



KYOTO PROTOCOL BECOMES LAW. THE NEW DAWN OF THE CLIMATE

Kyoto is not enough. But it's a start.

16/02/2005 — Greenpeace activists, supporters, and volunteers around the world celebrated the coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol with banners, windmills, actions against dirty power, and a shutdown of trading on the International Petroleum Exchange in London. After more than ten years of protracted - sometimes exhausting, often frustrating - negotiations, thirty-five industrialised countries along with the European Community are now legally bound to reduce or limit their greenhouse gas emissions.

As anyone involved in any international negotiating process will tell you, it wasn't easy.

Vested interests like the fossil fuel industry and heavy energy users interfered and obstructed at every turn. Oil producing nations such as Saudi Arabia kept up a constant whine for compensation for loss of oil revenue and politicians of all persuasions ducked and dived and tried to avoid any decisions they thought would make them unpopular at home.

Add to that the interminable 'diplo-speak' that participants tend to favour and the propensity to spend hours discussing whether to replace the word 'should' with 'may.' You begin to get a picture of how slow-



moving and cumbersome these talks can sometimes be and what an achievement the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol is.

Then of course there was the biggest obstacle of all to an agreement - the United States. The Bush administration withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in early 2001 but it didn't wash its hands of the negotiations. With the active support (some would say under the instruction) of the American fossil fuel industry and its well-funded front groups, the US government worked tirelessly to derail the treaty.

It is a testament to the commitment and tenacity of the many countries that acted in good faith and steered the agreement through these stormy seas, that we now have a legal framework for protecting the climate.

But Kyoto itself, if implemented to the letter, will only have a minimal effect on the changing climate so where do we go from here?

'Dangerous climate change' is already with us and the greenhouse gases we have pumped into the atmosphere since industrialization in the late 19th century mean a rise of 1.2C to 1.3C (2.2F - 4.1F) above pre-industrial levels is now unavoidable.

But scientists are warning that warming could increase by up to 5.8C (10.4F).



Avoiding catastrophic climate change means keeping temperature increase to below 2C. There will still be significant impacts on ecosystems and many millions of people will be threatened with increased risk of hunger, malaria and flooding and billions with increased risk of water shortage. While this is certainly dangerous to the millions of people who will be affected, it is probably the best we can do.

But time is not on our side. We are within a decade or two of closing off our options. Dragging our feet now will force us into a choice between climate catastrophe and economic catastrophe in the next couple of decades.

Kyoto now needs to develop and expand rapidly, extending the international emissions trading system and providing more help for developing countries to leapfrog dirty technology.

There is clearly much to be done and little time to do it. The choice is clear - there is none.

Source: Greenpeace International (<http://www.greenpeace.org>)
Press consultancy
All rights reserved