



## Citizens' Guide to a Climate Change Plan

Climate change is the most urgent issue challenging humankind. The latest scientific findings indicate that global warming is progressing much more rapidly than predicted even a few years ago. Related issues such as water scarcity, growing dead zones in the oceans, looming energy crises, food shortages and general resource depletion are alarming developments pointing to additional challenges ahead. Urgent action is now critical.

The current Government of Canada is acting irresponsibly, working to weaken targets urged by more committed nations at international meetings and with no credible strategy to achieve even the inadequate targets they have set nationally.

In addition, the Government of Canada is committed to maintaining tar sands subsidies and hopes to see growth in tar sands exploration. Our government is cheered on by the current Opposition leader, Michael Ignatieff, who calls support for the tar sands an issue of national unity. No party has an adequate platform to confront the magnitude of the impending crisis.

Fossil fuels are non renewable. Humanity will have to learn to live without fossil fuels. It is far better to make the switch to renewable energy as soon as possible to limit the environmental damage caused by carbon emissions. We have no right to claim all the available fossil fuel energy for ourselves, and to leave a wrecked land, depleted resources and extinct species in our wake.

We need a visionary plan, one that puts the interests of all the Earth's inhabitants, and especially future generations, ahead of consumer convenience and oil company profits.

**Economic costs** of climate change include:

- ★ Damage to buildings and infrastructure from extreme events and natural disturbances
- ★ Impacts on the production and prices of, and the demand for, goods and services
- ★ Costs related to the impacts on public safety, health and welfare of populations
- ★ Impacts resulting from hydrological changes in lakes and streams

The **human costs** include:

- ★ Environmental refugees from areas that will be overwhelmed by flooding, and the collapse of local agriculture due to droughts etc.
- ★ Probable warfare due to the migration of displaced populations into other regions
- ★ Increased health problems due to many factors including: migration of pathogen carriers such as:

mosquitos, ticks; frequent heat-waves; lack of adequate food; lack of potable water.

According to the World Health Organization, deaths from global heating in Africa have already begun. There are environmental refugees from rising waters in Bay of Bengal. In the Canadian north, polar bears are in decline and the livelihood of traditional Inuit hunters who depend upon them threatened. Higher temperatures in southern Canada have already caused damage by insect infestations in forests. But the damage is expected to be worse and occur sooner in the countries that have caused the least greenhouse gases. We in Canada, a major carbon emitter, are relatively sheltered from the damage.

## The Elements of a Good Climate Strategy

### Serious targets for greenhouse gas reductions.

Canada must negotiate internationally in good faith, agreeing to the greenhouse gas reductions dictated by scientific necessity, rather than those demanded by short-term political expedience. At all times, the demands of the best available science must be met.

At the time of writing, international political consensus sets the necessary emissions reductions targets for the post-Kyoto period at 25-40% below 1990 emissions levels by 2020 for developed countries such as Canada. This target may well be inadequate, as the emerging scientific consensus suggests that we will actually have to draw down atmospheric carbon levels to below 350 ppm (parts per million) from their current levels of 390 ppm. Total de-carbonization of our economy must be the ultimate goal, with at least 80% reductions below 1990 levels absolutely necessary by 2050, and possibly as early as 2030.

The federal government must work with provincial, territorial, municipal and First Nations governments, along with industry, media, faith communities and leaders in such sectors as health, education, arts, sports and recreation to implement a workable plan to meet the necessary targets.

Long before a long-term plan is negotiated with all levels of government, a great deal of work can and must be done by individuals and by municipal, provincial and federal governments. Waiting for a plan must not be an excuse for delays. Time is short.

A great deal of conservation and efficiency can be implemented at a profit. It is obvious that greater



public transit infrastructure will be necessary and that investments will need to be made into renewable generation. All these changes need to begin now.

A concerted plan to replace the use of fossil fuels Sustainable, carbon-neutral alternatives to fossil fuels must be developed. Solar, wind, tide and, above all, increased energy efficiency are key components. Carbon sequestration may prove to be useful in the future but cannot be relied on now. We must quickly use those tools at our disposal rather than relying on technologies not yet developed.

The reduction plan should include:

- ★ Legislation and regulation e.g. dramatically improved building codes and fuel efficiency standards for vehicles.
- ★ A carbon tax (revenue neutral and with safeguards to protect low-income Canadians.)
- ★ An economy-wide carbon market, with stringent caps on emissions. This market should not reward large emitters by giving them larger allowances based on past emissions.
- ★ Government procurement policies to help bring down the cost of more efficient alternatives.

### **Moratoria**

Moratoria are needed on particular high carbon emissions practices. No new projects in the tar sands should be permitted. No more coal plants should ever be built. New airport runways are not needed. We could also prohibit new highway construction, cheap flights, frequent flyer plans and inefficient vehicles.

### **Adaptation**

Because global heating and storms have already begun, and will continue even with strenuous emissions reductions, measures for adaptation are called for. However these must not be an excuse for not acting to mitigate climate change. Economists such as Nicholas Stern have demonstrated that the costs of adaptation are dramatically more expensive than mitigation costs would be.

### **Basic Political and Social Change**

Transition to a low-carbon society will require basic changes in our political, social and economic systems.

Electoral reform (proportional representation) would help. Sustainable business practices must be found as well. But the climate change plan should not wait for these broader changes.

What we do is shaped by how we think, and the concepts and images we use are in turn shaped by our own family upbringing, and later by educational institutions, the media, etc. Familiar concepts have

to be re-examined in the light of global heating, notably to distinguish the sustainable from the unsustainable, the renewable from the non-renewable.

In times of war people accept all kinds of sacrifices. If we agree that the climate crisis could cause at least as much damage, we will find and make the needed changes.

### **Starting the Process**

The Parliament of Canada and equivalent provincial, territorial and municipal bodies could start a process of consultation by holding "town hall meetings."

Broadcasters could do the equivalent in their media. Universities, colleges, professional associations, faith communities, First Nations, broadcasters, community centres, parents' groups, students and youth, not to complete the list, could all contribute.

Periods of social change require thinking about radically different alternatives (e.g. the salons of the 18th century Enlightenment, teach-ins and consciousness raising in the late 20th centuries). So must we meet, think and revision in the 21st century with our crisis.

The ozone crisis is a model: The world acted in time to meet the warnings about ozone depletion. Canada played a key role in promoting international measures, with the Montreal Protocol. The climate crisis poses even more of a challenge, requiring greater changes in our economy, politics and life in general than that required to address ozone layer depletion. Let's get on with it.

### **References**

George Monbiot, Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning, Canadian edition 2006.

Canadian Government papers:

\* Adaptation to Climate Change - [http://adaptation.nrcan.gc.ca/index\\_e.php](http://adaptation.nrcan.gc.ca/index_e.php)

\* "Human Health in a Changing Climate: A Canadian Assessment of Vulnerabilities and Adaptive Capacity" - <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/climat/eval/index-eng.php>

Lancet Article on Health Effects: Managing the Health effects of Climate Change - <http://www.thelancet.com/climate-change>

For further material on this guide see Backgrounder, A Citizens' Guide to a Climate Change Plan [http://www.justearth.net/resources\\_backgroundpaper](http://www.justearth.net/resources_backgroundpaper)