

Problems and Solutions to the mitigation of Climate Change

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There is now overwhelming scientific evidence of a direct and irrefutable link between greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere and climate change. Global problems require global solutions and it is within this context that the most pressing sustainable development issue is the inadequate level of international cooperation to solve climate change. The constant accumulation of emissions caused by the excessive production and utilization of natural resources in both developed and developing countries prevents effective mitigation efforts within the International Climate Change Regime (ICCR). We live on one planet and therefore ecological degeneration cannot be solved just within the context of nation states. At the present time there is a huge disparity between the levels of multilateral cooperation and the rate of ecological degeneration. The ICCR only aims at a 60% cut in emission by 2050; this is clearly ineffective because of the rapid rate of ecological degeneration now evident. Customary international law affirms the sovereign right of states to manage their own natural resources (Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration); however deforestation and greenhouses gases released in one state will affect other states (or areas of the global commons) and therefore this fundamental issue must be examined.

The Earth has taken 'billions of years' to achieve ecological balance between all life forms that co-exist on it. However within the past hundred and fifty years of industrialization, humans have managed to introduce levels of greenhouse gases that the Earth just can no longer handle. We are all aware of the destruction of the Earth's rainforests and the exploitation of the planet's natural resources, which have led to the increase in global temperatures, extreme weather patterns and the melting of the icecaps, however; I do not believe in being cynical, and am certain that global solutions can be found. I have identified three significant mechanisms that, if harmonised; would create global solutions. These fall within the legal, political, and economic spheres.

Firstly, national governments need to begin to endorse, sign and ratify the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter has been a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society for the 21st century. It has been endorsed by thousands of organizations and institutions. It is not only a call to action, but a motivating force, inspiring change the world over. The Earth Charter would put environmental issues at the centre of international law and begin to truly mitigate climate change from an Earth/eco-centric perspective. The Charter would create the necessary foundations to develop an International Environmental Organisation (IEO) that gives environmental issues priority in the international decision-making process. It would be able IRENAnal. This would begin the global process of phasing out the production and utilisation of greenhouse gases and the creation of an International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), linked to the IEO; could allow the development of research and oversee the technical process. The IEO and IRENA would therefore allow renewables and eco-technology to become a global and universal priority.

After World War Two, the pre-war international system was largely replaced by a new world order with the creation of the United Nations, NATO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement in Tariff and Trades (GATT). This world order was created to allow economic stability between nations and therefore prevent a future World Wars. However, to what extent can this order usefully serve today's very different world? Many proposals have been made on the reform of the current international institutions but most have been blocked by the lack of political will, resistance to change and internal conflicts. We need a global discussion

on this subject in order to discover ways these institutions can be reformed and areas where they have outlived their purpose.

For the past thirty years scientists have been warning us about the effects of environmental destruction and still there has been no significant action by the international community. The Kyoto Protocol is so far the best attempt, however; some countries like the United States and China, responsible for the largest levels of greenhouse gases in the world, still refuse to make the necessary commitment to join the rest of the world in an effort to help secure our future. The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 are the main vehicles for global environmental improvements but they still remain limited approaches to environmental mitigation. They lack the authority to regulate economic activity, due to the current international trade laws created by GATT and facilitated by World Trade Organisation (WTO). The establishment of an IEO would unify global resources and act as a vehicle for securing international cooperation and international resource coordination and therefore allow symbiotic relationships and transnational benefits.

When nations put their own comparative advantage and financial interests first, regardless of the consequences, then they put the whole Earth community at risk. Government economic balance and accountability is one thing, but such unrestrained financial pursuit at the expense of the Earth's environment and resources is clearly myopic, not to mention catastrophic. We have to know when to draw the line and when we start to destroy the very thing that sustains the lives of millions of species, including ourselves, we have crossed that line. Even though the Kyoto Protocol was ratified and progress has been made since then, however; without the support of the United States and China, it is still projected to fall far short of achieving the necessary targets that are required to reverse the deteriorating environmental situation; and time is running out!

The urgency of action is already immediate and therefore national governments must begin a swift transition to a more secure, sustainable renewable energy economy with the assistance of an international body. The proposed IEO and IRENA would develop the necessary regulatory frameworks for the universality of renewable energy and eco-technology and would phase out the process of greenhouse gas production and utilisation. The concept of emission reductions under the current paradigm is ineffective, since it is fragmented into national jurisdiction, and every car, plane, factory and so on is constantly 'adding' to the already high and lethal concentration of greenhouse gases. The crisis can only be tackled by 'phasing out' greenhouse gases altogether (like the Montreal Protocol did with ozone depleting substances) and replacing them with renewables and eco-technology. This can only be achieved with the development of an international regulatory framework within the proposed IEO and IRENA.

It is often difficult to comprehend the magnitude of the climate crisis and one could argue that it is totally beyond the current system's ability to solve it. The gap between the systems within civilisation and the climate crisis is huge. There is much talk about the 'urgency of action' but we are enclosed within a complex system that seems to put economic factors above the very thing that sustains us - the environment, thus preventing immediate and essential action. We are not separate from the Earth's ecosystems and therefore if we continue to see the environment as an externality, rather than the very thing that sustain our existence; then we are surely heading for disaster. The Earth is the foundation from where ALL humans get their subsistence. The economy relies on the Earth's ecological stability to supply us with what we need, and if this is taken away then there will be no profits made at all.

We need to develop a symbiotic relationship with the Earth and end the parasitic one that has evolved over the past few hundred years. It is not how the Earth can benefit the welfare of the global economy but how the global economy can benefit the welfare of the Earth and thus benefit

the interconnected web of life including both 'humanity' and all its 'biodiversity'. If we care for the Earth then the Earth will care for us, and therefore we must phase out greenhouse gases and replace them with (already developed) renewables and eco-technology. This may appear very difficult to achieve and unrealistic within the current systems but the urgency of change is already immediate, radical problems will require radical solutions. We are allowing post World War systems (that humanity have created) to take precedence over 'life saving' solutions.

I really feel these solutions will take place sooner or later (if not too late) when all other approaches (within the current systems) have failed. We need courageous leadership that will argue for and work with others to campaign for these changes. We need those that are elected and have a mandate to lead us and show us the way and not fear these global challenges. We cannot allow this crisis to happen just because we remain attached to the current systems and refuse to adapt. We need to campaign for a 'full phasing out of greenhouse gases' and develop a 'global action plan' for environmental regeneration immediately, before it becomes too late. It is time to put aside our complacency, differences and old habits and seriously tackle the enormity of the crisis (that we all face together) as a top priority.