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Climate Chancellor with Empty Hands

ECO is looking forward to Angela Merkel's visit to COP23 today. With negotiations on a new government in Berlin at a decisive point, the German Chancellor cannot stay long in Bonn. What message will the so-called "climate Chancellor" bring to the delegates and the world watching the conference? Reading leaked papers from the current negotiations in Berlin, ECO is worried that Merkel will come to Bonn with empty hands. It's not about money this time. ECO welcomed Germany's €100 million pledge to the Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund. But this time it's about something money can't buy: Germany's credibility on climate action.

Reading the leaked papers, ECO can tell that Merkel is not willing to start the long overdue, real phase-out of coal. The reduction of only 15 to 30 million tonnes of coal emissions that Conservatives and Liberals are pushing for is ridiculously low compared to the needed 100 million tonnes to close the German emissions gap in order to reach its national climate target for 2020. But on top of that, Merkel does not support measures to significantly reduce

emissions from road transport, giving in to pressure from German car makers.

Only yesterday, we learned that Germany's CO2 emissions are on the rise again, for the second year in a row. In the 12 years that Merkel has led the German government, the country's emissions have either stagnated or risen. The main reason is that German coal power plants produce surplus electricity which is sold to other countries. This is good for the companies profits, but devastating for the climate and Germany's credibility as a climate leader. And guess what emissions reduction the German transport sector has achieved since 1990? Zero. Nada. Nichts. Zilch. Their emissions have actually slightly increased. With that attitude it's no wonder Germany still gets 80% of its primary energy from oil, coal, and gas, and is on track to miss its national climate target of 40% less emissions in 2020 by a shameful 10% margin. ECO assumes that delegates have heard enough nice words from the German Chancellor. The climate crisis does not need more rhetoric, but credible politicians that walk the talk.

Do You Stand with Fiji or with Trump?

At the first ever COP hosted by a vulnerable island state, in a year that has witnessed record breaking temperatures, extreme weather events, climate skepticism, fake news, and stupidity in the form of incessant tweets, ECO asks: Developed countries, do you stand with Fiji and the vulnerable, or do you stand with Trump?

If you think this question isn't relevant to you, then you (a) are not a developed country or (b) have a serious identity problem. If you are neither of the above and your Head of State believes that the Paris Agreement benefits the citizens of your country and the world, then ECO urges you to take a clear stand now. The unwillingness of developed countries to constructively engage in pre-2020 action means that something which could have been resolved last week is now holding back progress across all items.

Developed countries have been unwilling to acknowledge the need for a political space to address the lack of sufficient action and support in the pre-2020 period. That may be because they refuse to recognise their part in it. But the urgent need for world leaders to actually deliver is not just a matter of adding

an agenda item, avoiding duplication, or filling in non-headings in non-papers. It's a matter of real people whose real lives are impacted right now. And at this point you frankly need to do more than simply "acknowledge the urgency", while sitting here in Bonn where the greatest "extreme weather" you will face is a sudden shower on your way from Bula 1 to Bula 3.

And you, emerging economies and large developing countries, are you going to let one part of the negotiations block another to this extent? We're talking about the Rulebook of the Paris Agreement you all fought so hard to secure. We're talking about the Ambition Mechanism which we so urgently need, in order to start closing the gaps in mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation - an important part of which is the Talanoa facilitative dialogue.

Parties: engaging in pre-2020 action is important, but climate action is imperative regardless of chronology. And a Paris Agreement without a Rulebook and without an effective Ambition Mechanism will not only mean that we have all wasted a lot of time, but also that we will be emitting a lot more carbon - further endangering vulnerable countries and communities.

It's the Efficiency Stupid

ECO has previously highlighted a major opportunity to build on the benefits of a global phase out of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), by coupling the switch to refrigerants with low global warming potential (GWP) with energy efficiency improvements in the appliances that use them. By improving the energy efficiency of cooling appliances, countries can cumulatively avoid another 40-50 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions, in addition to the 70 or more billion tonnes of CO2 equivalents avoided thanks to the HFC phase down by 2050.

