

Dealing with THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE



How can we attain the level of international cooperation, particularly between the developed and developing world, which will enable us to meet the challenge of climate change?

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There are two aspects to climate change. We know that global warming is taking place but we do not know the effect it could have on human civilisation. We are sitting on a time bomb. The time bomb is ticking. But it is very different to the one we see in the movies, where you can stop it at the last second – if you don't stop this the moment you hear it ticking, it goes out of control. Later, whatever you want to do you cannot stop it, you run for shelter. On the planet there is nowhere to run for shelter.

Global warming is the symptom. The time bomb is abrupt climate change. The fourth IPCC said that abrupt climate change is highly unlikely but the contrary evidence keeps accumulating. A science congress in Copenhagen in March endorsed the view that the world is facing abrupt climate change. If the factors behind global warming go on rising, at a certain point they become self-reinforcing. Then you cannot stop it even if you bring down carbon emissions to zero. Scientists call that the tipping point.

There are two tipping points. The first is when the algae in the sea start dying. They are responsible for capturing two thirds of the carbon dioxide that the

earth is capable of capturing. If they die, our major carbon sink is gone. The second tipping point is the ice – particularly the northern but also the southern ice cap. The more that icecaps melt, the more that area is dark and no longer reflecting 90% of the heat it receives, the more the world heats.

Detailed analysis with models of over 20,000 years have pointed out that the tipping point for both icecaps melting and the algae dying is when temperature rises by 3 degrees. James Hanson warned last year that even 2 degrees may be too much. Already the permafrost is melting in Alaska. The Greenland icecap is melting phenomenally fast.

We have no time to look to future technologies for solutions. We will have to use the technologies that already exist. If those technologies cannot be made market friendly the colossus of industry will fight them. The negotiations which are now totally confrontational could go the way of the Uruguay round. We cannot afford a Copenhagen which is confrontational. The answer is reappraising the technologies we have already developed in the new circumstances of cost, returns and the alternatives that we face today.