

# Support grows for equity-based global warming plan

**AUBREY MEYER** and **KAY WEIR** outline an inclusive global action plan to reduce global warming emissions equitably and transparently across nations. Contraction and Convergence allows everyone a fair share in a scheme for international emission entitlements. It has been the official position of the Africa Group of Nations at climate negotiations for the past ten years. If such a democratic plan is not adopted soon to stop emissions rising to dangerous levels, the consequences will be disastrous for everyone.

Global warming is largely a result of the developed world's fossil fuel consumption and is already having serious impacts. As a consequence, people living in regions that have naturally high temperatures are already under increasing climate-driven stress. In the past year, twenty-five million people faced starvation from a drought across sub-Saharan Africa, linked to past greenhouse gas emissions, yet Africans have contributed very little to the climate problem. Similarly Pacific Islanders and others living in Small Island States have contributed very little to global warming, and yet they suffer increasingly from more severe cyclones and "King Tides," which flood low-lying islands, and destroy crops and water resources. The toll of climate change on developing countries has led some UK MPs to observe that, if uncorrected, this asymmetry of responsibility amounts to genocide.

These problems will become overwhelming in future decades, without strong action to reduce the dangers. As the Stern Report made clear in October 2006, with annual emissions continuing to increase in developed as well as in some growing economies, atmospheric greenhouse gas levels can be expected to rise to over 550 ppm CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent as early as 2035. This is an extremely dangerous level, leading to an expected rise in global average temperature of 3°C, but much more in already hot regions. If emissions are not markedly reduced people in drought-prone areas

of southern Africa will be forced to abandon agriculture within a couple of decades or less, and storminess and flooding elsewhere in the world will increase dramatically, with sea level now predicted to rise more than a metre before the end of the century. The following inevitable rise in sea level of at least 25 metres will drown coastal cities worldwide, but long before that

most Pacific Islands will disappear as just a one-to-three-metre rise will wipe out most small island states.

We must act now to prevent such terrible destruction and suffering. A global plan of action is urgently needed to avoid the catastrophic consequences of global warming, defining a process with timelines for substantial and continuing

emissions reductions in a fair and equitable way. The UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol laid the foundations over the past 20 years, but it's clear action to date has been too slow to be effective.

The Global Commons Institute from 1990 has been working on a plan of action, based on an inclusive framework that is fair and equitable to all nations. The plan, called Contraction and Convergence (C&C), treats the atmosphere as a global commons, giving everyone a fair share, in a constitutional method for the pre-allocation of emissions *entitlements*. C&C has been the official position of the Africa Group of Nations at climate negotiations for ten years and was formally proposed again in Nairobi at climate negotiations in November 2006. It's based on the principle that an equal quota of greenhouse gas emissions should be allocated for every person on the planet. In practice, rich countries would have to "contract," or reduce, their emissions, while poor countries could actually increase so global emissions "converge" at equal, accepted levels. The economics are impeccable. C&C secures survival by correcting both fatal poverty and fatal climate change.

## Unprecedented global cooperation needed

The challenge with global warming is only solvable with an unprecedented degree of global cooperation and requires international allocations of greenhouse gas emissions to be negotiated globally in a transparently, even and just manner. Without this, there will be no global cooperation and the consequences will be calamitous for all.

When climate negotiations began in 1991, the U.S. canvassed quite logically for a "global solution" to this "global problem." IPCC scientists said global emissions should be reduced by 1–2% per annum for the next 50–100 years. The U.S. proposed emissions should be uniformly cut across the globe, with all countries limiting or reducing by the same amount. This was rejected because it was obviously globally inequitable. Developing countries rightly pointed out that the 20% of global population living in the industrial countries had been responsible for over 80% of the accumulated greenhouse gas output since the beginning of industrialisation and had grown rich and

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powerful while remaining unaccountable for the impact.

The mistake at that time was to reject the central notion of a global solution altogether just because that particular version of the principle was globally inequitable. After two years of negotiations, parties to the climate convention adopted the principle they: “should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind on the basis of equity.” (Article 3.1) They also noted: “that in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities the developed country Parties must take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof” (Article 3.1), while, “the share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and development needs,” (Article 3.3).

Instead of immediately engaging with the task of organising a global solution, the Berlin Mandate was adopted in April 1995, which sought to extend commitments for the industrial country group (Annex One) to control greenhouse gas emissions as required by the climate convention. The justification was the moral argument that under “differentiated responsibilities,” industrialised countries had to take the lead and be seen to take the lead before developing countries would join in.

