

December 18, 2009

Dear President Obama,

The world has had great expectations for your leadership in addressing climate change internationally, but to date there has been much disappointment. We understand you face a difficult political reality in the United States, but billions of people face the reality of flood, drought, famine, and climate-constrained development. Every country faces its own complex political circumstances, and those of the United States cannot be allowed to hold back the rest of the world.

We are writing to urgently ask you to reconsider the emission reduction target you have put forward for Copenhagen and instead offer a target that will return atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide to no more than 350 ppm and allow for no more than 1 to 1.5°C global temperature rise. A reduction by the United States of only 3 percent below 1990, contingent on greenhouse gas cuts by China and other developing countries, is scientifically unsound and deeply unjust. If other developed countries committed to longer term reductions that are no more ambitious than those you have pledged for the US¹, the rich world will end up consuming two-thirds of the carbon budget available for this century.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Africa is expected to warm at around 1.5 times the global average. In Copenhagen, leaders from Africa have made it clear that a temperature rise of 2 °C is suicide for the peoples of that continent. Yet the targets offered by developed countries won't even keep the world below a 2 degree global temperature rise. We echo the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance that this is, "a death sentence to literally millions of Africans. We fear for our mothers and fathers, our sisters and brothers – your uncles, aunts and cousins. Your policy on climate change threatens not only our families but also your own."

Rather than undermining constructive multilateralism, the U.S. should join the rest of the international community and ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Barring that, the U.S. should plug its emission reduction commitment into the special space designed for it under the Bali Action Plan - paragraph 1(b)(i) - to fulfill its obligations under the UN Climate Convention in a manner that is comparable to the commitments of other developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol. The failure of the US to take serious reduction commitments has instigated an abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol by developed countries, spurring a race to the bottom.

¹ The Obama Administration's stated reduction pathway is 17% below 2005 emission levels by 2020, 30% by 2025, 40% by 2030, and 83% by 2050. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/president-attend-copenhagen-climate-talks>). Assuming the same targets were adopted by all Annex 1 countries, this pathway consumes nearly 500 GtCO₂ out of a total available budget of 750 GtCO₂ for the world. On a per capita basis, this appropriates about eight times more atmospheric space for each Northerner compared to each Southerner.

The provision of public climate finance for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries is also fundamental to a just and effective outcome in Copenhagen. As the leader of the nation most responsible for causing the climate crisis, and as the world's wealthiest economy, the U.S. must pay its share of what the Africa Group is calling for from developed countries— at least 5 percent of GNP annually in the long term and US\$400 billion for fast track financing. Further, climate finance should be channeled through a new Global Climate Fund established under the authority of the UNFCCC. The World Bank and other existing international financial institutions should have no role in UNFCCC climate finance.

During your Nobel Lecture, you said “...the world must come together to confront climate change.” We ask that you move beyond rhetoric to meaningful action. More than 100 countries have called for reductions by developed countries of at least 45 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, no more than 1.5°C global temperature rise, and a return to 350 ppm. The United States should support nothing less.

Climate change is an extreme threat to world peace, and in many cases, entire peoples' survival. If ever there was a time for you to exert bold leadership, this is it. Last week you received the Nobel Peace Prize. Now, we call on you to earn it.

Thank you for your serious consideration of this life-or-death matter.

Sincerely,

Africa Action, USA
Alliance Sud, Switzerland.
Amazon Watch, USA
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Regenwald und Artenschutz, Germany
ASSOCIATION GREEN ALTERNATIVE, Georgia
ATTAC Hungary
Australian Climate Justice Program
Australian Orangutan Project
Bahrain Transparency
Baikal Environmental Wave, Russia
Canadians for Action on Climate Change
CENTER for a COMPETITIVE WASTE INDUSTRY, USA
Center for Biological Diversity, USA
Centre for Civil Society Environmental Justice Project, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa
Centre for Organisation Research and Education, India
Chesapeake Climate Action Network, USA
Children Education Society (CHESO), Tanzania
Christian Aid, UK

Climate SOS, USA
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, USA
Earth Circle Conservation & Recycling, USA
Earth Renewal Plan, USA
Europe External Policy Advisors
European Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace, Norway
Fluoride Action Network, USA
Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy, USA
Friends of the Earth International
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, USA
Global Exchange, USA
Global Recycling Council of the California Resource Recovery Association, USA
Global Witness, UK
Green Map System, USA
Greenpeace International
Haverhill Environmental League, USA
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, JPIC, USA
Hungarian Social Watch Coalition
JATAM/ Indonesian Civil Society Forum for Climate Justice – Indonesia
IBON Foundation, Philippines
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, USA
Institute for Social Ecology, USA
Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Uruguay
International Accountability Project, USA
International Forum on Globalization, USA
La'o Hamutuk, Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis
LDC Watch International CSO Alliance working on 49 UN defined LDCs, Nepal
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, USA
The Mexican Action Network on Free Trade
Mother Earth Foundation, Philippines
National Forum of Forest People & Forest Workers, India
Neighbors Against the Burner, USA
North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network, USA
Oil Change International, USA
One Earth Climate Action Group, USA
Pacific Environment, USA
Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition, New Zealand
PRRM Philippines
Practical Action, UK
Pro REGENWALD, Germany
Red Ambiental Loreana, Iquitos, Peruvian Amazon
Rural Reconstruction Nepal
Sindh Democratic Forum, Pakistan
Social Agenda Working Group, Thailand
Social Watch (international network)

Social Watch Philippines.
Solidarité, France
South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication-SAAPE, Nepal
Stree Mukti Sanghtana, India
Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, USA
Taiwan Environmental Protection Union
Tamalpais NatureWorks, USA
Tanzania Forest Conservation Group.
Third World Network
Tyneside East Timor Solidarity, Australia
Walhi Bali, Indonesia
West Papua Advocacy Team, USA
Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing, South Africa
Women's Rights Centre; Social Watch Suriname
Worldview-The Gambia
Yayasan Palung, Indonesia
350.org, USA

cc: Senator John F. Kerry