

STAND UP FOR THE EARTH COMMUNITY

Win the struggle against global warming

BRENDAN MACKEY and **SONG LI** discuss two vital ingredients often overlooked in efforts to find solutions to global warming. Our generation must begin to care sufficiently about future generations, people in other countries, and the greater community of life, and demand our governments show international leadership in negotiating a new legally binding, equitable international climate agreement. Without this agreement, based on a world ethic of universal responsibility, our efforts will fail to solve global warming. Governments are wavering when leadership is needed. Everyone needs to take a stand, become a leader.

World ethic of universal responsibility

Talk of a world ethic for universal responsibility to resolve the problem of global warming may appear arcane or irrelevant given the urgent, difficult decisions that must be made. Such a dismissive attitude reflects how little attention we give to the role of ethics in motivating people to action and in creating the political will needed to advance significant social change. By world ethic is meant a sense of responsibility, extended to all peoples, nations, and the greater

community of life on our planet, now and in the future.

Many national governments have argued against taking substantial action on climate change saying benefits to citizens are outweighed by costs. But the costs and harm done to people in other countries from global warming are not taken into account in such analyses. Neither is the cost and harm included for future generations of their citizens, or future generations of people born in other nations. The harm caused to all other species of life on Earth is also excluded. This position is not illogical; it just reflects a very narrow sense of who a government sees as belonging to the community for which they are legally and morally responsible. Many national governments think in this narrow way about international relations.

Addressing the root causes of global warming will require a level of national and international cooperation not seen since the Allied nations' response during World War II. So it's not unreasonable to speak of 'winning the war against global warming,' although the analogy is imperfect as in this war the enemy is ourselves. Mandela said: "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."¹ Global warming can only be solved through partnership and the cooperation of all sectors and nations.

We are all aware of the need to reduce our greenhouse emissions from fossil fuel use. But what critical steps must we now take to ensure our efforts are not wasted? Voluntary agreements and agreements that include only some of the world's



nations will not solve the problem. The sad fact is any benefits to the global climate system gained from reducing your greenhouse gas emissions by double-glazing your home's windows, or cycling rather than driving a car to work, can and will be offset by greenhouse gas emissions from dirty factories in Australia, deforestation in Brazil, or cars driven in Beijing. Unless there is an agreed target and timetable for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to a safe level there can be no guarantee our efforts will help solve the problem.

Urgent: binding climate agreement

Fortunately, the world's nations have signed the UNFCCC – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which commits all nations to work together to solve global warming.² The UNFCCC allows for ongoing negotiation of additional agreements, called 'protocols,' to guide the actions needed to solve the problem. The Kyoto Protocol³ is one such agreement negotiated committing nations to take some important 'baby steps' along the road of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. However, national governments now need to agree on a new protocol binding countries to reduce total global warming emissions to a safe level with targets and timetables. Without such an agreement, all our individual and collective efforts will fail to solve the problem. What would a new binding protocol look like?

The answer is called Contraction and Convergence.⁴ C&C is a framework that makes governments agree on three vital questions. First, what is a safe concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases? Secondly: When will total global greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to the amount needed to maintain atmospheric concentrations at the agreed safe level – 2050, 2100, next year? The sooner the better, of course, as

the longer we wait the more harm is done to people and nature and the more expensive it becomes to fix.

The third important question a C&C framework would make governments reach agreement on is how the permissible annual amount of greenhouse gas emissions will be allocated between nations. The simplest and fairest way is to give every person an equal share, called a *per capita* allocation. An important feature of C&C is it treats nations fairly.⁹ Under this framework, emission entitlements of people in a poor country will increase relative to what it is now, while that of people in a wealthy country will decrease. This is fair as historically poor countries have not caused the global warming problem and they need to now quickly develop to eliminate poverty. However, under a new C&C-framed protocol, all countries, including developing countries, will be committed to meeting their specified national greenhouse gas targets by the agreed date. Once a new protocol is in place, based on the equitable C&C framework, national governments can begin the complex task of working out how to most efficiently and fairly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases to the agreed safe level.

Earth Charter: the community of life

Yet many governments are reluctant to commit to the action needed to solve global, based on the narrow understanding of their responsibilities. Consequently, the world's nations will only agree to such a comprehensive agreement if they become motivated to act with a sense of universal responsibility. Nations need to expand their understanding of who belongs to their community of concern so this includes, in ad-

national governments now need to agree on a new binding protocol to reduce total global warming emissions to a safe level

Excerpts from the Earth Charter

Preamble – We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. We must recognize, in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it's imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Universal Responsibility – We must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community and our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature. *See website for full Charter with 14 principles to affirm for a sustainable life: www.earthcharterinaction.org*

dition to their fellow citizens currently alive, people in other nations and future generations, along with species and ecosystems. We need to respect and care for the entire community of life, those alive now and future generations. Otherwise, why should governments bother making the very significant changes a new C&C framed protocol will demand?

Promoting a *world ethic of universal responsibility* like the Earth Charter⁵ can help generate the necessary motivation and political will so national governments support and negotiate a strong agreement. The advantage of a strong climate agreement will be the certainty it provides and an increasingly ethically motivated global community, where all sectors can focus in earnest on meaningful mitigation and adaptation actions.

Calling for nations to act with an expanded sense of universal responsibility and commit to a new C&C framed international legal agreement is no idle pipe dream. There are many examples of nations acting with an expanded sensibility that involved real sacrifice and commitments beyond those promoting national self-interest. The leadership shown by the USA Government during World War II was one shining example. The founding of the UN Charter was another such historic moment, as was the agreement on the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. But, we must be realistic given the current geo-political situation, for the global warming problem is too important to leave to good memories and ideals. What will generate the political will to motivate governments to act?

