

Climate Change and Global Poverty: A Statement of Principles

As the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently concluded, climate change is already creating devastating impacts for the world's poorest and most vulnerable people – especially those in developing countries – even though they are the least responsible for causing it. Those impacts will become all the more severe in the coming decades, and will sometimes even reverse the “development process” as a whole. Climate change is already a major driver of impoverishment and conflict around the world, but that fact has not yet been given the urgent attention it demands.

Over the past century, the United States and other wealthy countries have been and continue to be responsible for a disproportionate amount of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. With only five percent of the world's population, the United States emits about 25 percent of greenhouse gases generated by human activity. Over the course of history, its responsibility is even greater.

- ***All countries, including the United States, must act now to do their fair share to reduce their contributions to global warming.***

We believe that it is critical for the United States to endorse the goal of keeping global temperatures from rising more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels, a level that the scientific community has identified as a point beyond which dangerous and irreversible changes to the earth's climate are predicted to occur. In order to achieve this, global emissions must peak within the next decade, and emissions from the United States and other wealthy countries must be reduced by at least 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

- ***The United States has a responsibility to provide assistance to help developing countries adapt to the consequences of global warming.***

The United States must recognize its historic contributions to the adverse impacts of climate change on developing countries by pledging substantial new resources to those countries most affected. The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report found that “[e]ven the most stringent mitigation efforts cannot avoid further impacts of climate change in the next few decades, which makes adaptation essential, particularly in addressing near-term impacts.” The primary objectives of adaptation activities must be to build resilience and adaptive capacity in vulnerable, local communities; include consideration of climate change impacts in development planning; and address magnified disaster assistance and humanitarian relief needs.¹ Since climate change disproportionately affects poor

¹ The World Bank estimates that the annual cost of adaptation in developing countries is approximately \$10 to 40 billion, but this figure is now widely considered inadequate. New studies assess a more complete range of additional impact costs, including the costs of prioritizing climate change in policy

women, and given that women's knowledge, skills and participation have been critical to the survival of entire communities, governments should incorporate gender equality and women's participation in climate change initiatives.

A significant, stable and dedicated pool of new money will be needed to support forecasting, planning for and reducing the impacts of climate change on people and ecosystems. But these "adaptation funds" cannot and should not replace existing development funding commitments. In order for adaptation funds to achieve their greatest possible impact, the voices of those most affected and least responsible for climate change must be present in the design, implementation and evaluation of adaptation projects. In this spirit, the United States should acknowledge that the cost of providing adaptation assistance to the most vulnerable countries should be borne by the greatest contributors to climate change.

- ***The United States must work collaboratively with other nations to address climate change and the critical links between global warming and global poverty.***

In tandem with serious domestic action, the United States should commit to reengage in international negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including establishment of deeper mandatory commitments to reduce U.S. emissions.

- ***The United States must both shift to a more sustainable domestic energy path, as well as support other nations in their shift to a more sustainable energy and climate path.***

The United States should respect the right of developing countries to fight energy poverty without being forced to follow the unsustainable energy path that has created the problem of global warming. Dramatic action must be taken by the US to address global warming, but also to help create a global transition to a clean energy economy, thereby providing multiple opportunities for technological and financial innovation. This will not only help the environment and those affected by climate change, but will also create global economic opportunity.

In addition, the world's wealthiest countries should end domestic and international subsidies to oil and other fossil fuels and support the development of sustainable energy alternatives in developing countries. The United States and other wealthy countries should also provide some of the substantial resources needed by tropical nations to reduce their emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

planning, climate-proofing current investments, upgrading existing capital stock, and the costs of entirely new (unplanned) investments, on both the macro and community levels. These estimates suggest that climate adaptation in developing countries will likely cost at least \$50 billion annually -- and far more than that in the future if urgent measures to curtail global warming are not taken soon.

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