

**For a climate policy which does justice to development
Climate protection and the fight against poverty may not be played off
against one another!**

Declaration by the German Commission for Justice and Peace and
Misereor, the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation

For the German Commission for Justice and Peace, *overcoming extreme poverty* is the primary goal of all development policy and should be the target of all policy fields. In accordance with the option for the poor, the church aid agencies are under an obligation to support the achievement of this goal and to support people in development cooperation projects to find a way out of poverty and marginalisation. As a round table bringing together the church aid agencies with other development, peace and human rights policy players within the Church, the Commission also explicitly supports the efforts of the international community of states in the context of the "Millennium Development Goals" to halve worldwide poverty by 2015. After more than half the planned period has now passed, however, it is clear that even these ethically extremely modest goals will not be met.

A completely different topic has admittedly grabbed the public's attention in recent years, namely that of *climate change with its threatening consequences*. At the latest after the publication of the Fourth Assessment Report of the World Climate Council last year, it can no longer be seriously scientifically disputed that climate change is primarily caused by Man and that it will have threatening consequences for Man and nature. However, the question as to the suitable political responses remains contentious. In the climate negotiations, the goals and benchmarks of international climate policy are drafted which are to apply after the expiry of the first obligation period of the Kyoto Protocol at the end of 2012. These negotiations are to be concluded in December 2009 so that sufficient time remains for the recognition of the Agreement by the individual states. The success of these negotiations will also depend on whether the ethical dimension of the climate problems, together with their connection with the question of poverty, is considered systematically and suitably. The German Bishops addressed this connection back in 2006 with an expert text on climate change.¹

¹ The German Bishops – Commission for Society and Social Affairs/Commission for International Church Affairs no. 29en: Climate Change: A Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice – An Expert Report on the Challenge of Global Climate Change; Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference; Bonn, September 2006

1) Climate change as a multiple problem of justice

Climate change causes *inescapable justice-related problems* which call for political, economic and ethical responses. The primary causers of climate change are the industrialised nations, which are responsible for a large share of the increase in the atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration which has taken place in the past 150 years. Those worst affected, however, are already and will continue to be the poorest people in the developing countries. The majority of the worldwide poor live in geographically-sensitive regions which are most at risk from extreme weather events such as tropical tornados, floods or drought. According to prognoses on the part of climate researchers, such events will become more frequent and more extreme, something which can already be observed as a trend from long-term records. Much more serious is likely to be the gradual, previously virtually invisible consequences since they make it difficult to meet elementary needs, and hence pose entirely new challenges for the fight against poverty. For instance, strongly fluctuating and tendentially lower precipitation volumes, as well as falling harvests, are predicted for already dry areas – that is where the greatest danger of hunger predominates. Further areas will be threatened by drought.

Poor people and countries are particularly vulnerable because they have far fewer possibilities to overcome the climatic consequences and to adjust to the changed conditions than prosperous countries and people. Poverty always also means *social vulnerability*. For instance, the poor almost never have insurance protection. Social vulnerability admittedly does not stop at a lack of income, but is frequently also linked to social marginalisation, a lack of access to basic social services (health, education), as well as to a lack of legal security, political rights and cultural freedom. In crisis periods, this may easily lead to the poor not being able to assert their interests because of a lack of purchasing power, a lack of knowledge and a situation of political impotence. The disproportionately higher level of vulnerability of the poor is shown particularly dramatically by the fact that more than two-thirds of the almost one million deaths caused worldwide by natural disasters between 1980 and 2007 were accounted for by countries in the lowest income bracket. The evidently unfair division of the burdens of climate change is hence shown in the fact that poor people and countries who have made the least contribution to climate change are particularly affected by the negative consequences, and are virtually unable to cope with them.

2) Unrestrained climate change brings horrendous dangers

In climate policy terms, the question is now in the foreground as to who may impose what burdens on the atmosphere in the future. Ultimately, the economic development of the prosperous states is largely borne by the use of coal, oil and gas, and thus far no industrialised country has been able to decouple its economic growth from high greenhouse emissions in the long term. The developing countries too are now claiming a right to catch up in their

development according to the traditional patterns, which would lead to dramatic growth in the consumption of fossil energy and greenhouse gas emissions. This leads to a dilemma since on the one hand the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb greenhouse gasses is limited, whilst at the same time the countries of the South rely on economic development in order to be able to fight poverty effectively.

