

Foreword

Addiction is a terrible thing. It consumes and controls us, makes us deny important truths and blinds us to the consequences of our actions. Our society is in the grip of a dangerous greenhouse gas habit.

Coal and oil paved the way for the developed world's industrial progress. Fast-developing countries are now taking the same path in search of equal living standards. Meanwhile, in the least developed countries, even less sustainable energy sources, such as charcoal, remain the only available option for the poor.

Our dependence on carbon-based energy has caused a significant build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Last year, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) put the final nail in the coffin of global warming skeptics. We know that climate change is happening, and we know that carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases that we emit are the cause.

We don't just burn carbon in the form of fossil fuels. Throughout the tropics, valuable forests are being felled for timber and making paper, for pasture and arable land and, increasingly, for plantations to supply a growing demand for biofuels. This further manifestation of our greenhouse gas habit is not only releasing vast amounts of CO₂, it is destroying a valuable resource for absorbing atmospheric CO₂, further contributing to climate change.

The environmental, economic and political implications of global warming are profound. Ecosystems – from mountain to ocean, from the Poles to the tropics – are undergoing rapid change. Low-lying cities face inundation,

fertile lands are turning to desert, and weather patterns are becoming ever more unpredictable.

The cost will be borne by all. The poor will be hardest hit by weather-related disasters and by soaring price inflation for staple foods, but even the richest nations face the prospect of economic recession and a world in conflict over diminishing resources. Mitigating climate change, eradicating poverty and promoting economic and political stability all demand the same solution: we must kick the carbon habit.

Kicking the habit is the theme of this book. Written in easy to understand language, but based on the most up-to-date science and policy, it is a guide for governments, organizations small and large, businesses and individuals who want to embark on the path to climate neutrality.

From reducing consumption and increasing energy efficiency, to offsetting emissions via the multitude of carbon trading schemes – including the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism – the opportunities are plentiful.

The fundamental message of “Kick the Habit – A UN Guide to Climate Neutrality” is that we are all part of the solution. Whether you are an individual, a business, an organization or a government, there are many steps you can take to reduce your climate footprint. It is a message we all must take to heart.

Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations