

UN Climate Conference in Durban: Joint press release from the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA) and the German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU)

Act and negotiate in Durban

German government's climate advisors pin their hopes on UN climate talks - and recommend "progressive alliances" to boost climate protection

There will be no "all clear" for the climate: global emissions of greenhouse gases have reached another new all-time high – never in the history of mankind has so much CO₂ from fossil fuels been released into the atmosphere as in 2010. A major political effort will be needed at the UN Climate Conference in Durban if effective rules to curb emissions are to be agreed. The Kyoto Protocol, the only international agreement to date that sets binding emissions reduction targets, is due to expire in 2012. Key emitters such as the USA never signed the Protocol. Leading climate advisors for the German federal government insist, however, that the UN climate process is vital: a binding agreement under the aegis of the United Nations is the only way to manage climate change. This is the key message of high-level representatives of the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA), the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), the German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU) and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) at a joint press conference held prior to the start of the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Durban, South Africa.

In parallel, the EU should immediately step up its cooperation with other states willing to embark upon a rapid transition to a low-carbon economy. Such progressive alliances will be essential to exert sufficient political leverage to convince climate laggards of the need to act in unison. The EU should further lead by example, bringing to Durban a commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2020. This will require binding energy efficiency standards and further binding targets for the expansion of renewable energies.

"We must use Durban to set the course for a rapid reversal of the global greenhouse emissions trend. To that end, we must move towards a new, comprehensive and binding climate change mitigation agreement in order that mandatory climate goals are in place worldwide post-2012," said **Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA)**. "Travelling that road will be a lengthy and difficult process. Yet it will be vital to stabilise the concentration of

greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in order to keep the global mean temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. That goal can only be met by taking bold steps", Flasbarth continued. "That is why the Cancún agreements must be implemented quickly now. Starting points are already at hand: forest conservation in developing countries, the conversion of energy systems and the re-direction of investment into low-carbon infrastructures. It will be essential to achieve a seamless transition from the currently applicable Kyoto Protocol to a new and comprehensive climate treaty."

Dirk Messner, Vice Chair of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) stressed: "There is a real risk that the world climate conference descends into directionless routine. This makes it so important to aim for ambitious outcomes in Durban. For instance, agreeing when the emissions trend reversal is to be achieved would give a strong signal." Messner stressed the importance of accelerating the transition to low-carbon economies: "The global energy system can be transformed so that a 2 degree Celsius limit is possible. Investment in climate change mitigation will pay for itself in the long term in industrialised and developing countries alike. It is becoming increasingly clear that the crisis in the financial markets and the climate crisis can only be solved together. Sustainable growth, sustainable financial systems and the transition to a global low-carbon world economy are all part of the same equation."

"Anyone who accepts the two degree target, and the international community maintains that it does, must recognise that this target also represents a fixed upper limit for the emission of greenhouse gases," says **Wolfgang Lucht from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)**. "Based on this there is no way that the existing commitments will be adequate for a reduction in emissions. If there were to be no change in these, we could expect increasingly drastic consequences of climate change across the world. A rise in sea levels, far-reaching changes to ecosystems and a fall in agricultural productivity in important regions can all be prevented with effective climate change mitigation measures. It would make sense for the international community to set and allocate emission volumes for every decade until 2050."

Martin Faulstich, Chair of the German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU) added: "In Europe's case a secure electricity supply based entirely on renewable energies is technically feasible and the cheapest option in the long term. That is why the EU should lead by example. It is important to commit ourselves to a 30% emissions reduction target, binding energy efficiency standards and a further timetable for the expansion of renewable energies by 2030. Making progress in climate change mitigation brings benefits as well." The initial high investment in renewable energies triggers innovations, is an effective countermeasure to the looming recession in Europe and furthermore avoids later energy costs and costs to the environment.

Parties in Durban will also negotiate on the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol with new targets for the period after 2012. Only a few of the industrialised nations have indicated that they are already willing to accept fresh post-2012 commitments at the Durban conference. Nonetheless, the political significance of the Protocol must not be underestimated. Many states have already set voluntarily their own targets for limiting emissions and have introduced measures to implement them, but all of these together are not enough to prevent a rise in temperature of more than 2°C. The WBGU has made it clear that to remain within this limit not more than 750 billion tonnes of CO₂ from fossil fuel sources should be emitted by the middle of the century. That is why it is crucial that, in order to remain within the two degree Celsius limit, the emissions

reductions offered voluntarily by all states have to be raised as well. At the end of the day, however, there is no alternative to a legally binding, sufficiently ambitious agreement which includes all countries. Every delay in efforts to protect the climate involves the risk that the inescapable long-term emissions reductions will only be achieved at high financial cost and with considerable technical difficulty.

Progressive climate change mitigation must also be based on new alliances and mitigation instruments such as the introduction of regional emissions trading schemes. They demonstrate that states can implement ambitious climate protection strategies and that low-carbon development is possible without any significant loss of prosperity.

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