

Press Release No. 84/2009

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Joint press release by UBA, PIK, WBGU and WI

Countdown to Copenhagen

UN Climate Change Conference mustn't lose sight of climate change

Berlin, 20 November 2009. Shortly before the start of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the voices of the Federal government's key climate and policy consultants are pressing for a successful outcome to the conference. The effects of climate change have been more tangible than predicted just a few years ago. Mankind needs an ambitious follow-up treaty to Kyoto that defines clear and binding greenhouse gas mitigation goals. Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency, said, "In addition to bailouts for banks or automobile manufacturers, the world needs a safety net for the global climate. The outcome of Copenhagen must be more than mere statements of intention. I am confident that this will happen given the appropriate political will; although stock will be taken on the final day of the conference, agreement is possible until then. Copenhagen must determine all the key elements of a treaty—and it must be contractual, non-negotiable and scientifically founded. Lazy compromises must not be allowed, for mankind can not cope with the ecological, economic and social consequences of a climate system gone off course. Therefore, we mustn't delay again in Copenhagen. The climate crisis will pay no mind to our failure to stick to a schedule!"

Current trends in many of the components of the climate system are either at the top or exceed the range of projections made by the IPCC Climate Council in 2007. This applies in particular to the world-wide increase in emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂). The impact of the financial crisis will not alter this development. However, further accumulation of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere diminishes the chances of containing warming at a controllable level. "Scientific indications that mankind is moving dangerously close to a critical tipping points in the climate system are becoming more frequent, even if global warming remains under two degrees Celsius. Policymakers must finally take responsibility in Copenhagen and put the brakes on the risk of dangerous climate change. Anything else is tantamount to a declaration of political bankruptcy", said Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

The latest research shows that there is only a limited budget of CO₂ emissions still available to mankind if the critical two-degree celsius temperature rise over the pre-industrial age level is not be exceeded. If the two-degree goal is to have a two-thirds chance, then only 750 billion tonnes more of CO₂ total from fossil sources may land in the atmosphere. Assuming today's

level of emissions, this budget would be depleted in just 25 years. In terms of reduction goals, global emissions of greenhouse gases would have to be more than halved by 2050, based on 1990 levels. Moreover, industrialised countries would be called upon to lower their emissions by least 80 percent. These goals can realistically only be achieved if there is a turnaround in global greenhouse gas emissions before 2020. Even if emissions should decline after 2015, it would require a reduction rate of five percent per year. To compare: the Kyoto Protocol required a reduction by the industrialised nations on the same scale, yet within twenty years' time.

Altogether, unambitious national emission mitigation plans would not amount to staying within the two-degree limit. "An upper limit that acts as guidance should be agreed whereby the balance of total carbon dioxide emissions still available up until 2050 is determined, and which is distributed fairly and proportionately according to population among individual countries", said Dirk Messner, Vice Chair of the German Advisory Council on Global Change to the German Federal Government. "The resolution of token goals must be avoided in Copenhagen at all costs", continued Messner.

"And time is of the essence. It is still possible to set the right course, and the technology is on hand", said Manfred Fischedick, Vice President and provisional head of the Wuppertal Institute, and added, "the consistent expansion of renewable energies and tapping energy efficiency potential globally and nationally can achieve the desired mitigation targets." Many studies have irrefutably proven that effective climate protection, coupled with immediate action, is tolerable for national economies. These studies include one published by four European research institutes ("RECIPE") and the World Energy Outlook 2009 by the International Energy Agency. Germany stands to benefit enormously as a location of innovation and technology. Fischedick went on to say, "That is why we must develop the blueprints for a sustainable and eco-friendly industrialised society that is connected with a process of transformation towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles." Developing the necessary momentum for this could also mean that the EU would have to go it alone should negotiations fail, nevertheless implementing its stated goal--heretofore hinged on the commitments of other countries- of reducing emissions by 30 percent over 1990 levels. This is also likely in light of the climate economy calculations made, which clearly indicate that Europe stands to gain from its pioneering role on account of its low climate protection costs, even if other countries only follow suit at a later date.

Dessau-Roßlau, 20 November 2009

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