Recognising the flaw in the Berlin Mandate, the Indian Government made the following statement. “We face the actuality of scarce resources and the increasing potential for conflict with each other over these scarce resources. The social, financial and ecological inter-relationships of equity should guide the route to global ecological recovery. Policy Instruments such as ‘Tradable Emissions Quotas,’ ‘Carbon Taxes’ and ‘Joint Implementation,’ may well serve to make matters worse unless they are properly referenced to targets and timetables for equitable emissions reductions overall. This means devising and implementing a programme for convergence at equitable and sustainable per values for consumption on a per capita basis globally.”

The Berlin Mandate proceeded with the Alliance of Small Island States, (AOSIS) advocating 20% cuts against 1990 emissions levels by 2005 for developed countries only. A year later, in June 1996, the U.S. declared the AOSIS Protocol, “unrealistic and unachievable,” and rejected it. They also focused on the “fatal flaw” as the “apartheid” between the developed Annex One countries and the rest of the countries. The U.S. again was centering its objections to conditions of “global apartheid.” This was a significant blow to those in favour of the AOSIS Protocol. The U.S. with 4% of world population is responsible for 25% of any year’s greenhouse gas output and 33% of accumulated output is the world’s biggest greenhouse gas emitter. How could we achieve much without them?

### Overcoming global apartheid with global ethics

It seems self evident that a “globally equitable” solution would work toward setting emissions rights to become

proportional to people rather than remaining proportional to accumulated income and environmental impact. This would entail an agreed convergence on per capita equality of emissions rights globally under a sustainable global emissions cap. Such an approach would transcend the sub-global ethics of “global apartheid” in a practical way. Moreover not only does climate change make this possible, averting human-caused climate change actually makes ending global apartheid necessary. Clean energy paths cannot be achieved globally without an organised global solution for sharing resources and information effectively. As the climate convention requires, this means sustainably, equitably and efficiently. This is exactly what the Africa Group proposed a year later in August 1997, surprisingly assisted by the full body of Senators in the U.S. Congress in the so-called Byrd–Hagel Resolution passed in July 1997.

The essential challenge is how to develop an agreed plan for sharing carbon entitlements between people globally, equitably and sustainably. In principle there is no other viable way than convergence on per capita equality of shares by an agreed date inside a finite contraction budget. Anything else leads to disaster by default. When more complex convergence indicators are introduced, the whole process becomes a morass of competing indicators and contradictory assumptions. It means 180 countries with 180 different arguments about equity will negotiate for the next 100 years in the hope some kind of “invisible hand” will aggregate all of the international rivalry, politicking and cross-talk into a controlled and consensual global greenhouse gas contraction agreement. This is obviously not going to happen.

Even continuing to work to this agenda perpetuates the culture of forgetfulness regarding the increasingly dangerous relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and their accumulating concentrations in the atmosphere. Even if we succeed in achieving a gradual global greenhouse gas contraction of emissions, concentrations (all other factors remaining stable) will only stabilise at the end of the contraction budget (e.g. 100 years around 450 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e). Consequently global temperature and related climate and other environmental damage will continue rising throughout – the already dreadful prospect.

An increasing number of countries recognise the logic of the Africa Group Proposals for Contraction & Convergence. It answers the U.S. demand for a global solution and enables revenues from international emissions trading to accrue to developing countries in potentially significant amounts. By definition, property rights can’t occur until the principle of property rights has been agreed and entitlements assigned and ratified. C&C ensures the long-term effectiveness of the emission

**Averting human-caused climate change actually makes ending global apartheid necessary**

trading process, with the recognition of equity and order in the allocation methodology. The hoped for efficiency of emissions trading will not pass the reality test if emissions trading is set up based on globally inequitable allocations. It will simply be seen as a mechanism for sustaining sub-global inequity with a green veneer of pseudo-sustainability “business as usual” and global apartheid.

**Contraction and convergence: how it could work**

The figure below shows an example of how Contraction and Convergence could operate. The goal of an emissions path that leads to a sustainable CO<sub>2</sub> level is defined by the area under the whole curve, and this sets the constraint on the whole set of negotiations over times and rates for each country.

In this example a maximum, or “ceiling,” of 450 parts per million (ppm) atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent is set, giving rise to a future global emissions “budget” that contracts year-on-year to near zero by around 2080 to keep concentrations within that “safe” ppm ceiling.

The tradeable shares in this future budget are agreed as “one person, one share” globally, but moderated by a convergence to the global average of equal per capita shares over, say, 20 or 30 years as a compromise to ease the transition.

