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dynamics

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The warming of the earth's climate system is unequivocal. According to the Fourth Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), most of the observed increase in global averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations. Rising temperatures in the Arctic have caused a decline of 2.7 percent of sea ice since 1978. Elsewhere, mountain glaciers and snow cover are retreating. A third of the glacier surface in Bolivia and Peru, for example, has disappeared since the seventies. Climate change is one of the most critical global challenges of our time: its effects range from agricultural impacts and endangered water and food security to sea-level rise and the spread of vector-borne diseases.

While the ice continues to melt, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is facing significant difficulties on agreeing on what needs to be done once the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires after 2012. International discussions to build a long-term climate regime are constrained by a fundamental disagreement on how to move forward. It is difficult to generalize the position of different groups of Parties, as national circumstances relating to global warming vary widely. In essence, developing countries suffer most of the negative climate-related impacts but fear that emission limitations could compromise their economic development. On the other hand, industrialized countries, driven by competitiveness concerns, are reluctant to agree to taking on new emission reduction commitments without any move from developing ones.

Climate change is a global problem and, as such, needs a global response which embraces the interests and needs of all countries. In its absence, individual actions face the risk of fragmentation and limited effectiveness. The international community needs a common and long-term agreement to address climate change, and a consensus on the direction that such a framework should take. The need for such a multilateral response is the main reason why the climate change debate within the United Nations must be revived.

More than ten years of diplomacy have delivered a mature process and have put in place the carbon market, which is one of the most powerful tools for international environmental policy. Negotiations on a future climate regime need to be reinvigorated during 2007, with a view to avoiding any gaps in the action to combat climate change, and in order to provide the carbon market with political certainty. The international community should seek the involvement of economic and financial decision makers, since emerging concerns with energy security and economic growth are closely linked to actions to combat global warming. To build confidence, Parties could set boundaries of their deliberations by agreeing on important elements of consensus in the form of principles. These could include:

- * The need for a long-term global response in line with the latest scientific findings and compatible with private sector long-term investment planning strategies;
- * The importance of industrialized countries continuing to take the lead by substantially reducing their emissions, given their historic responsibility and their economic power and capabilities;

- * Further engagement of developing countries, in particular major emitters;
- * The requirement that developing countries get incentives to limit their emissions and assistance to adapt to the impacts of climate change, so as to safeguard socio-economic development and poverty eradication; and
- * Full flexibility in the carbon market to ensure the most cost-effective implementation and to mobilize the resources needed to provide incentives to developing countries.

It is time to change the dynamics of the UNFCCC process and to turn December's Conference of the Parties in Bali into the beginning of a new phase in the politics of climate change. The debate on whether or not to embark on new negotiations needs to be replaced by a substantial discussion on how Parties envisage the Convention in the longer term.

The first and most important task is to bring together the discussions that will shape a future climate regime. These include, primarily, negotiations on further commitments for industrialized countries (currently the responsibility of an ad hoc working group under the Kyoto Protocol) and a broader discussion on long-term cooperative action to address climate change, taking place in the form of a dialogue under the UNFCCC. This non-binding and open dialogue has enabled Parties to take a broader look at the Convention by considering four thematic areas: advancing development goals in a sustainable way; addressing action on adaptation; realizing the full potential of technologies; and realising the full potential of market-based opportunities.

This broader perspective has provided the opportunity for countries to identify the essential building blocks for a future regime. Technology, for example, lies at the core of any response to climate change as it provides the physical means to address it. The Convention could, for example, strengthen its activities on technology deployment and transfer, and look into establishing agreements and partnerships for technology research and development. Then, adaptation must be seen as a priority since it is not feasible entirely to prevent the impacts of climate change. It is, therefore, essential to generate mechanisms to support and strengthen the processes of assessment of vulnerability and adaptation — and of mainstreaming adaptation into development planning. Valuable knowledge for this task has been already produced under the Nairobi Work Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation. Finally, the implementation of the Convention relies upon sustainable, sufficient and predictable financial resources. Parties will embark on a comprehensive assessment of financial flows required to address all aspects of climate change, with an aim of making such resources available.

What happens during 2007 at the political level is crucial for the future. As time passes, additional initiatives to address specific aspects of global warming are likely to join those in place. It is the international community's responsibility to lead these initiatives into common action and to avoid their fragmentation. Governments ought to devote substantial efforts to move international politics towards this end. The politics of climate change must heat up if the world's ice is to remain frozen. 