

# The time to deal with climate change is now

BY ED MILIBAND, CITIZEN SPECIAL JULY 3, 2009

A make-or-break moment for our planet is now only six months away. In Copenhagen this December, the world will try to find a deal on climate change -- and we have to succeed. Whether we do so cannot be left until the winter, and cannot be left to politicians alone. As part of our contribution and to open up debate, the British government is publishing our position for what the deal should include.

In some negotiations, the government's position can seem like a state secret. We're taking the opposite approach -- sending it to schools, putting it online, discussing it as much as we can -- because these climate change talks are not like any other negotiations in recent history. More than any other, they will affect everybody's lives. And, more than any other negotiations, governments might be the ones to sign the deal, but governments and people together will need to deliver it.

In making our case within Britain and to the world, we are guided by the science, experience and ethics.

The science tells us that the consequences of half-hearted action would be catastrophic: we must be ambitious. I have spoken to people in China who are battling the desert on both sides, as climate change makes their village an oasis in a growing sea of sand. We know that the proportion of very dry land across the world has already doubled since the 1970s, and half-hearted action could mean water shortages affecting between 75 and 220 million more people in Africa alone by 2020.

So, to be ambitious, not half-hearted, the test we set for the deal is whether we can limit climate change to two degrees, the threshold for the worst tipping points and irreversible damages. That means turning around the growth in global greenhouse gas emissions in this coming decade, not later. They must start to shrink instead of grow, and keeping on shrinking to reach at most half of their 1990 levels by 2050.

In Britain, we have already cut emissions by almost a quarter compared to 1990. We have already written our commitments into law to cut emissions further. National "carbon budgets" will cut emissions by a third of their 1990 level by 2020, and at least 80 per cent by 2050, and we are confronting the choices this commitment implies. Earlier this year, for example, I announced new proposals to forbid any new coal-fired power stations that don't capture and store a substantial proportion of their CO<sub>2</sub>.

We hope other countries will increase their ambition too. Many already have, but the truth is that the offers currently on the table are not enough.

Even if developed countries cut their emissions to zero today, the world would still breach two degrees unless developing countries also move from high-carbon growth to low-carbon growth, so an ambitious climate deal will have to involve action from everyone.

Experience, meanwhile, teaches us a separate lesson: that the deal must be not just ambitious but effective. Kyoto, the first climate change agreement, achieved many things but no one could claim that all countries lived up to their commitments. Not all the emission cuts that were promised were achieved. Not all the flows of finance to help the poorest countries ever reached their shores. Not all the actions that were taken were done so in the most effective way.

To be effective, the agreement at Copenhagen, what some have called Kyoto 2, needs robust monitoring and checking of what countries are doing. It needs to be effective in how cuts are achieved, by linking carbon markets between developed countries, so that each dollar of spending finds the place where it can have the biggest possible impact on emissions. For developing countries, a full carbon market will not be possible straight away but sector-by-sector trading systems can still mean we get more effective action, and more flows of finance to where it is needed.

And that brings up the third source of our lessons for the kind of deal we need: ethics, and the obligations that rich countries owe to the poorest. At the core of the debate is a fundamental moral question, concerning whether we see ourselves as neighbours and fellow people to citizens of other countries, and whether we care about the legacy we leave to our children. It is a question about whether we choose to preserve or break the bond that says the earth is held in trust by each generation for the next, and accept or walk away from our ability to transform the lives of others.

In the document Britain published, we want to live up to that moral challenge, so the deal we are looking for must be not just ambitious and effective but fair.

The global downturn has made budgets tight for many countries, not the least Britain, but Prime Minister Gordon Brown has a deep personal commitment to getting the right, fair finance to deal with climate change -- not instead of existing overseas aid, but as well as it.

This week, he urged countries to work on a global figure of around \$100 billion per year by 2020 to help developing countries, with new financial mechanisms to make it possible

And we have seen, in the last six months, how debate can be transformed. U.S. President Barack Obama has changed the game. China has upped its ambition and made clear it wants to find a deal. In the six months that follow, we have even further to travel and our need to speed up is urgent. The make-or-break moment is upon us. With a deal that is ambitious, effective, and fair, dangerous climate change can be stopped; with action by governments and citizens in every country, that deal can be found.

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and climate change.

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