In view of this, it is understandable that messages which make the dangers of climate change appear to be slight are well received. This is all the more so if this is ethically linked to a reference to the priority attached to the fight against extreme poverty, such as the arguments of the Dane Bjørn Lomborg and a group of economists in the so-called Copenhagen Consensus. Accordingly, global emission reductions are to be rejected as too expensive because they endanger economic growth and hence the chances of effectively combating poverty. Economic development is said to be ultimately the precondition to allow the poor countries and the poor to better adjust to the changed climate conditions in future. For this reason, it is alleged to be better to invest in economic development and in the fight against poverty now than in climate protection.

This position, which is certainly comprehensible at first sight, however has two central problems. Firstly, it is based solely on an aggregated view presuming that economic growth leads to future generations being more prosperous on average than today's. Even if this were to be true, the danger would however remain that the poor would become even poorer and more vulnerable to climate change in future than the poor of today. Secondly, this cost-benefit view leaves decisive climatic effects out of the equation. Many climate researchers are warning that unrestrained climate change could lead in the medium term to a spiralling increase in the greenhouse effect and set off so-called toggle switches in the Earth's system (for instance the melting of the Greenland ice sheet and of the Arctic snow ice or a change in monsoon dynamics in South and East Asia). The consequence would be climate change which would be practically irreversible and virtually impossible to overcome, especially for the poor.

3) Ambitious climate protection is feasible and affordable

It is a principle of justice towards future generations that they at least have a right to be able to meet their basic needs. Hence, the unmanageable risks posed by unrestrained climate change must be avoided, especially if today's generations do not have to accept any excessive restrictions as a result. That this is reasonable is proven by recent calculations carried out by climate economists, who reach the conclusion that worldwide greenhouse emissions can be considerably reduced at a justified expense. The highly-respected 2006 report by Nicolas Stern, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, and the Fourth Assessment Report of the World Climate Council, have confirmed this assessment. The cost of emission reduction can hence be considerably reduced if the dynamic efficiency and growth potential of the

conversion of the worldwide energy supply towards a largely carbon-free energy system (“decarbonisation”) are used. Possible options for such a conversion are increases in efficiency, more intensive use of renewable energies, underground coal gasification and nuclear energy. Recent results of studies by climate economics reach the conclusion that nuclear energy is the option the expansion of which could be most easily done without. Here, the costs caused by doing without expanded nuclear energy use are likely to be not only economically justifiable, but above all considerable risks could be avoided which are linked to the proliferation of the civil use of this technology.

The international community of states should hence subscribe to the ambitious goal of EU climate policy to restrict the warming of the Earth to a maximum of two degrees in comparison to pre-industrial levels in order to avert dangerous climate change with unavoidable consequences. To this end, global emissions would have to be stabilised by 2020 and reduced by 2050 by much more than half as against the level of 2000. This means for the industrialised states a reduction in emissions by up to 40% by 2020, or by 40-95 % by 2050, as against 1990. It is likely that this goal can be reached most effectively if the community of states agrees to charge the future costs caused by burdening the atmosphere to the polluters.

4) Integrated linking of climate protection and the fight against poverty by means of a Global Deal

The international community of states declared its commitment back in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio to understand climate protection and the fight against poverty as inter-dependent goals of sustainable development. This confirms that these two goals may not be played off against one another for factual and ethical reasons. Accordingly, a global climate policy must tackle two strategies at the same time. By reducing emissions (mitigation) it must restrict climate change to a manageable degree, and at the same time develop possibilities to act in order to overcome the consequences of climate change which is already no longer avoidable (adaptation). A fair division of the burdens is necessary in both cases.

The key to achieving this is framework conditions permitting developing and threshold countries to play an active part in climate protection without reducing their chances for globally-effective economic development and anti-poverty measures.² It will admittedly not be possible to achieve this through individual political measures, but there will be a need for a clever combination of various strategies linking up and complementing one another to form a Global Deal for climate and development policy.

² This is exactly the leading question of the *Climate Change and Justice* project which the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the Institute for Social and Development Studies, Jesuit Munich School of Philosophy, Misereor, the German Catholic Bishops’ Organisation for Development Cooperation and the Munich Re Foundation are working on together (www.klima-and-gerechtigkeit.de).

