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Input to the High Level Panel on Global Sustainability

Dear Mr. Pasztor

We appreciate the initiative by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, to establish a panel on Global Sustainability (GSP). The challenges to our joint future are immense and there is an urgent need for global leadership to show sustainable pathways for the world to take. We believe that the recommendations from the panel will be important input to the process towards Rio +20, where we anticipate ambitious decisions will be made.

We have presented below a number of points which we, as a global NGO network, consider important. I hope you can forward them to the members of the panel, as input to their ongoing discussions.

The need for a paradigm shift

Science shows that changes are needed in our way of living. To improve our chances of avoiding dramatic changes in the climate, global temperature should not increase by more than 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels. To make that possible efforts far more than currently pledged, must be made by all countries. Change will need to be on the levels of economic systems, culture, consumption, transport, energy and production. However, necessary changes will not happen in isolation. There is need for political leadership, followed by concrete and ambitious actions. The paradigm shift required will only be driven by clear signals and sustainable obligations across the economy. A commitment by developed countries to the necessary greenhouse gas emission reduction target, of more than 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, would provide this guidance.

As agreed in Cancun, developed countries should develop low-carbon development strategies. These strategies should not only be “low-carbon” but “zero carbon”, to ensure that the path is truly equitably sustainable. National processes to develop such plans will reinforce confidence in the willingness of developed countries to commit to zero carbon futures and create a base for political decisions. Moreover they will trigger public debates about sustainability and future ways of living, as well as justify green investments and stimulate innovation within the private sector. It would be valuable if the GSP developed guidelines for the production of these Low/Zero Carbon Action Plans, and recommended that developed countries produce their initial strategies by 2012.

The Cancun Agreements also encourage developing countries to develop low-carbon development strategies in the context of sustainable development. Developing countries will require financial as well as other support to develop these plans. Elements of these plans may already exist, through for example Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPAs), and domestic planning processes etc. The GSP could help assess the level of support required, and suggest timetable and guidelines for these plans.

The right for sustainable development

The change of paradigm should be interpreted as a new era of development. Development should continue, but based on equity and sustainability. Equity is a key matter to address - everybody in the world should have the same right to sustainable development.

There are already big challenges in this field that should be brought forward in the debate on global sustainability. The present Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have led to some positive results, but they are set to be achieved by 2015. A process that looks beyond 2015 must be initiated to keep the pressure on to reach the MDGs, and to ensure that global development can continue, based on a fair and ambitious approach where all people in the world can take part.

We propose to use the experiences from the MDGs, with clear and measurable targets, and to develop them further, combining them with a stronger sustainability perspective, including clear and measurable climate change objectives with frequent reporting. For instance, these might include a clear and measurable pathway to generate the substantial amount of new and additional public finance needed for developing country mitigation and adaptation actions, starting with how we will achieve the \$100 billion of funding identified in the Cancun Agreements.

The GSP could significantly assist progress within the climate negotiations by beginning to examine what equitable and sustainable development would look like within a carbon constrained world. This could include an assessment of the economic and social impacts of various levels of global warming at a regional or country level. A further extremely useful contribution from the GSP could include an examination of an equitable effort sharing approach to emissions reductions and climate financing consistent with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. This effort sharing approach could then be used to inform the level of action to be taken by developed countries, while taking into account the level of action planned in developing countries and calculate the level of supported emissions reductions needed in developing countries along with the corresponding funding required.

Finance

The need for funds, to make necessary changes possible, is significant. As agreed in the UNFCCC, finance should be new, additional, adequate, predictable and sustainable. It is clear that new innovative sources are needed to make this possible. The Secretary General's Advisory Group on Finance (AGF) report presented in 2010 included several such possibilities. Further work in this direction would be a helpful contribution from the GSP to lay the ground for the concrete implementation of such approaches, for example at the UNFCCC summit in Durban 2011 and/or the Rio+20 summit.

Useful sources of finance for which the GSP could consider implementation pathways for include the Financial Transaction Tax, as a solution not only to mobilise funds, but to also positively affect financial markets and transactions.

To promote a paradigm shift, there must be incentives to change behaviour. One obvious way is to introduce the Polluter Pays Principle. Finance generated from international aviation and maritime transport, as included in the AGF report, is a good example of how such a principle could be used to effectively modify behaviour and simultaneously raise funds for climate change. The GSP could have a significant impact by working with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) on pathways to both reduce emissions and raise substantial new climate funds from these sources, incorporating the principle of no net incidence on developing countries introduced in the AGF. With input from the GSP it is possible that substantial funds from this source could contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation in developing countries by 2013-14.

The role of technologies

Technologies, both existing and new, will have an important role to play in any kind of development. In the UNFCCC, technologies have been discussed for a long time and there are several interesting ideas, both included in the Cancun Agreements, and from previous negotiations.

Most debates about technology cooperation tend to focus on initiatives between industrialised countries, or the big developing countries. However, to create sustainable development based on equity among all countries, also small and poor countries, should be able to take part. A focus is therefore needed on north-south and south-south cooperation where technological solutions relevant and needed in the least developed countries are also addressed.

Special attention should also be paid to groups and people within countries. For example the vast majority of farmers in developing countries are smallholders, not able to use technological solutions that are developed based on the needs in industrialised countries. Initiatives must be taken to promote technology cooperation that also benefit these groups, so that sustainable development can be accessible for all.

To enable and promote technology cooperation as well as innovation and development of new solutions, all hindrances should be removed. The GSP could add value by assessing when and how Intellectual Property Rights hinder, or even threaten development, and identifying ways to overcome these issues.

NGO engagement

As a network of over 500 NGOs from all corners of the globe, the Climate Action Network stands ready and willing to work with the GSP Panel Members and Secretariat to present our members' ideas and provide feedback. We look forward to further engagement in the near future on this, most important of areas.

Yours sincerely



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