

September 24, 2009

Dear President Obama,

As you prepare to host the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, we write to you with great urgency and concern regarding what we see as a current lack of U.S. leadership in solving the climate crisis. Last November, you stated, “Any nation that’s willing to join the cause of combating climate change will have an ally in the United States of America.” We call on you now to honor that commitment. We urge your leadership in setting a vastly higher level of ambition for the United States’ contribution to both emission cuts and a package of finance and technology for developing countries. Without these commitments, a successful outcome at the United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen in December is not possible.

At the first United Nations climate conference of 2009 in Bonn, Germany, the world applauded the U.S. for its re-engagement in climate discussions. But leadership goes far beyond engagement, and given what the U.S. climate negotiating team has put forward since, the U.S. is becoming a stumbling block in the negotiations.

The need for adequate and just proposals

As the world’s largest historical greenhouse gas polluter, the United States’ proposal of zero percent reductions below 1990 levels by 2020 is environmentally unsound and entirely unjust. So too is the House of Representatives’ American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, with its target of one to four percent below 1990 levels by 2020 and provisions allowing 2 billion tons of offsets to be used. Even this incredibly weak target is unlikely to be met because of legislative loopholes. If all available offsets are used, U.S. emissions from capped sources could rise until 2029. The Senate climate bill may be weaker. This is too little, too late. Many countries are calling on developed nations to reduce emissions by at least 40 percent below 1990 by 2020, drawing on the latest science and principles of responsibility and equity. They are right to do so – the world’s largest historical polluter cannot continue to increase its domestic emissions while asking the rest of the world, including poor countries, to peak and reduce theirs.

Proposals by the United States and other G8 countries for a global goal of limiting temperature increase to 2°C, and for a 50 percent global emission reduction by 2050, are also inadequate. Allowing the Earth to warm by up to 2°C threatens catastrophic consequences, and a 50 percent global emission reduction offers a low probability of achieving even this weak goal. Moreover, the G8’s proposed 80 percent cut by the developed countries leaves developing countries with an unfair share of the burden of stabilizing temperatures, leading many countries to express concern over the G8’s role and proposals.

Climate equity and the global carbon budget

A successful agreement in Copenhagen must be based on a fairer approach. Developed countries represent less than one-fifth of the world’s population but have emitted three-quarters of all historical carbon-dioxide emissions from fossil fuels. These historical emissions have built up in

the atmosphere and are a main cause of current warming. They have committed the Earth to considerable warming in future.

Measured on a per-person basis, the United States' historical emissions are more than 15 times those of China, more than 40 times those of India, and 150-fold those of Kenya. The United States' annual emissions currently exceed 20 tonnes per person – nearly five times those of Chinese, more than 15 times those of Indians, and more than 60 times those of Kenyans.¹ If emissions from products produced abroad but consumed in the United States are included, its emissions are higher still – over 30 tonnes per person.

Wealthy countries have consumed far more than their fair share of the Earth's atmospheric space and now enjoy the spoils of two hundred years of carbon-intensive development. Developing countries worldwide – which are already struggling to provide adequate healthcare, education and other essential services for their populations – must now develop under the twin burdens of the rising costs of both mitigation and adaptation to an escalating climate crisis. Developed countries faced no such constraints.

Each day people in developing countries are suffering the effects of a climate crisis they played little role in causing. Economic losses due to climate change today amount to more than \$125 billion a year — more than all the present world aid.² The global cost of addressing climate change in developing countries has recently been estimated at between \$500 billion and \$600 billion.³ Developed countries – including the United States – must accept responsibility for the effects of their historical emissions, and their current excessive consumption of the Earth's atmospheric space, as part of any successful agreement.

Stronger targets and increased financing are needed

Utilization of only current emissions as the basis for future emissions allocations ignores both wealthy nations' historical responsibility and their greater capacity to act. We now know the world's carbon budget is limited and shrinking daily. The United States and other developed countries are seeking a disproportionate share of the Earth's remaining environmental space, unfairly curtailing what is available to developing countries. Nor do they propose compensating developing countries for this over-use. By ignoring their historic responsibility, the wealthy countries in effect sentence developing countries – all too often devoid of energy services and vital infrastructure development – to continued poverty.

Moreover, the United States has put forward woefully inadequate finance proposals for developing countries for adaptation and mitigation. The United States' continued emphasis on the private sector - which will do little to support adaptation and the most vulnerable communities - and insistence on the use of existing multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility are unhelpful and demonstrate an unwillingness to understand the perspectives and experiences of developing countries. The monetary amounts

¹ Figures from WRI "Climate Analysis Indicators Tool" -- cait.wri.org

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/may/29/1>

³ <http://greeninc.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/the-cost-of-adapting-to-climate-change/>

discussed are magnitudes too low. Further, U.S. negotiators have signaled their intention to double count payments for offset credits as a large part of the U.S. obligation to provide financial resources to developing countries. This is unacceptable. If the United States is to play a positive leadership role, the world expects to see substantial public finance for adaptation and mitigation, as requested by many developing countries. The G20's London pledge of \$850 billion for the IMF shows how it can mobilize resources when it perceives a planetary emergency; climate change deserves no less. The world expects credible public financing proposals from G20 finance ministers.

The current US position undermines the viability of a global agreement

We look to you to hold your nation accountable for its disproportionate contribution to the causes and consequences of climate change. But the targets and financing proposals put forth by your negotiating team puts at risk the prospects of any viable solution to climate change and, correspondingly, the safety of all nations, peoples, and indeed the planet. We do not have the luxury of time to hold out for goals in 2050. We need drastic greenhouse gas reductions, financing and technology cooperation now, if not yesterday.

