



Climate change cannot be halted purely by negotiation

Despite the failure of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, climate protection cannot be allowed to retreat into the shadows. However, leading climate researcher Prof. Mojib Latif takes the view that little can be achieved at UN level. Instead, he advocates deploying all the technological means at our disposal.

“If we carry on along the same vein, we can expect an increase in the temperature of the earth’s atmosphere of around 4°C in the course of this century,” forecast Latif on Tuesday evening at an event hosted by the Munich Re Foundation. From a scientific point of view, a rise of 2°C at the most is tolerable. The climate expert from the Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences in Kiel seriously doubts whether this objective can be achieved by political means alone. “The failure of Copenhagen has clearly shown that politicians and the complex UN process are not in a position to bring about a reasonable and viable climate agreement.”

Instead, people should start implementing what is already possible today, i.e. by converting industrial plants from fossil-fired to regenerative energies. As a possible example, he cited the Desertec Industrial Initiative, which seeks to harvest energy from the desert using gigantic solar installations. He refutes the standard objection that renewable energies are far too expensive, arguing that “it is not a question of money; it is the future of mankind that is at stake”.

If we really want to get to grips with the climate problem, global emissions of greenhouse gases will have to be reduced prior to 2015, if possible, concurred Prof. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK). At present there is no political scenario designed to achieve this objective. Still, we should not declare the UN system dead and buried just yet. The German federal government’s top environmental consultant, who was also a member of the German negotiating delegation in Copenhagen, made an appeal for “a continuation of negotiations as long as we possibly can”.

Schellnhuber also considers technical innovation to be a key element in the battle against global warming. At the same time, he warned against being led astray by the idea of putting enormous effort into controlling complicated technical processes: “It is relatively easy to capture the fusion energy of the sun with mirrors,” he remarked. Trying to control plasma in a fusion reactor was a much more complicated matter altogether. One thing is clear as far as Schellnhuber is concerned: people seem to prefer the more complicated approach: instead of a bird in the hand, they’d rather go for the two in the bush.

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**Munich Re
Foundation**
From Knowledge
to Action

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Latif and Schellnhuber were guest speakers at this event, part of a series of dialogue forums which the Munich Re Foundation is now staging for the fifth time. Under the motto “The world in flux – The forgotten billions”, the forums focus this time on the future prospects for international development policy and the fight against climate change. The series is aimed at laypersons interested in entering into dialogue with the experts. The next dialogue forum, entitled “Microfinance – A way out of the poverty trap?”, will take place on 25 February 2010. Applications and further information can be found at www.munichre-foundation.org.

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