

Shadow G8, 2009
Joseph E. Stiglitz, Chair
Climate Change Concept Paper
Richard Moss and Keya Chatterjee, WWF-US

I. Beyond Rhetoric: The Urgency of Action

Despite nearly a quarter century of forecasts and warnings from the scientific community about climate change, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have continued to grow, a wide range of impacts have emerged, and projections of more adverse impacts are becoming increasingly dire. In the last six months alone, a series of studies have been released that indicate that the problem is deepening to crisis proportions: measurements of actual GHG emissions track the worst case projections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); new climate modeling studies project we may experience higher than expected increases in global mean surface temperature even if emissions are frozen at today's levels; indications that a number of "feedbacks" which reinforce climate change appear to be accelerating, including loss of Arctic summer sea ice, increases in methane emissions in the Arctic, and increases in the number and extent of forest fires in the Northern Hemisphere. In late January 2009, a study was released indicating that the consequences of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations peaking between 450-600 ppmv over the coming century are likely to be irreversible dry-season rainfall reductions in several regions comparable to those of the 'dust bowl' era as well as inexorable sea level rise. Such changes in physical climate will have dangerous human consequences. For example, nearly half the Earth's human population confronts a looming water resources crisis as a result of reductions in snow pack and glacial mass in the Himalayas, Western North America, and other mountain ranges. There are many other serious consequences for food security, human health, and infrastructure for which adaptations will be difficult and expensive to design. There is no doubt that a planetary emergency is upon us.

Past sessions of the G8 have been long on rhetoric about the climate change crisis but short on appropriate action. In 2008, the G8 opined:

"We reaffirm our commitment to take strong leadership in combating climate change and in this respect, welcome decisions taken in Bali as the foundation for reaching a global agreement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process by 2009...."

Yet in the same declaration, they were willing to set only a weak objective: "achieving at least 50% reduction of global emissions by 2050," a statement made all the more confusing by the failure to set a baseline year. Contrast this unambitious target with the reductions levels suggested by the IPCC to be necessary to limit warming to below 2°C:

- Global emissions would have to peak and decline well before 2020, resulting in a global emissions reduction of 80% by 2050 below 1990 levels
- Industrialized countries would need to reduce their collective, economy-wide emissions 25% to 40% below 1990 levels by 2020.

Over the past eight years, the positions taken by the George W. Bush administration were a principle reason that the G8 failed to take action commensurate with the crisis. While the Obama administration seems poised to provide refreshing and needed leadership, other members of the

G8, including Russia, the current Canadian government, and Japan have been hiding behind past US intransigence and can be expected to resist the kinds of measures that are needed to set us on the path to climatic and economic solvency.

II. A solution in the international process

An international agreement is essential to meeting needed climate change targets for a variety of reasons. It will set agreed limits for emissions that are consistent with the objective of limiting climate change risks for developed and developing nations alike. Technology transfer and financing are additional components of an international regime that are expected, if properly designed, to facilitate economic growth in developing countries without the same level of emissions that were associated with economic development in the past—these provisions can help decouple economic development and GHG emissions. An international framework will also alleviate trade and economic competitiveness concerns that would arise with unilateral action. Finally, even with ambitious emissions reductions, some climate change is unavoidable. Concerns about humanitarian and ecological impacts for poor countries that lack resources for adaptation, will need to be addressed through international funds for adaptation.

III. Status of international climate change negotiations

Within the UNFCCC negotiations, 2008 was a year of analysis, gathering ideas and building trust. Negotiators progressed on some issues, including on the Adaptation Fund and on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), but a great deal of work remains. Even so, by approving an ambitious work plan and timetable, the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Poznan kept the world on a path to an agreement at COP-15 in Copenhagen at the end of 2009.

A particularly notable development in 2008 was that developing countries brought constructive proposals into the negotiations and also proposed ambitious domestic climate plans. For example:

- Mexico—a 50% emissions reduction by 2050, and a proactive finance proposal
- South Africa—a peak/decline date and analysis of long-term emissions trajectories
- Brazil—70% reduction in deforestation by 2018
- China—several ambitious targets including 20% efficiency improvement by 2010, 20% renewable energy target by 2020, as well as a technology proposal with the G77.

But by the end of the COP, a sense of stalemate and disappointment enveloped the negotiations as industrialized countries failed to respond to these initiatives with any corresponding commitments on emissions reductions, adaptation, finance, or technology. What is needed now is political leadership from key industrialized nations to lead us down the road to Copenhagen. In this regard, the G8 meeting is a critical venue for climate change progress in 2009.