Parties to the Montreal Protocol are examining possible incentives for such appliance efficiency improvements under that regime. Meanwhile, the UNFCCC, as the regime under which CO2 emissions are regulated, and through which countries are developing their low-carbon development, has much to offer. Wouldn't it be nice if for the 30th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol we ratified the Kigali amendment?

ECO recommends that Parties should ensure that improved energy efficiency, is not limited to appliance efficiency, and is recognized as means of significantly increasing ambition during the Talanoa Dialogue next year. The recent UN Environment Emissions Gap Report showed that energy efficiency in many forms can significantly contribute to a 1.5° C trajectory in a cost-effective way, by reducing more than 10 Gt of CO2 by 2030.

A Technical Expert Meeting (TEM) under the UNFCCC should be devoted to showcasing the opportunity of improving energy efficiency in appliances worldwide.

The High-Level Climate Champions and leaders of the Marrakesh Partnership for Global Climate Action should raise

awareness about this opportunity and ensure it is highlighted in the Yearbook of Climate Action.

Both Parties and newly emerging regional renewable energy initiatives should recognize that highly energy efficient appliances: can reduce the amount of clean energy infrastructure they need to install; increase access to energy from the renewable sources that are installed; reduce grid stress, black outs and electricity availability concerns, and; lower the cost of energy for public and private consumers alike.

Parties should recall that both the Green Climate Fund GCF and the Climate Technology Center & Network CTCN have prioritized the appliance energy efficiency issue and stand ready to help.

Finally, all Parties should ensure that their appropriate officials, including ozone officers, climate negotiators, and efficiency standard-setters are cooperating to implement Minimum Energy Performance Standards for cooling appliances. The standards would complement the HFC phase down and help prevent dumping of older, inefficient appliances in regions that are moving forward first.

ECO emphasises that it is extremely rare that a global policy mechanism can uniformly drive scheduled changes across an entire sector of high-energy consuming products such as cooling appliances. To miss the chance to improve the energy efficiency of these appliances at the same time as we exchange high GWP refrigerants for low-GWP alternatives would mean leaving tens of billions of avoidable tonnes of CO2 on the table –and in the atmosphere.

Coal Retirements Keep US on Track for Paris Pledge, and Trump Can't Stop It

Donald Trump completely deserves every bit of the international criticism that he has received for his efforts to undermine the Paris Agreement. The White House-sponsored fossil fuel side event on Monday here in Bonn is just the tip of the quickly melting iceberg. You can add to that Trump's decision to pull the US out of the Agreement, his repudiation of the US Nationally Determined Contribution, and his efforts to dismantle US climate policy. All of that risks undermining the integrity of the Agreement and its core principles of progression and highest ambition.

But all of Trump's misinformed bluster and inane tweeting aside, it is important to keep in mind what is actually happening to US carbon emissions. Despite Trump's effort to repeal the Clean Power Plan and the absence of any national carbon reduction strategy, the decarbonisation of the electricity sector is proceeding so quickly that the US' climate targets under the Paris Agreement remain well within reach. And the truth is, there isn't a darn thing Trump can do about it.

The US is already at least halfway to meeting its 2025 Paris pledge. The majority of these reductions have come from the

electric sector, where the country has been retiring coal-fired power plants and replacing them with clean energy. The US is also reducing electricity demand at an unprecedented pace. Since 2010, existing coal-fired power plants representing 71 gigawatts (GW) have been retired and another 41 GW of coal plants are scheduled to retire no later than 2025. This represents 34% of the coal power plants that operating in 2009.

Ongoing advocacy to replace coal, and increasingly fracked gas, with clean energy can slash US electricity sector carbon pollution by at least another half billion tons by 2025. That would bring the US within striking distance of meeting its Paris pledge.

The US should be roundly condemned for the Trump administration's efforts to undermine the Paris Agreement and to promote fossil fuels as an even remotely realistic solution to the climate crisis. But the grassroots movement to phase out coal will continue to grow and succeed, moving the country toward 100% clean energy, with or without the White House.