

## **The climate Change and the Energy Crisis**

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This earth that we live in is warming up dangerously. The last decade has been the warmest recorded in history. This fact was verified by the experts on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in their report published a few days before the United Nation's Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Bali in December 2007. The report of the IPCC revealed grave climate related facts to the community of world leaders who met at this conference.

Due to the incessant burning of fossil fuels, mankind has released more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than the earth can withstand. It is difficult to make conclusive statements about the climate changes that can occur because of the increase in atmospheric carbon and warming of the planet. However, due to these conditions, the following is already occurring:

- Melting of the polar ice caps
- Rise of sea levels
- Increase in evaporation
- Drought
- Destruction of farm land
- Famine
- Reduction of water in the environment
- Incidence of epidemics
- Forest fires
- Storms and cyclones
- Floods
- Landslides and earth slips

In fact, we are now forced to recognize the uncomfortable truth that phenomena that was previously understood to be natural is now firmly laid at the door of the destructive activities of mankind itself. It is frightening to note that large segments of human beings are already doomed by these "natural" phenomena.

According to the experts of the IPCC, it is now impossible to stop the increase of global temperature by 2 centigrade degrees. It is already too late to reverse this trend. Those that will suffer most due to the large scale incidence of the above mentioned natural disasters will be those who live in third world countries. The desperate appeal of the experts of the IPCC is to at least try and limit the increase in temperature to 2 degrees only.

The Secretary General of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki Moon made a very important statement about the IPCC report, "These scenes are as frightening as a science fiction movie. But they are even more terrifying because they are real... The world's scientists have spoken

clearly and with one voice. I expect the world's policy makers to do the same. Slowing and reversing these threats is the defining challenge of our age"

The appeal of the scientists of the IPCC was that at by 2050, that mankind reduces its carbon emissions by at least 50% of 1990 levels.

Let it be noted that an average individual living in an industrialized country emits 20 times more carbon into the atmosphere than a counterpart in a non-industrialized country. This is not a situation that arose in the recent past but one that has been a constant state that existed in the world since the advent of the industrial revolution. Accordingly, the stance taken by developing nations is to achieve development by accelerating their own carbon emissions rate. By the data available already, we know that the atmosphere has already been polluted to an irreversible level. *The bottom line is that the developed countries have already stolen the right of the developing nations to emit carbon dioxide at safe levels. Therefore, the industrialized nations already owe an ecological debt to third world countries.*

The third world maintains its right to pollute the atmosphere and is pressurizing the developed nations to drastically reduce their carbon emissions. The European community accepts this stance to a certain degree. They state that in the process of reducing global carbon emissions by 50% on average, the EU nations will reduce their emissions by as much as 80%. Accordingly, the third world countries should reduce their emissions to bridge the gap. The third world group believes this is a grossly unfair state of affairs and maintains that they should not fall into this trap of the EU.

On the other hand, the American block maintain that although they have been emitting large quantities of carbon in the past, countries such as India and China are currently emitting large amounts as well and therefore should commit to control of their emissions as well. They further state that if the third world does not agree to this, then they will not agree to reducing emissions either.

If we cannot reach a compromise the result is the destruction of modern civilization or, in other words, the death of billions of people.

The developed nations have no solution to this earth-threatening problem. They cannot - and will not - envisage life without carbon emission. They cannot - and will not - envisage a world without the use of gasoline and coal. The third world has not come up with any solution expect to weep at the unfairness that is being meted out to them and thus, the third world is now leaderless in facing this dire challenge.

It is time, therefore, for us all to act. The world community has only one solution and that is a dramatic change in their lifestyles. They should eschew excess and deprivation and reach a middle path of consumption. They should reject false measurements of "development" and reformulate valid and life-sustaining measures for the same. The traditional knowledge, philosophical background, and worldview to engineer such a

change exist in none other than our very own land of Sri Lanka. We have the background to provide leadership to the leaderless third world.

The third world is being squeezed under financial debt. The industrialized nations are being squeezed under environmental debt. Therefore a mechanism to cancel out these two forms of debt should be set up. It is critically important that proper leadership is given to such a process.

Sri Lanka is currently attempting to overcome its energy crisis by constructing coal power plants. This should be completely stopped and the funds available should be used for conservation of energy and the introduction of renewable energy sources. We have to revisit and review the agricultural practices we had, the way we built our houses, the way we maintained our micro environment, the way we built our infrastructure facilities including irrigation, and the way we powered our industries for us to find our path towards post fossil fuel era. It is imperative that we take steps to harness the renewable energy sources of our land and our seas. Additionally, a program to adapt to global warming should be immediately formulated and implemented.

Sri Lanka can also assist the world to find a solution to this problem through the propagation of our most prized possession – Buddhism. Through this, it is possible to change the mindset of the world communities. It is not the developed countries that will lead the way into the future but rather those who accept and live in accordance with a middle path outlined by the Buddha which is based on frugality. Having inherited such a legacy, let us at least now release ourselves from the mindset of slavery and become a country leading the way in the forefront of the new world that is not a possibility but rather, a certainty.