

# POLICY BRIEF

CLIMATE CHANGE LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT

# SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT

A global move to low carbon development is vital to keep the world's average temperature well below a 2°C rise, beyond which humanity faces catastrophic and irreversible climate change. >>

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# THE WORLD NEEDS CARBON DIOXIDE CUTS OF UP TO 40% BY 2020 AND 80% BY 2050

Industrialised countries must accept their responsibility to cut their carbon emissions drastically and move towards zero carbon development. Developing countries should be supported technologically and financially so they can grow and prosper using renewable energy and other low carbon strategies. A global commitment to find real alternatives to high carbon consumption offers the world its only hope for a safe future with sustainable development for all.

## **CARBON-INTENSIVE GROWTH CANNOT CONTINUE**

The promise of wealth through endless growth that has driven developed countries for two centuries has come at a heavy price. The atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has increased nearly 40% since 1860, the greatest density in 650,000 years. Colossal carbon emissions have made life fragile for the world's poorest people, who depend on the land and rely heavily on a predictable climate. In the last 150 years, the average global temperature has increased by 0.8°C. The trend shows no sign of abating. According to analysis by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a 2°C increase in global temperature is the utmost rise humanity can afford if it is to avoid unmanageable climate change.

Despite such bleak warnings, emission trends reveal steeply increasing levels of carbon discharge in emerging economies and very low reductions in developed countries. If the trend continues, the world is on the road to a global temperature increase of 4-6°C by the end of the century, leading to collapsed ecosystems and food chains, the extinction of many species, half the planet becoming uninhabitable and a maximum potential population of one billion. According to the British economist Nicholas Stern, "everybody who is of sound mind should do everything to drastically reduce this risk".

## ACT ALLIANCE PRIORITIES FOR LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT

### 1 INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES MUST REDUCE THEIR CARBON EMISSIONS AT ONCE

One of the most important issues at stake in the negotiations on climate change is the issue of mitigating carbon emissions. Strong differences of opinion exist on who should take responsibility, at whose pace and following which format, according to the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is clear, however, that industrialised countries bear greater responsibility than developing countries, based on their current and historical emissions. An ambitious target of between 25-40% emission cuts by 2020 and 50-80% by 2050 (based on 1990 levels) has been recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The current emission cuts pledged by industrialised countries are grossly inadequate.

Governments must swiftly rise above the challenges related to mitigation and agree how to achieve the deep emission cuts recommended by climate science.

### 2 INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES MUST PROVIDE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WITH FINANCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

In most countries, economic growth and development was linked to the industrial revolution, which entailed the extensive exploitation of fossil fuels. It is now clear that this mode of development is unsustainable, destructive to the environment and damaging to people. There are now plenty of technologies and systems that make sustainable low carbon growth possible and reduce humanity's dependence on carbon-intensive solutions.

Financial support is now urgently needed for developing countries to allow them to take advantage of these technological and methodological innovations in order to move towards a low carbon future.

Countries must build on renewable and efficient energy as a way of moving away from heavy reliance on fossil fuels. This will require changes in attitudes as much as infrastructure: low carbon development requires public policy steps to influence consumption patterns and behaviour.

Industrialised countries' role in supporting developing countries in terms of finance and technology is crucial for this transformation to take place.

### 3 CREATE GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING LOW CARBON STRATEGIES

All countries should prepare zero or low carbon strategies in the near future. In order to assist and direct them, the COP17 should agree on guidelines on how to develop such plans.

Developing countries are already engaged with various climate or development strategy processes – such as National Adaptation Plans, National Mitigation Plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Low carbon strategies should be seen as complementary to these development plans, and should either be in line with or integrated into other plans. They must be seen as directions in which developing countries are encouraged to go, rather than obligations.

As a guiding principle, low and zero carbon development pathways must respect the equal right of all people to use environmental resources and space sustainably. They should be prepared in a participatory, accountable and transparent manner, with special attention given to the rights of, and impacts on, the most vulnerable people and communities.

### 4 USE COP17 AS A STEPPING STONE TO A NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

The COP17 in 2011 is one step in a necessary process of change geared to setting the world on a sustainable development path in the next few years. The international community must use this and other opportunities to put future discussions on the right track. The Rio+20 Summit in June 2012 should be seen as a separate, but equally important, process to change the existing development paradigm based on resource- and energy-intensive exploitation of the environment, which has led to such catastrophic consequences for the world's poorest people.

To stimulate the global shift towards low carbon development, sustainable development goals with human rights obligations should be adopted.

### 5 ENSURE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS A RIGHT FOR ALL

The world is facing both a challenge and a unique opportunity. All countries have the right to sustainable development, but that will only be possible if they obey the imperative to follow a low carbon path. What that means varies enormously from country to country.

For poor people in developing countries, whose carbon footprint is miniscule, the first question is not how to reduce emissions but how to meet everyday needs. For their governments, the challenge is how to provide for the people while avoiding carbon-intensive development. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals grasp some of the key priorities for developing countries. Access to food, water, education and other basic amenities are key human rights that need to be fulfilled and prioritised in any development strategy.

For industrialised countries, on the other hand, the dilemma is to find ways to sustain the standard of living while at the same time drastically reducing carbon production.

Emerging economies and middle-income developing countries are at a crossroads. They need to find a balance between supporting their poorest communities while at the same time avoiding the carbon-intensive growth patterns used by their developed counterparts.

# ACT ALLIANCE ASKS GOVERNMENTS TO

- 1 COMMIT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES TO MAKING DRASTIC CUTS IN THEIR CARBON EMISSIONS** producing zero carbon development strategies before the COP18 and making further commitments in line with these plans.
- 2 AGREE THAT DEVELOPED COUNTRIES PROVIDE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WITH THE FINANCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGY NEEDED TO SET OUT ON A LOW CARBON PATHWAY** This should be done through funding from the Green Climate Fund.
- 3 CREATE GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR LOW AND ZERO CARBON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES** that all countries are encouraged to use, in line with, or integrated with, national development plans.
- 4 USE COP17 AS A STEP TOWARDS A NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM** This paradigm should guide the international community's transition to low carbon pathways.
- 5 SAFEGUARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A RIGHT FOR ALL** All government decision-making, at all levels, should be founded on the principle of sustainable development.

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#### **About ACT Alliance**

ACT Alliance is a global coalition of 125 churches and related organisations united by a single vision: justice for the world's poor. Every day, the coalition's 33,000 staff and volunteers work together in 140 countries to deliver emergency relief, implement development programmes, and support people's fight for their rights.

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