



## Appeal for Urgent Action on Climate Change

11 June, 2012, Geneva, Switzerland

*President Mikhail S. Gorbachev has convened a high-level Task Force to stimulate an urgent and profound international response to the increasing risks and threats of climate change. The Task Force brings together scientists, practitioners and experts from developed and developing countries to focus attention on the crucial issue of climate change within a broad economic, social and political context. Institutional support for the Task Force is provided by Green Cross International. A detailed Statement “Action to Face the Urgent Realities of Climate Change” that sets out the scientific and expert analysis supporting this Appeal was prepared by a number of international leaders, experts and organizations, and will be launched on June 18, in Rio de Janeiro. The Statement summarizes the scientifically-verifiable realities and risks of climate change and the benefits of early action to secure a stable climate and a viable global environment.<sup>i</sup>*

The impacts of climate change are intensifying across the world: unprecedented temperatures, glacier melt, changing rainfall patterns, droughts, floods, storms, fires and widening desertification are degrading the fragile ecosystems of the planet. They are devastating the lives and livelihoods of millions of people today and undermining the prospects for progress, stability and peace in the future.

The destabilization of the world’s climate will affect the security and lives of all peoples, rich and poor. But the vast majority of those who are suffering the most bear no responsibility for its cause. Basic principles of self-preservation, justice and human rights demand immediate action to avert the risks of irreversible climate change, to mitigate the impacts of climate destabilization on the poor and vulnerable and to assist them in adapting to those climate-driven changes which are now inevitable.

The alarming effects being observed today across the world are the result of the rise of only 0.8°C in global average temperature above pre-industrial levels. But humanity is currently generating CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at a rate which could cause an average rise of over 6°C by 2100 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). This would imply double this increase in polar-regions and would have dramatic consequences for the climate, for food and water security, for the temperature, level and acidification of the oceans and for the survival of the vital web of ecosystems which are the life-support systems of humanity.

It is increasingly recognized that we do not simply face a process of gradual atmospheric warming but that we run the risk of sudden, non-linear changes in the climate systems of the planet with unforeseeable consequences. Simple prudence demands that precautionary action be taken now. To continue on the present “business as usual” course would have devastating consequences. In the vital interests of both present and future generations we must cut emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere drastically and quickly to preserve a stable climate and a viable environment.

**We, the Members and Associates of the Climate Change Task Force appeal to leaders across the world in all walks of life to face their historic responsibilities by taking strong, urgent and concerted action to face the realities of climate change and to avert its potentially devastating consequences. In a spirit of international solidarity, we call on them to engage public support in defining and implementing a vision and strategy for human progress that is sustainable, inclusive and just.**

We face a world emergency that now demands transformative, radical action on a global scale within a clear and predictable framework of governmental policies. Yet, despite many government statements acknowledging this need, the current global situation can be summarized by three facts:

- (i) Far from declining, global emissions continue to rise at an alarming rate - by 5.9% in 2010 and cumulatively by 49% since 1990 (International Energy Agency);
- (ii) The risks of destabilizing the climate are increasing; we may be approaching a point of no return and an irreversible destabilization of the climate;

- (iii) Multilateral efforts to preserve a stable climate and a safe future are proving to be slow and inadequate in relation to the scale and urgency of the challenges. They are failing to achieve action sufficient to avert the risks of catastrophic climate change.

The targets of the present negotiations for cuts in emissions are too little, too late. We must make structural and behavioral changes to shift the trajectory of consumption-driven economic growth and human development onto a sustainable, low-carbon course so as to reconcile the welfare of a growing world population with the real potentials and limits of nature. Effective action to avert the destabilization of the climate is in fact, a pre-condition for successful progress towards sustainable world development – which will be the focus of discussions at the “Rio+20” UN Conference on Sustainable Development, in June 2012. We must position climate change in the wider context of sustainable economic and social development and identify and act on its underlying causes which are rooted in our present values and consequent social and economic choices and actions. In particular, we must break our addiction to the profligate use of fossil fuels on which our modern economies and agricultural sectors are based if we are to preserve a stable climate.

It is widely acknowledged that the current mitigation targets of the Cancun and Durban agreements are far from what is required to limit global average temperature rise to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Current mitigation and energy policies will lead to irreversible and potentially catastrophic climate change (IEA, 2011). The action currently pledged could lead to a global average temperature rise of 5°C (Rogelj et al., 2010). Inertia in energy infrastructure is a major hurdle in reaching higher mitigation targets. The long economic timeframe of energy infrastructure means that investments made today will impact the levels of mitigation possible 30 years down the line. According to analysis by the IEA (2011), if we wish to limit atmospheric greenhouse gas levels to 450 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e (CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent), internationally coordinated action must be taken to halt the buildup of new fossil fuel infrastructure while increasing the efficiency of existing infrastructure and where possible speeding up investment in renewable energy solutions. If action is not taken, by 2017 all permissible emissions within a 450 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e scenario would come from energy infrastructure that has already been built. Consequently all new energy infrastructure after 2017 would need to be zero-carbon. Alternatively, emitting infrastructure would need to be retired before the end of its economic lifetime, an action that is potentially very costly and politically difficult (IEA, 2011).