The first pillar of such a Global Deal forms an *ambitious programme to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions* in order to be able to avoid dangerous climate change. Even if agreement can be reached on this, there is a need to clarify how the limited budget of emission rights can be fairly distributed globally. A proposal which is being put forward by the Federal Government amongst others in the climate negotiations aims to allot the same pollution rights to all people in future. On the basis of today's per capita emissions, the emission rights of the industrialised nations are to be gradually reduced by a considerable degree, and those of the developing countries increased slightly, until everyone has the same per capita rights in 2050. The most effective and most efficient way appears to be to link this reduction programme with global emissions trading, which admittedly requires strong institutions which facilitate a well-functioning trade system. Countries with high avoidance costs can then acquire emission rights from those countries which are able to reduce their emissions at a relatively low cost. This could make the difficult transitional process easier for the industrialised nations, and would enable the poor countries to receive considerable funding which would be far in advance of today's development aid. According to estimates, it is the African countries which would benefit from this in particular. This rule admittedly only distributes the future utilisation opportunities equally and ignores previous emissions. This therefore only meets an absolute minimum of requirements with regard to justice. At the same time, it must be guaranteed that this additional money is also used in the countries of the South in working to eliminate poverty. To this end, the participation of the population in the respective countries must be increased.

Since climate change now already has serious consequences, which affect the poor in particular, further *considerable efforts* are needed to *adjust* to those consequences of climate change which are no longer avoidable. To this end, there is a need for separate global transfer payments going far beyond the means previously provided for them. These are to make a contribution to strengthening the ability to act of the poor countries and regions, but above all of the poor in situ, which is particularly important in the interest of a development policy which is orientated towards the poor. This increased ability to act is the best means of effectively combating poverty, by means of which vulnerability to climate change is in turn reduced, and ability to cope with unavoidable effects in a humanly dignified manner is increased. Since the poor are only able to strengthen their ability to act alone and on the basis of their own strength to a highly restricted degree, they depend on political, legal and economic frameworks promoting and strengthening the potential and initiative "from below", starting with people and local authorities, via the respective states and their regional associations, through to global structures. Since the prosperous states are the primary causers of climate change and have the assets in question, they bear the greatest responsibility for a world order policy which embeds the climate questions in the context of a policy for human, dignified globalisation. Better coordination of trade and agriculture policy with other areas has core significance here, above all in climate and development policy. At present there is a

particular danger that there will be a fight for land between the production of vital foodstuffs on the one hand and biomass for allegedly environmentally-friendly energy on the other. This may by no means lead to a situation in which the poor have less access to food, be it because they have less land for their own production, or because they are unable to pay for imported foodstuffs.

There is also an urgent need to *prevent rapid deforestation, in particular in the tropics*. Deforestation not only endangers biological diversity and destroys the habitat and economic area of many people, but already causes roughly one-fifth of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. Since the export of wood and export-orientated agriculture, which is frequently unsustainable and promotes deforestation, is a major source of funding for the developing nations in question (above all Brazil and Indonesia), there is a need for a package of measures to reduce the incentive for deforestation and to structure the concept of “avoidable deforestation” in a manner which favours development. The countries in question must effectively combat the mostly illegal deforestation by large company groups and strengthen the land rights of smallholders so that they have an incentive to manage the forests sustainably. The international community of states should support the countries in question in protecting their rainforests by providing financial transfers or debt-reducing measures since these would also make a major contribution to climate protection and to the fight against poverty.

Sustainable economic development in the North and South, finally, also requires much greater *public investment in research and development on low-emission energy technologies*, as well as the transfer of such technologies to the developing countries, for instance in the area of renewable energy, which should be adjusted to the needs of people in situ. In order to make this easier, for instance, trade barriers for low-emission technologies should be reduced or indeed agreements made on the passing on or buying up of corresponding patents. This refers once more to the fact that global climate protection can only be achieved if the developing and threshold countries are able to exercise trust. Industrialised nations must keep their promises, shoulder new goals and at the same time make a fair offer, opening up opportunities to the developing nations for globally-effective development and accommodating their respective interests.

Such a global agreement on climate and development policy requires far-reaching reforms, both in the countries of the South and at home. So that the political decisions necessary for this find the appropriate majorities, we need a fundamental value discussion which must also relate to our lifestyles and to our production and consumption patterns.

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