per capita emissions in a relatively small country such as the UK are roughly 5 times that of China and more than 10 times that of India.

Developed countries must play a leading role in bringing down their own emissions first and fastest, at the same time getting the support mechanisms right to enable fair and effective support for mitigation in developing countries.

Many proposals and policies currently under consideration however, at national and international levels, are dangerous distractions to these goals, and could actually deepen the climate crisis whilst simultaneously deepening global inequality and injustice. Such proposals include issues such as offsetting; granting governance of climate funding to what are in our view undemocratic and unsuitable institutions (such as the World Bank); and pressure to put forests in the carbon market to satisfy offsetting objectives rather than respecting the rights of forest communities and promoting real biodiversity objectives.

Our overriding concerns remain the impacts that climate change already will have, and potentially could have, on the health and wellbeing of communities worldwide. As such we believe it is essential to challenge such proposals and to promote real pro-people and pro environment solutions.

We believe in equity and the fact that all peoples, the world over, have the right to an equal amount of the planets natural resources and capacity to deal with human lifestyle choices regardless of means. For that reason we believe that the legal and moral responsibility for urgent meaningful action rests firmly on the shoulders of the rich, industrialised countries. It is they who must first and foremost show the leadership and commitment to addressing the climate crisis we all face.

With this in mind there are 3 specific issues we believe must be secured at the Copenhagen discussions and subsequently delivered upon:

1. Reductions in CO₂ emissions in rich countries

The need to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is desperately urgent. Scientists tell us we are hovering at the edge of dangerous climate change tipping points. Despite the UNFCCC having been signed over a decade ago, global emissions of GHGs have continued to increase, and have even accelerated since 2000. It is now widely accepted that an average temperature rise of more than 2

degrees compared to pre-industrial times would have dangerous and potentially catastrophic impacts.

All of the UNFCCC signatories (which includes the United States of America), have committed to the overall objective as stated in Article 2, of preventing such dangerous climate change. The latest science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that to have at least a fifty per cent chance of avoiding a 2 degree rise, we need to see a 25-40 per cent reduction in emissions from developed (Annex 1) countries by 2020 and a 15-30 per cent reduction below 'business as usual' baseline emissions levels for developing (non-Annex 1) countries by 2020.ⁱⁱ

The Kyoto Protocol – the international agreement linked to the UNFCCC agreed in Kyoto, Japan in 1997 – set binding targets for 37 industrialised countries and the European community for the period 2008-2012. These amount to an average of 5% against 1990 levels for that first commitment period. UNFCCC parties are currently in the process of negotiating the Annex 1 emissions reductions targets for the second commitment period of the Protocol (2013-2020).

Key Milestone for Copenhagen Climate Talks:

To have even a 50 per cent chance of avoiding dangerous climate change, it is essential that Annex 1 countries commit to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2020, with no offsetting.

Why no Offsetting within the 40% and 80% target?

- Offsetting counts action to reduce emissions in developing countries as part of the cuts promised by developed countries. The EU plans to offset half of its planned emissions reductions to 2020.
- However, as set out above, climate scientists have highlighted that we need cuts in both developed and developing countries' emissions in order to increase our chances of avoiding dangerous climate change.
- Offsetting also has lots of other disadvantages. By pushing emissions reductions overseas, it is delaying much needed economic and social transformation in developed countries. A key need is to change the collective behaviours in the developed world. It is vital to realise that by investing in directly tackling climate change, developed countries would equally be investing in positive economic transformation. For example, in the UK, offsetting is cheating the British people out of much-needed public investment in new renewable energy infrastructure and technology, as well as the green collar jobs that would be created from this public investment and the increased energy security that would result from decreased reliance on fossil fuels. This would be positive investment and moreover at a time when it is much needed in the face of economic recession. The same is true of other developed countries.
- Furthermore, there is no guarantee that offsetting ensures positive sustainable development in, or appropriate financial transfers to developing countries. Carbon offsetting funds can even go towards building more coal or gas fired power stations in developing countries, as long as they're more efficient than the ones they're replacing. But this is locking these countries into burning coal for another 40 years which in itself is counterproductive to reducing carbon emissions globally.

2. Appropriate finance for emissions reductions & adaptation in developing countries

The United Nations Development Report 2007/2008 estimates that \$86 billion a year by 2015 (0.2% of developed country GDP or around a tenth of their current military

spending) is needed to help developing countries adapt to climate changeⁱⁱⁱ. Additionally, tens of billions of dollars in finance and technology transfer is needed yearly to support developing countries in reducing their emissions and making a just transition towards low-carbon economies.