Clearly rapid action is required to prevent this scenario from unfolding. Humanity has enormous capabilities of creativity, technological potentials and organization which could be mobilized to manage the threats of climate change and respect the realities of the natural world. This would create a myriad of positive opportunities to generate the new ideas, new policies and new partnerships needed to overcome the present economic crisis by reorienting and restructuring economies onto a more sustainable, resource-efficient and inclusive path and generating new economic activities and employment. Those who act early are already benefiting: those who fail to act – whether countries or corporations – are falling behind.

We need to approach the crisis from a proactive, positive perspective, recognizing that if all participants contribute to meeting the global de-carbonization challenge, this will provide benefits, opportunities and security to all. The changes required will demand vision and courage. Civil society and the general public must be properly informed about the realities and risks of climate change and mobilized to overcome the obstruction of the powerful interests vested in the present system which are determined to resist change.

The world community of nations must address the issue of climate as a truly global, systemic challenge which demands precautionary action, solidarity and long-term commitment. If an international climate agreement is to have legitimacy, it must adopt a values-based approach to development, centered on justice, inclusion and sustainability. It must engage not only the major emitters but also those countries and groups within society which are most immediately affected today by the consequences of climate change. And it must recognize the rights and aspirations of the young people and the future generations who will have to face these immense challenges.

Fortunately, many countries, cities, communities and corporations across the world are pursuing rigorous and comprehensive plans to limit their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. They are demonstrating in practice not only that it is possible to achieve this goal without reducing economic growth but also that reducing emissions and improving energy and resource efficiency will generate many opportunities and contribute to the welfare and health of citizens and to competitiveness and employment. Climate action is in fact a condition for

meeting human needs and building the secure, innovative and sustainable societies of the future.

Leaders and policy-makers should actively promote innovative solutions and partnerships across all sectors – from agriculture to energy production to transport to buildings – which can help to decouple advances in human development and wellbeing from rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Fundamental to achieving this will be major increases in resource productivity, including far greater energy efficiency, to break the present linkages between economic growth, resource use and environmental degradation. Experience in key countries, cities and corporations already shows that the emissions driving climate change can be sharply reduced and that energy and resource efficiency can be substantially increased at acceptable cost, and with major benefits. The on-going economic crisis should be a wake-up call providing greater impetus for change, not an excuse for further delay. There are four key areas to focus on: 1) Raising mitigation ambition and early action; 2) Incorporating carbon-pricing mechanisms globally; 3) Promoting climate leadership alliances; 4) Climate finance and technology transfer.

Several decades of experience show that the risks and threats of climate change cannot be averted by incremental change and a reliance on market forces and voluntary measures alone. The future cannot be secured through interminable negotiations that only reach agreement on the lowest common denominator. Those States which are ready and willing to seize the opportunities and to make the transformations needed to build a sustainable future should take the lead, if necessary leaving the unwilling behind to cling to the failing and inadequate ideas of the past.

In a speech to the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, the Secretary General urged global leaders “to use every ounce of your experience, skills and influence to advance action on climate change. Help us defend the science that shows we are destabilizing our climate and stretching our planetary boundaries to a dangerous degree. Help us to identify the new alliances – among public officials, business, civil society and faith communities – that will make sustainability the rallying point for action in the 21st Century.”

**We, the Climate Change Task Force members and Associates, share the views of President Gorbachev:**

**“Climate change is only the tip of the systemic crisis we face. It poses existential threats to global stability and security that can shake the foundations of modern civilization. The biggest challenge of the next decade will therefore be to counter this systemic crisis with comprehensive solutions based on scientific knowledge focused directly on the causes and impacts of climate change while overcoming the pressures of various vested interests and of business-as usual politics.**

**The outcomes are not predetermined. They will depend both on events and on our purposeful actions. And change must start with leadership, whether in politics, business, science or civil society. The science, including the science of climate change, is clear. Civil society is on board. The onus is now on government and business leaders to act.”**

**We call on leaders across the world, individually and collectively, to consider and to act on the lines of action presented in our Statement. In this way they will not only avert the threats of dangerous climate change but also secure the future of humanity by moving the world economy onto a sustainable and equitable path, enabling present and succeeding generations to attain a healthier, safer and more prosperous future. We have the opportunity, the knowledge and the capabilities. The scale of the challenge is clear: we call on leaders to act.**

---

<sup>i</sup> **The Statement of the Climate Change Task Force elaborates on the following proposed lines of action to:**

- 1. Implement urgent and deep cuts in emissions**
- 2. Preserve natural capital and restore ecosystems**
- 3. Undertake rapid adaptation to the inevitable impacts of climate change**

- 
- 4. Strengthen capacities and resilience**
  - 5. Develop radical new solutions**
  - 6. Reorient economies on to a sustainable path**
  - 7. Mobilize the essential financial resources**