We look back to the wisdom revealed in your inauguration speech and hope you will honor your own forward-thinking words, "And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it."

The world has great expectations for the United States under your leadership, Mr. President, and as we move quickly towards Copenhagen, we ask that you lead a race to the top, not a race to the bottom.

Sincerely,

International Organizations

350.org
Friends of the Earth International
ActionAid International
Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA)
Global Forest Coalition
HELIO International
International Indian Treaty Council
Jubilee South
Third World Network

North American Groups

Carolinas Clean Air Coalition – U.S.
Center for Coalfield Justice – U.S.
Citizens Environmental Coalition – New York – U.S.
Citizens for Clean Power – Delaware – U.S.
Citizens' Action Coalition – Indiana – U.S.
Civil Society Institute – Massachusetts – U.S.
CLEAN – U.S.
Clean Power Now – Massachusetts – U.S.

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach – U.S.
Comité Pro Niñez Dominico-Haitiana – Puerto Rico
Corporate Ethics International – U.S.
Direct Action to Stop War – U.S.
Down to Earth, International Campaign for Ecological Justice in Indonesia – U.S.
EcoEquity – U.S.
EcoLaw/Massachusetts – U.S.
Environmental Investigation Agency – U.S.
Finger Lakes Zero Waste Coalition – U.S.
Friends Committee on National Legislation – U.S.
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Global Community Monitor – U.S.
Global Exchange – U.S.
Green Delaware – U.S.
Greenpeace USA
Grito de las/os Excluidas/os de Puerto Rico
Indigenous Environmental Network – U.S.
Institute for Social Ecology – U.S.
International Accountability Project – U.S.
International Forum on Globalization – U.S.
International Rivers – U.S.
Jubilee USA Network – U.S.
Justice In Nigeria Now – U.S.
Leadership Conference of Women Religious – U.S.
Massachusetts Power Shift – U.S.
New York Climate Action Group – U.S.
North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network (NC WARN) – U.S.
Oil Change International – U.S.
Polaris Institute - Canada
Proyecto Caribeño de Justicia y Paz – Puerto Rico
Public Citizen – U.S.
Rainforest Action Network – U.S.
Sustainable Energy & Economy Network – U.S.
SustainUS
The Edmonds Institute – U.S.
The Enviro Show WXOJ-LP/WMCB – U.S.
U.S. Bangladesh Advisory Council

Vermonters for a Sustainable Population – Vermont – U.S.
West Papua Action Network (WPAN-US)
West Papua Advocacy Team – U.S.

Africa

Centre for Environment and Development - Cameroon
citizens for justice-(CFJ) / Friends of the Earth Malawi
Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone
South Durban Community Environmental Alliance - South Africa
Sustainable Development Institute - Liberia
Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control (UNETMAC) - Uganda
Worldview-The Gambia

Asia Pacific

450ppm Dont let it get to that - Australia
ActionAid India
Akar Foundation - Indonesia
Aktivis LSM di Solo- Indonesia
Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) - Indonesia
Bali Collaboration on Climate Change - Indonesia
Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (India People's Science Platform) - India
Bharatiya Krishak Samaj - India
Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law - Kyrgyz Republic
Center For Development Programs of the Cordillera (CDPC) - Philippines
Centre for Environmental Justice - Sri Lanka
Climate Action Newtown - Australia
Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle - Australia
EQUATIONS - India
Equity and Justice Working Group
Bangladesh
Friends of the Earth Australia
Friends of the Earth Japan
Globalization Monitor - Hong Kong
Groundwork for Indonesian Socio Ecological Progress (GORESS) - Indonesia

Himalayan and Peninsular Hydro-Ecological Network-HYPHEN - Nepal
Institute for Essential Services Reform - Indonesia
JS - Asia/Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JSAPMDD)
Kelompok Studi dan Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat (KSPPM) - Indonesia
LIVE - Locals Into Victoria's Environment - Australia
Nadi Ghati Morcha - India
Nepal Policy Institute – NPI
NGO Forum on the ADB - Philippines
Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition (PIPEC)
Partners With Melanesians - Papua New Guinea
Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM)
ProPublic/Friends of the Earth Nepal
Pusat Telaah Dan Informasi Regional (PATTIRO) - Indonesia
Science for Society - India
Taiwan Environmental Protection Union
Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples International Centre for Policy Research and Education) - Philippines
Urban Research Centre - India
VOICE/Bangladesh
Water and Energy Users' Federation-Nepal (WAFED)
Yarra Climate Action Now - Australia
Yayasan Pusaka - Indonesia
Yayasan Tananua Flores - Indonesia

Europe

Amigos de la Tierra Espana - Spain
Bretton Woods Project - UK
Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND) - Friends of the Earth Germany
Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale - Italy
Carlisle Countdown to Copenhagen - UK
Christian Aid - UK

Concerned Citizens against Climate Change - Netherlands
FERN - UK
Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Friends of the Earth Europe
Friends of the Earth Flanders and Brussels - Belgium
GLOBAL 2000 / Friends of the Earth Austria
Grian - Ireland
Klimataktion – Sweden
Milieudéfensie - Friends of the Earth Netherlands
Moluccan Human Rights Organization
"Maluku Masa Depan" - Netherlands
NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark
Pro Natura – Friends of the Earth Switzerland
Rainforest Foundation UK

Latin America and the Caribbean

Bloque Popular - Honduras
Jubileo Sur/Américas
Latin America CAN Regional Node
CANLA