

The Elders' Letter to World Leaders – full text

27 November 2009

As the world prepares for the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December, we urge you to step up your efforts to help secure a new global deal to combat climate change. Millions of people around the world expect you and your fellow leaders to take the urgent action that is needed to tackle current impacts of climate change and protect future generations.

We, a group of global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela, are concerned by the lack of progress towards an outcome in December that will adequately address the catastrophic risks posed by climate change. We recognise that a political agreement rather than a treaty is now the likely outcome. But your efforts must not stop there. It is critical that the meeting in Copenhagen leads to clear targets on emissions reductions and specific financing commitments that enable developing countries to limit their emissions without jeopardising growth and to adapt to the effects of climate change. The deal in Copenhagen must be robust enough and contain a fundamental set of agreements to drive future progress.

We are writing to encourage you personally to attend the talks and ensure that the outcome is an ambitious, fair and effective deal that leads to a legally binding agreement in which countries:

- *Agree to a 2 degree Celsius target as the outer limit of global temperature increase that humankind can tolerate;*
- *Agree that global greenhouse gas emissions must therefore be reduced by at least 50 percent by 2050 to stop further global warming;*
- *Agree that developed countries must commit to emissions cuts of 25-40 percent by 2020, and 80-95 percent by 2050, relative to levels in 1990 – and establish national mid-term targets that are binding, measurable and verifiable;*
- *Agree that all countries around the world should develop low carbon growth plans, which allow them to plan for the transition to sustainable low carbon prosperity;*
- *Agree that the big emerging economies limit their emissions through national action plans that are measurable, reported and verifiable;*
- *Agree to provide immediate large scale, predictable, adequate and additional funding for adaptation as well as mitigation, including reductions in emissions in forestry, agriculture and other land-use sectors in developing countries;*

- *Agree that industrialised countries – governments together with the private sector – will provide the majority of financial support (estimated to be at least €100 billion per year by 2020) to help developing countries – particularly the poorest and most vulnerable – to achieve to low carbon growth and adapt to the damaging effects of climate change that are already taking place;*
- *Agree that developing countries, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, receive technological and capacity building support to facilitate access to funding and action on adaptation and mitigation;*
- *Agree on a process to review periodically the latest science and the early learning from the Copenhagen agreement to adjust our global and national targets, actions and funding accordingly.*

A few weeks ago, as you can see from photographs posted on www.theElders.org, we joined forces with thirteen of our grandchildren from Asia, Africa, Europe and the United States to remind the world of the risks of climate change to future generations. Like all young people, our grandchildren expect today's leaders to take responsibility for delivering a low-emission, sustainable future: one that requires shared commitment, based on common but differentiated responsibilities.

The agreement reached in Copenhagen must have climate justice at its heart. It is a tragic irony that the world's least developed countries have contributed less than 2 percent of the greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, yet are most vulnerable to climate change and least able to protect their people. We have had the opportunity to meet small farmers and indigenous leaders from the poorest countries, many of whom are women, who tell us that changing weather patterns are already putting increasing pressure on water, food and land. Climate change threatens to undo years of development gains by exacerbating poverty and destabilising fragile states. We must invest now in adaptation and mitigation measures to assist those who are already losing their land to floods, rising seas or droughts, and to help poor countries develop renewable energy and more efficient ways of achieving economic growth. The benefits of investing now will far outweigh the cost to future generations of dealing with climate catastrophe.

Industrialised nations must meet their historic responsibility. Fast-emerging economies such as Brazil, China, India and South Africa also need to reduce emissions but in a way that does not prevent them from improving standards of living of their citizens. As a matter of justice, we must ensure that action to tackle climate change does not trap millions in poverty. Ultimately, no one is immune from the impact of climate change – rich, poor, developed and developing countries. We are all in this together. The interrelated challenges of achieving global food security, reducing poverty, addressing climate change, and meeting growing demands for energy cannot be addressed in isolation.

Your strong leadership has never been more needed than it is today. The laws of physics and chemistry will not wait, nor will they compromise. Either Copenhagen sets us on a course of radically reduced greenhouse gas emissions or the future of humanity is in jeopardy.

Let us not forget: climate change also brings opportunities. Current modes of consumption and production are unsustainable – out of balance and unjust towards people and nature. Let us now embrace the green, the local, and the sustainable – because our survival depends on it.

We have lived through times when change seemed impossible, but our greatest leaders never gave up hope. As you prepare for Copenhagen, we ask you to have the courage and the vision to see beyond short-term national and sectional interests to confront the global climate challenge. We ask you to lead.

Yours sincerely,
The Elders

(signed)

Desmond Tutu (Chair)

Martti Ahtisaari

Kofi Annan

Ela Bhatt

Lakhdar Brahimi

Gro Brundtland

Fernando Henrique Cardoso

Jimmy Carter

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