

MESSAGE FROM THE MAURICE STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL DIALOGUE IUCN, 1st AND 2nd JULY 2009

Introduction

On 1 and 2 July 2009, 100 leaders from around the world came together at the Headquarters of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Gland, Switzerland. They included a broad range from the early days of the international environment movement to key players in the twenties. They (see attached list) debated Climate Change and the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen this December.¹

Urgency

The participants believe that there are critical linkages between poverty and environment, climate change and development. In 2009, the world is facing such severe crises as a result of these combinations that we should be talking about a paradigm shift in tackling Climate Change as a solution.

The discussions recognized the importance of the year 2009 for international climate change policy, but also stressed that we need to be thinking beyond the end of this year. One of the key issues raised was: “what will we do on 1 January 2010?”, and the key players at the Copenhagen Summit must “move from words to action” - urgency is key.

Copenhagen will succeed or fail on political will. It needs to be focused on a long-term vision and related mechanisms, not on immediate details. A detailed agreement with numbers and figures can be defined later.

2010 is the year of Biodiversity. In October 2010 there will be a Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan. Like Copenhagen, this gathering needs to be about action, not analysis. The same need for concrete action applies to the possibility of a Rio+20 conference and IUCN’s World Conservation Congress in 2012 and the 2015 review of the Millennium Development Goals. So many meetings, so much talk. We may be slipping past the point of no return. We cannot risk that.

Political realities

The US administration is back at the negotiation table, after a long period of silence and deliberate non-participation. The political will of the Obama Government has been shown by the recent passing of the Waxman-Markey Climate Change Bill in the US House of Representatives. However, the victory was fragile and there is an urgent need to win strong national support, both in the US Senate and by the public at large.

¹ 15th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

China and India are introducing national legislation that is, in some cases, more stringent than similar regulations in Europe or the USA. Legislation to curb emissions, promotion of public transport, green architecture and construction are all areas where the emerging economies of China and India seem to be further advanced than the governments of many OECD countries

Finding solutions

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) can be a deployable, cost-effective means to reduce greenhouse emissions. The additional benefits of the conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of carbon stocks were also acknowledged (this is generally described as REDD+), as this can provide benefits to adaptation and livelihoods, as well as conserving biodiversity. The potential of both funds and markets should be harnessed to finance REDD+.

Ecosystems can help us adapt to the effects of climate change. Ecosystem-based adaptation examples include restoring mangrove forests and coral reefs to protect against storm surges, regenerating floodplains to deal with excess river flows and sustainable agriculture to maintain local food supplies. Such solutions are accessible, cost-effective. These are immediate solutions that can be deployed by local communities to increase their resilience in the face of climate change.

Political will is needed to promote investments in ecosystem based adaptation solutions. The conservation community must work with politicians, business leaders and the general public to increase understanding and awareness on the concept and its relevance to human livelihoods.

Energy futures

Energy efficiency is the number one priority to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. A range of complementary drivers from regulation and financing and matching incentives to research and innovation in new materials are required.

Access to relevant and up-to-date information about all energy sources and alternative technologies is needed. Reliable renewable energy sources are now technically available. They are technically advanced and suited to broad commercial distribution. They should be made accessible and affordable to the public, accompanied by continuous investment in innovation for new energy technologies.

Political will is required to help push through necessary energy reforms and investments. This will be simplified by the creation of jobs through renewable technology.

Institutions and governance

New governance structures are needed, rejecting both ‘entitlement’ of funds and old-fashioned aid approaches. Partner countries should be in the driving seat, but certain mechanisms for mutual-accountability are required. Approaches could include the Compact Approach² as proposed by the UK or delivering development assistance through budget support as adopted by many OECD countries.

In order to make headway with the critical issues of climate change and development, “silo-approaches” must be abandoned. Integration and inter-sector collaboration is urgently needed. This should be done at global, national and local level, but only political will can make this happen.

Imagination and innovation is needed to develop alternative approaches and new instruments, such as Sustainable Drawing Rights over common goods; payments for maintenance and improvements of ecosystem services; rewards for non-emissions and penalties in line with the ‘polluter-pays-principle’.

Funding

Financing climate change must be a part of traditional development funding. Adaptation to the effects of climate change in the developing world is all about poverty reduction, but this has not been sufficiently recognized in the climate change negotiation process.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) therefore needs to be increased, and climate funding should be added to the 0.7% Gross National Income goal for ODA. Development aid should focus on building capacity and strengthening resilience, at national and sub-national level of the partner country.

Money should be used for transformation, better integration and the breaking of the traditional silo approach. It should focus on supporting locally driven action through the subsidiarity principle³, creation and support to Public-Private-Civil society partnerships and cross-country sharing of lessons learned. Funds should also be directed towards safeguarding ecosystems, the goods and services they provide.

² The UK “Compact Approach” would be based around three strands:

- a) An international compact – agreement to the balance of resources between adaptation and mitigation, and the financial needs of different nations.
- b) A national compact – national plans drawn up by each country, reflecting their own priorities, reviewed and reported on internationally to ensure every country is both ambitious and credible.
- c) And a delivery compact – money should flow directly into central budgets, but only with the assurance of robust governance and transparency.

³ The subsidiarity principle is intended to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen and that constant checks are made as to whether action at global or regional level is justified in the light of the possibilities available at national or local level.

Awareness, communication and education

Scientists have a lot of information on climate change and its impacts. However, politicians and the general public have not yet accepted that they need to make certain lifestyle sacrifices. Effective political and public policy actions tend to follow rather than lead the change in consumer attitudes. Communications programmes that focus on influencing cultural behavior are key to educational efforts to influence policy decisions.

Scientists, conservationists and climate change experts struggle at getting the message out in a clear, coherent and effective way. They need partners from corporations and agencies that have proven skills in changing consumer culture and behavior

Education and awareness should be focused on key groups including youth. In order to effectively reach out to them, web-based instruments should be used like Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, the radio, mobile phones, video games, virtual marches, etc.

The participants from around the world who were present at the Gland meeting believe that action is needed now and are committed to be involved in practical ways to bring about the changes needed.