Motivating responsible climate action

The reality is some governments will only negotiate and ratify a new legal international agreement to solve global warming if there is clear popular support

for such a major commitment. In countries with popularly elected governments, political will must come from a change in people's minds and hearts. These changes of mind and heart need to be supported by appropriate institutional, policy and legal arrangements nationally and internationally to enable effective action on global warming in all sectors, and collaboratively between the world's nations. We, the current generation, must begin to care sufficiently about

future generations, people in other countries, and the greater community of life, and demand our governments show international leadership in negotiating a new legally binding agreement.

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The Earth Charter provides an approach for educating and motivating people and governments to act with the necessary sense of universal responsibility. It's a world ethic of values and principles for a more just, sustainable, peaceful world. The Earth Charter can be endorsed and used by everyone, governments at all levels, businesses, communities, and individuals. The Earth Charter was produced by a unique global consultation process, and endorsed by the World Conservation Union (the IUCN), among many thousands of other people and organizations. UNESCO has endorsed the Earth Charter as an important resource for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Endorsing and spreading the word about the Earth Charter is an inexpensive, simple, highly effective way to create motivation and political will to convince our governments to do what is necessary to remedy global warming.

Addressing root causes of global warming means shifting from unrestrained economic growth to the concept of sustainable development.⁶ As stated in Earth Charter principle 7, we should "Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being." Energy conservation, especially in the built environment and transport sectors, must be part of a core response. Economically developed societies will need to consider how low-energy lifestyles can be promoted. Fossil fuel must be replaced with energy sources like solar energy that do not emit greenhouse gases nor further pollute Earth with bio-toxic substances. Earth Charter principle 5 highlights the need to "Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life." A most important natural process is the role played by terrestrial ecosystems, particularly the world's forests, in removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Forest protection urgent

Forest protection and restoration is an urgent matter because of ongoing destruction.⁷ Emissions from deforestation are very significant, representing around 18% of global emissions, greater than that produced by the global transport sector. The world's forests are an important part of the global carbon cycle and Earth's natural processes help regulate greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, storing them in the biomass of trees and in the soil. The world's forests are an essential natural mechanism for stabilising atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide in the short and long term.⁸ Forests currently contain around three to four times more carbon than is currently in the

atmosphere.⁹ About half the world's forests have now been cleared for agriculture and human settlement. Much of what is left is commercially logged for timber products, especially wood chip for pulp-based products. Commercially logged forests store around 30–40% less carbon than unlogged forests.¹⁰ If we were to halt further deforestation and allow even some of the world's logged forests to naturally regrow, the amount of carbon taken up and stored in these ecosystems would make a significant contribution to our global warming predicament.

Implementing this strategy will be difficult and must be a main task tackled once we have in place a new legally binding climate agreement based on the C&C framework. The Stern report estimates the opportunity cost of forest protection in eight countries responsible for 70 percent of emissions from land use could be around \$5 billion yearly initially. This may seem a large amount, but the cost of not solving global warming will escalate the longer we ignore it. And the world can afford such solutions; global military expenditure now exceeds one trillion (thousand billion) US dollars annually.¹¹ We only need divert half of one percent of this expenditure to save the world's forests and make a significant, lasting contribution to resolving global warming. Establishing a carbon price, through tax, trading or regulation, is an essential foundation for governments to provide incentives for climate-change policy, giving economic value to stocks of carbon in mature forests.

Advancing equity/peace/security

Adaptation can be a 'win-win' solution in both economic and ethical terms and is a key action to advance equity among people of the current generation and between generations. It's a perfect opportunity to act in accordance with an expanded sense of our universal responsibility by saving the lives of millions of vulnerable people from the harmful impacts of human-forced climate change and variability, especially droughts and floods. Adaptation will also contribute to world peace and security by reducing the risk of natural disaster and environmental refugees. Adaptation provides us with a chance to show our solidarity in face of the common danger of global warming.

Adaptation measures depend on the different types of climate variability each area experiences. Small island countries for example, may need risk diagnosis and response methods (awareness raising and monitoring), construction guidelines to protect key public assets (hospitals) in vulnerable coastal areas, and protection of coastal ecosystems and biodiversity affected by sea level rise. Some African countries will need to alter land-use and agricultural policies in their

marginal agricultural lands given increased drought-related stress caused by climate change.

Adaptation should help us learn a fundamental lesson of what it will take to achieve sustainable development, namely, as noted in the preamble to the Earth Charter: "Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more."

Our place in history will be determined by how we respond to the challenge of global warming. History will judge us harshly if we fail to rise to the challenge, as we cannot claim ignorance.

We have the necessary scientific knowledge and policy compasses to guide us along the way: UNFCCC, C&C, the Earth Charter. We must guard against false prophets¹² who say it's too hard, too expensive, or too easy. The world is struggling to take the steps needed to resolve global warming; national governments are wavering when leadership is demanded. The time has come for each person to take a stand and become a leader in the war against global warming with an Earth Charter sense of our ethical responsibilities bringing about the vital collaboration needed. ■PE

"We must realize when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more"
– Earth Charter

■ This article is abridged from the paper "Winning the Struggle Against Global Warming – What will it take?" published in 2006 for the Earth Charter International Council by Brendan Mackey, professor of environmental science at The Australian National University, and Song Li, works for the World Bank Group. Abridged by editor KW for *Pacific Ecologist*.

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