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The EU Must Show Leadership

As delegations arrived in Buenos Aires one week ago, everyone expected the negotiations to be filled with renewed energy from the imminent entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol. A particular sense of achievement should have been felt by EU negotiators who were the main champions of the Protocol among Annex I countries.

With this pocket full of Kyoto capital and goodwill, the EU was positioned to provide strong leadership in discussions on how to start the crucial process of designing a post-2012 framework. Surprisingly, this has not happened. Instead, communication on the EU's position has been dominated by the Dutch presidency and a few countries (many others being silent) with strong emphasis on engaging the US in future talks on the basis of the Convention and not the Kyoto Protocol. But it is the Protocol – and not the Convention – which stands for the key principle that adequately addresses the challenge of climate change: legally binding caps and a compliance regime for the industrialised countries. To be crystal clear: getting the US back on track is strongly endorsed by ECO but not at any price.

It is deplorable that even the unofficial offer by the EU to re-engage the US on the Convention has been ridiculed and dismissed by the statements and actions of the Bush Administration's delegation here at COP10. Thus, ECO strongly advises the EU not to give away space for negotiation for the future. Nevertheless, the EU needs to involve the US government in policies and technology approaches which do not pre-empt or dilute

any future negotiation path based on the fundamental Kyoto principles.

It is clear to everyone that the global nature of the threat of climate change demands the US, as the world's largest emitter, to come back into the fold and start doing their part. Pressure on the US must be kept high with climate change emphasised as a crucial matter in global affairs. However, it is a grave mistake to believe that the Bush Administration will seriously participate in discussions on any thinkable framework. Attempts to involve them will only hand George W. Bush control over the multilateral process. Such an approach would postpone any meaningful progress for at least several years. This is an unjustifiable delay that would imply additional warming and more dangerous impacts.

What the EU needs to do now is establish a vision on how to move the process forward with the rest of the Kyoto Club (at present 130 countries strong and growing) towards the declared goal of limiting dangerous climate change to a warming of under 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. This process needs to build on and extend the Kyoto Protocol's framework with mandatory absolute emission caps post-2012 for industrialised countries, and the monitoring and enforcement provisions that accompany them. Simultaneously, the EU should build bridges with the growing amount of actors in the US which accept a cap and trade policy.

The current momentum that many countries fought so long to achieve can only be

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Delaying Action Will Not Improve the Climate

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) launched its paper on Sustainable Future Framework on Climate Change at a side event yesterday. Although prepared by an advisory committee to the minister, it is not Japan's official position on a future climate regime.

The report advocates a loose framework which sets the second commitment period on a long-term basis – from 2013 to 2040 or from 2030 to 2040 – and proposes changes to the Kyoto Protocol's crucial fundamentals including legally binding targets for absolute emission reductions.

In response to questions from the floor, a METI official confirmed that Kyoto-type short-term targets should continue for domestic policies and measures to exist. However this position is not reflected anywhere in the report.

It was shocking to hear METI officials say they propose long-term commitment periods on the grounds that renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies cannot result in deep emission cuts.

This implies they consider there is a need to depend on nuclear technology and to wait for carbon capture and storage (CCS) to come into play around 2030 to 2040 to make up for lost opportunities for a truly sustainable energy future.

ECO rejects this position and expresses that we do not want to be in a world with dangerous climate change, nuclear technology-related threats, and the possibility of billions of tonnes of CO₂ resurfacing.

Nature Struggles to Keep Up with Global Warming

Nature and wildlife are struggling against the impacts of extreme weather, and many ecosystems and species will die out as their natural responses to global warming will be inadequate.

This is the finding of a new report entitled "Extreme Weather, does nature keep up?" presented today at COP10.

Based on a study which analysed the impact of increased extreme weather events on

nature, it says the combination of a rise in temperature and increased variability of severe weather events place species and ecosystems at an even greater risk than scientists had previously feared.

The report proposes that temperature increase be kept to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This supports the position of the EU that temperature rise must be kept below 2 degrees Celsius and that deep cuts in CO₂ emissions be

made to achieve this.

The report's author, Arnold Van Vliet, said: "Our report shows for the first time that it is weather extremes that determine how nature experiences climate change and not just the average temperature increases."

"This means that the natural world changes more quickly than previously predicted and makes defining emission reduction targets more pressing than ever."

The Human Dimension of Arctic Warming

Yesterday ECO reported on the massive changes occurring in the Arctic and their implications for the planet. These changes, as last night's dramatic presentation from the eight-nation Arctic Council made clear, are already having devastating impacts on the Inuit and other indigenous people of the Arctic. These communities live as their ancestors have for eons, relying on their ability to hunt and fish for sustenance.

As the report points out, indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic depend on polar bear, walrus, seals, caribou and other species, not only for food, but as the foundation of their cultural identity. As sea ice retreats and ecosystems shift, access to vital resources becomes more and more difficult. Weather becomes unpredictable and the ice itself becomes hard to read, even for the most experienced hunters. To gather the resources they need, hunters must increasingly put their own safety at risk.

The report is unequivocal about this risk: "For Inuit, warming is likely to disrupt or even destroy their hunting and food sharing culture as reduced sea ice causes the animals on which

they depend to decline, becoming less accessible, and possibly become extinct."

Inuit villages have also been badly damaged by the retreat of sea ice and thawing of permafrost caused by global warming. In Shishmaref, Alaska, a small Inuit village in the Chukchi Sea, seven houses have had to be relocated, three have fallen into the sea, and engineers predict that the entire village of 600 houses could disappear into the sea within the next few decades. Advancing seawater has contaminated Shishmaref's drinking water supply.

The Inuit and other Arctic people, sadly, seem to find themselves constantly on the front line of mankind's assault on the planet. They have suffered from the release of toxics, such as mercury and PCBs and experienced the highest exposure to cancer-causing UVB because of damage to the ozone layer. Incredibly, as last night's panel pointed out, climate change enhances these other impacts, making the risk all the greater.

The message is clear: What is happening to the Inuit today the rest of the world will surely be condemned to experience tomorrow.

- The EU Must Show, from front page – maintained if the EU locomotive keeps pulling the Kyoto train along and proves its credibility to both Annex I and non Annex I partners by sticking to the framework. The EU must not squander its hard-won Kyoto capital and goodwill, but use it wisely. Backing away from the Protocol as the basis for future negotiations would send all the wrong signals.

"Fossil of the Day" Award

The Netherlands was awarded top prize yesterday for spreading confusion, as EU president, regarding the EU's position in relation to post 2012 negotiations, and for seeking to engage the US in negotiations here. The EU should be providing clear leadership at COP10 to move towards much tougher mandatory emission reductions instead of bending over backwards to accommodate the Bush administration.

The US, won second place for its "draft text of a seminar decision that the US could find acceptable." This is the most absurd piece of text ever proposed by a national government for the future steps of an important multilateral treaty. The US was also awarded third place for stating in the Tech Transfer group that some Parties are holding the process hostage.

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