

A Global Carbon Levy for Climate Change Adaptation

Authorised English edition* of the of the high-level opening statement at the Nairobi UN climate change conference delivered by

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Climate change is happening, here and now. We are tied together by melting glaciers in Africa and in Europe, by floods in America and in Asia, and by droughts and shortages of fresh water in Australia and Africa. And we are tied by a joint responsibility to combat climate change around the world and help those affected by it.

In Rio and Kyoto we committed ourselves to fighting the causes of climate change. We have indeed made some progress – but unfortunately not enough. For that, we have waited too long and our fight to get to grips with the problem has been too feeble and uncoordinated.

With damage from major disasters increasing by the day, we have to talk about adaptation: about how we can protect ourselves against the threats of climate change here and now. For we know that, even if we began today to take every conceivable action the world over, the trend will not be reversed immediately. Today, we are no longer called upon only to tackle the causes, but also to protect

against imminent harm. Where that is not possible, we must bear the consequences and arrange for compensation. This is why we must combine measures to prevent future climate change with efforts to tackle the effects of today's weather-related disasters.

A global carbon levy for adaptation

In order to increase the financial resources for this, I propose a global carbon levy. Based on the "polluter pays" principle, it would be paid by each individual and each business in proportion to their carbon emissions. The revenue from this levy would then be directed towards adaptation measures worldwide.

This levy would address both the causes and effects of natural disasters. It would serve a dual purpose: it would encourage major emitters to reduce their emissions, and it would provide sufficient and reliable resources to finance adaptation measures. It would also redress the injustice of climate change, given that it is precisely those who so far have

KEY MESSAGES:

- **We are tied by a joint responsibility to combat climate change and to help those affected by it**
- **This is not a fight against nature. It is a battle against short-sighted egoism, a fight against unreasonableness and blindness. And, above all, it is a fight for solidarity**
- **We are duty-bound to protect against imminent climate change damage and, where not possible, arrange for compensation**
- **We need a global carbon levy to fund these obligations in line with the 'polluter pays' principle**

*Edited and translated by Benito Müller, director ecbi.



contributed least to the cause who are the most severely affected by the impacts of climate change. The Nairobi Climate Conference was able to advance the issue of financing and management of an adaptation fund, which has indeed been a major step in the right direction.

Post-2012

Adaptation and emission mitigation are both matters of urgency. They are the two sides of one and the same problem: climate change. We must conclude by 2009 the negotiations on the commitments we are willing to take on after the present Kyoto targets expire in 2012 – because we have to ensure the continuity of our efforts.

Kyoto has put a price on carbon, and it has the particular merit of aligning economic and environmental interests. An international carbon levy to fund adaptation measures would fit in perfectly with this price mechanism.

This alignment of interests covers all of us – even the rich and richest nations. Anyone who, for whatever reason, took the decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol must, at the very least, finally carry out what they promised to do on their own. If this is not done, then they risk being accused of having deliberately allowed the disaster to happen. It is never too late to reconsider, to learn from mistakes. Even the most powerful of countries cannot brave the climate disaster alone, because climate change with all its consequences – such as migration and refugees – knows no borders, not even those of the largest nations. We are therefore all dependent on one another, north and south, large and small.

When I speak of an alignment of interests, I am also referring to business. By tackling climate change head on, business can protect the grounds for its future prosperity. Sir Nicholas Stern's recent Review on the Economics of Climate Change has made clear that the costs of damage due to climate change are a thousand times higher than the costs of preventive action. So there is every argument in favour of action now. This is not a fight against nature. It is a battle against short-sighted egoism, a fight against unreasonableness and blindness. It is a fight for global solidarity to find a common way forward which rises above our differing economic and narrow national interests of reducing the

threat our planet. This common challenge is what we need to address urgently. If we fail to do so, we and our children will all pay the price.

People all over the world have great expectations of our work in these international negotiations. Let us not dash the hopes they have placed in us. It is not only floods, melting glaciers and droughts that unite us. Above all us it is the need to act now and to show a united front in our actions.

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