IV. Building blocks for planetary success at the Copenhagen COP

COP-15 in Copenhagen has been identified by the international community as the turning point at which humanity must agree on to pursue a low-carbon, climate-resilient future. While it is not

necessary to have every detail agreed, there are some essential building blocks for the international regime that must be agreed by governments in Copenhagen. These include clarity on:

- What are the quantified emissions reduction targets to be taken in industrialized countries?
- How will actions to reduce emissions in developing countries be linked to “measurable, reportable, and verifiable” technology, finance, and capacity building?
- How will the necessary finance and technology support be generated?
- How will adaptation support be provided to countries that are the least responsible for the crisis, but the most vulnerable to it?

V. Role of the G8: leadership, reciprocation, and confidence building

The G8 have a critical opportunity at their upcoming summit to reinvigorate the preparatory negotiations leading up to Copenhagen and set the stage for a successful outcome. Their declaration should provide a strong statement of intent on the part of the wealthiest industrialized nations to take serious measures to confront climate change, which arises largely as a result of their past economic and energy systems. All of the heads of state at the conference should unite behind a high level of ambition for emissions reductions, committing to a peak and decline of their emissions by 2020 as a down payment on the long-term deep emissions reductions required by mid-century. The declaration should include an acknowledgement that the physical climate system has limits beyond which it should not be pushed, and that as a result, there is a limited collective budget of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere. Future diplomacy must be oriented towards negotiation of the sharing of the atmospheric budget based on the *principles* of past responsibility (i.e. polluter pays) and current capacity for actions to reduce emissions and finance mitigation and adaptation globally.

Specific consideration should be given to integrating across the different issues being addressed by the Summit. Essential outcomes of the Summit include:

- Integration of developing countries into the dialogue and establishment of ongoing discussions to build trust between key developed and developing country players. This would set the stage for resolving concerns that could easily become deal-breakers, e.g. the economic competitiveness concerns associated with establishing a price for carbon emissions. Russia in particular can be expected to resist calls for broadening participation, since they see this as lowering their influence within the process. The “Major Economies Meeting” process initiated by the Bush administration contains some of the needed participants, but lacks representation on the part of the most vulnerable developing countries who also have a right to participate in discussions about dividing up rights to the remaining budget for greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere. If MEM were to be continued, it would have to be in the context of a more open and inclusive process.
- Commitments to see the climate and economic crises as linked, and to promote policies that can both solve the financial crisis and stimulate the necessary investments in ‘green’ development. The Obama administration has started to work towards enactment of a green stimulus package—or at least a stimulus with some elements designed to set the stage for a low emissions energy system and economy. By the time of the G8 Summit,

the outcome of the Congressional debate on the President's proposal will be clear. The G8 leaders must adhere to the medical dictum of "do no harm" by avoiding steps to stimulate the economy that will lock us in to continued high greenhouse gas emissions. Additional agreements to invest in a low emissions energy system and reinvigorate the economy should be strongly encouraged.

- Recognition that the G8 have a special moral responsibility with respect to adaptation measures in vulnerable countries. Adaptation measures must include those designed to enhance the resilience of economic, social, and environmental systems to climate change, and insurance-like mechanisms to cover costs of recovery from climate-change related disasters. G8 leaders could help the negotiation process a great deal if they worried less about attributing particular disasters to climate change or climate variability, an impossible task scientifically, and instead concentrated on providing access to scientific monitoring, projections, and decision support to enable developing countries to formulate robust adaptation strategies. The needed levels of financial support are discussed below.
- Commitments related to energy security and clean energy development, addressing emissions in high-emitting industry sectors, and enactment of Technology Action Programs. A particularly promising area is to develop a pledge and review process to increase commitments on energy efficiency and deployment of renewable energy technologies. Another area is a technology agreement on carbon capture and storage technology. With the understanding the G8 itself is not the proper forum for implementation and monitoring of such agreements, the heads of state do have a role in setting ambitious objectives and mandating creation of transparent international processes for providing technical support, financing, monitoring/verification. This can be non-binding, so long as it is transparent and staffed by independent, third-party experts.
- Developing a partnership among the G8 on finance for the climate crisis, focusing on mitigation, technology sharing, adaptation, and REDD. By 2030 the UNFCCC estimates that \$130 billion must be available, in addition to existing aid flows. The mechanisms for delivering this support must be reliable, or efforts to improve resilience and reduce impacts will not succeed.

VI. The special role and challenge of the United States

President Obama's leadership will be crucial, especially to counteract the influence of Italy (the host, and a long-standing ally of the Bush administration), and to encourage constructive participation on the part of the current governments of Russia, Japan, and Canada. A challenge for the new US administration is the domestic policy context in which climate action must take place. The US senate must ultimately ratify any international agreements entered into. This requires 67 of 100 votes in body that has failed to demonstrate collective leadership on environmental and international issues for many decades. One of the lessons of the Kyoto Protocol in the United States is that it will be extremely unwise of the new administration to agree to commitments internationally that exceed the domestic political consensus. Thus the administration must be working assiduously at home to build public and political support for climate change policies, as it balances the need for international cooperation.

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