At the same time, 2.4 billion people lack fuel and 1.6 billion are without electricity.^{iv} 40% of the world's poorest, around 2.6 billion people, are on the brink of climate change events that will jeopardise their prospects for survival let alone development.

Due to their historical responsibility for global CO₂ emissions, the responsibility lies with industrialised countries to provide the bulk of the financing needed. Public money should have a vital and central role to play in encouraging and supporting a global shift to low carbon technologies.

However, developed countries, including the UK, are pushing for funds to support mitigation and adaptation by developing countries to come from the global carbon market and be managed by the World Bank. We believe, as do many other commentators that the World Bank is the wrong institution to control any financing for climate change. As the recent financial meltdown has highlighted, it is essential that global financial institutions are fully democratic and accountable. The World Bank does not meet these simple but fundamental criteria. Not only that but its previous record in terms of the social and environmental impacts of its lending policies is arguably less than satisfactory coupled with the fact that it has a conflict of interest as the largest multilateral lender for fossil fuel projects in the world (the World Bank Group's fossil fuel financing totalled \$2,275 billion in 2008^{vi}). It is, for all these reasons and more, not an appropriate institution for administering the distribution of climate funds.

Critical issues are already apparent with its proposals for Climate Investment Funds (CIFs), including:

- CIFs undermine the UNFCCC process by setting up an unequal aid framework of donor and recipient rather than treating climate financing as the binding obligation of Annex 1 countries as it is regarded under the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol;
- CIFs compete for funding with already established UN adaptation and technology funds;
- CIFs promote industries like coal as clean energy; and
- CIFs force developing countries to pay for the industrialised world's pollution by providing loans for them to adapt to the climate crisis, increasing their overall debt burden – a process which runs counter to efforts to reduce poverty and vulnerability to climate change.

Key Milestones for Copenhagen Talks:

- **UNFCCC parties must negotiate a new financial mechanism under the authority of the UNFCCC to ensure adequate financial flows to developing countries to support their transition to a low-carbon future.**
- **Finance should be allocated by expert assessment panels on a needs-based principle similar to proposals in the submission of G77 and China.**
- **Annex 1 countries must commit adequate finance for developing country actions, additional to and independent from the domestic commitments of Annex 1.**

3. Keep forests out of carbon markets

To prevent dangerous climate change and land degradation, conserve biodiversity and safeguard the sustainable use of forests by local communities and indigenous peoples, any international climate agreement must be designed to stop deforestation

and degradation, not simply reduce or defer emissions. IFEH is therefore greatly concerned about the proposals in the UNFCCC for a scheme that would allow industrialised countries to offset their emissions by purchasing forest carbon credits from developing countries.

The proposal on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing countries (REDD) is an offsetting mechanism and, as with other forms of offsetting, it will mean that countries with emissions reduction responsibilities avoid necessary economic and social transformation.

In addition, proposals on REDD define plantations as forests, and as a result REDD funding could be used to replace forests with large monoculture plantations. Not only do plantations store on average only 20 per cent of the carbon of intact forests, replacing forests with plantations can have devastating social and economic impacts on those that live in forests and rely on them for food, shelter and medicine. It would also have significant negative impacts on biodiversity.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) 1.6 billion people globally rely on forests, including 60 million indigenous people who are entirely dependent upon forests for their livelihoods, food, medicines and building materials.^{vii}

The inclusion of forests in carbon markets will also undermine public governance, weakening governments' ability to protect and manage natural resources. Furthermore, if the financial value of forests increases, Indigenous Peoples and local communities will increasingly face the prospect of social dislocation and violent eviction, especially those with no formal land title. Including forests in carbon markets is therefore likely to trigger a land grab, leaving these communities struggling to survive. Tackling the drivers and underlying causes of deforestation is essential if we are to avoid dangerous climate change whilst safeguarding the rights of forest-dwellers and Indigenous peoples.. These drivers include the expansion of plantation agriculture, including for biofuels, soy and genetically modified trees to fuel excessive meat and paper consumption in industrialised and other major importing countries.

We believe that any agreement on forests must be fully and explicitly in line with the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) Expanded Program of Work on Forest Biodiversity and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and integrated with international and national implementation policies under these Instruments;

Key Milestone for Copenhagen Talks:

- **Any agreement on forests at the UNFCCC must keep forests out of carbon markets and be developed through a joint process with other relevant forest conventions and human rights instruments and ensure full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities.**

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