

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?

Geoff Lean UK, Award-winning pioneer of environmental journalism

Climate change is not something that is going to happen. It is happening now- and faster than we expected. About 10 years ago I wrote a story saying that the polar ice cap was expected to disappear in summer by the end of this century. Now it is generally accepted that it will be by 2050, there are those who say 2025, and the most pessimistic science group say it could be gone in five years time.

There are long time lags built into the world system. What we are seeing now is largely the effect of the pollution we put into the atmosphere decades ago. The scientific consensus is the maximum we can possibly go to before global warming runs out of control is 2 degrees above the average historic temperature of the planet. We are so far warmed up by 0.7 degrees. The pollution of the recent decades has committed us to another 0.5 as it works through the system. So we are getting pretty close to that 2 degrees. It is reckoned we have 10 years, at most, to turn the situation around.

The positive side is that we would have a better life if we moved to a low carbon world. The technologies are already there and improving fast. Last year for the first time more money was invested worldwide in renewable energy than in fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas combined – 155 billion dollars against 110 billion. In Silicon Valley people feel that this is the big money making technological thing of the future. ‘Remember the internet?’ John Doerr said – one of the biggest venture capitalists in the world. ‘This is so much bigger.’ Many Silicon Valley people feel this is the biggest economic opportunity of the 21st century.

We have had one summit of world leaders on global warming, and two more are planned. Never has there been such a concentration of effort on one issue. Yet we are moving at a snail’s pace. It is a paradox. The science is now clear. Business, with few exceptions, is pressing hard for action. Almost all governments want a deal. The conditions are there for a breakthrough. Why is it not happening? Because the problems around table are as big as the problems on the table. There is immense distrust between North and South, developed and developing, as a result of many failed negotiations in the past. Everyone is waiting for someone else to begin. So round and round we go. The skills which IofC has build up over the years in dealing with such human problems are greatly needed. This is an issue which should command its attention.

Geoffrey Lean

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