Shares created by C&C are valuable because they are tradeable. C&C makes it possible for poor countries to finance their future defence against climate change and their “clean development”

by trading their considerable excess emissions with rich countries. Rich countries would use their capital to retire their “dirty development, and replace with sustainable technologies.

Emission rates can be calculated for every country

and future year. The rate of global emissions for full contraction, the year when this is achieved, and the year when per capita emission rights converge can be set independently. The C&C model provides a very flexible tool for climate negotiations. Guided by the International Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, the model can embody key elements of climate change science as well as generate critical factors for international climate negotiations.

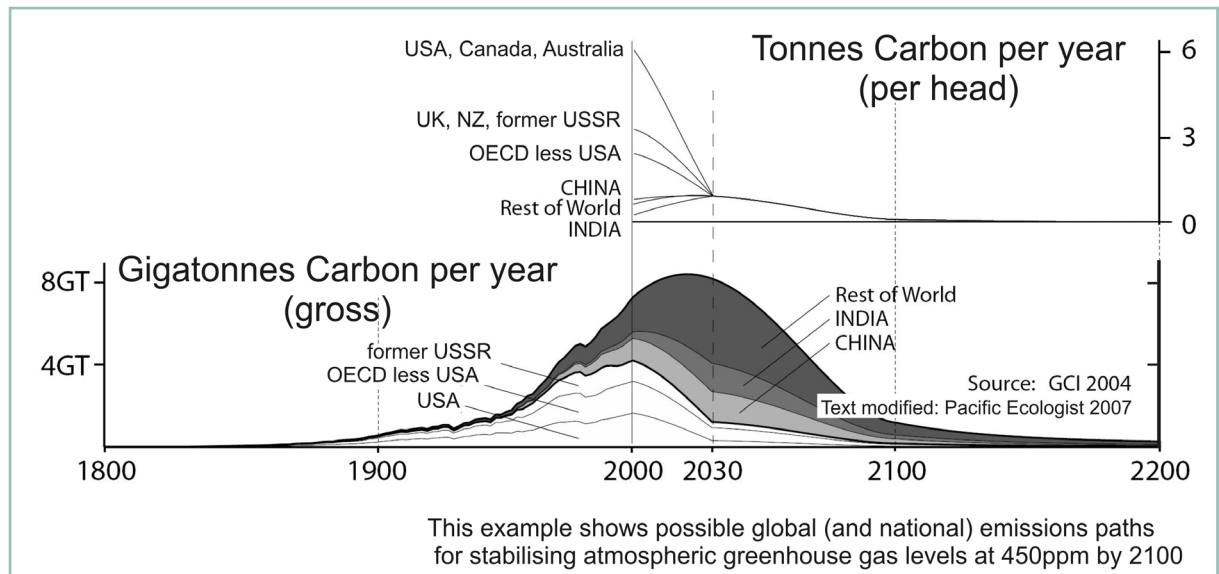
Contraction to 450ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e is not entirely safe, but it is a much better prospect than the target of 550ppm proposed by the Stern report. Stern acknowledges 550ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e is associated with a 50:50 chance of temperatures exceeding 3°C above pre-industrial levels, whereas the figure for 450ppm CO<sub>2</sub>e is 2°C. This difference readily translates into the loss of huge tracts of land, and the livelihoods of millions of people as well as the extinction of many species.

The historic debt of climate change limits the prosperity of developing countries. It’s therefore important to realise that the sooner the date for full convergence to equality is agreed, the sooner and easier this historic debt can be settled. To reduce climate damages, we have to solve the problem collectively and much faster than we created it.

Both the UN Charter and the U.S. Declaration of Independence declare everyone is born equal. This proposal takes equity as the starting point for the whole world to resolve the twin problems of global warming and global inequity. Contraction and Convergence, along with the practice of Allocation and Trade, can be used to provide a structure for human societies to reach sustainability with the earth and its ecosystems. Without a plan of this sort, there will be an increasingly visionless future and many people will perish. ■PE

■ Aubrey Meyer, a musician by training, co-founded the Global Commons Institute in London in 1990, and is author of the Contraction & Convergence concept. He has campaigned and won acceptance for it in many forums, and has contributed to the International Panel on Climate Change and UN climate change negotiations. Email [aubrey@gci.org.nz](mailto:aubrey@gci.org.nz) and see [www.gci.org.uk](http://www.gci.org.uk) Kay Weir is editor of *Pacific Ecologist*.

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This example shows possible global (and national) emissions paths for stabilising atmospheric greenhouse gas levels at 450ppm by 2100