



Resolution 1682 (2009)¹

Challenges posed by climate change

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is concerned about the consequences of global climate change and the urgent need to secure a successful agreement at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP 15 – Fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)) in December 2009. Recent scientific evidence shows that global warming is occurring faster than predicted. If emissions continue unabated, climate change is likely to accelerate faster than previously forecast.
2. According to scientific observations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the warming of the climate system is unequivocal. As a result of anthropogenic emissions, atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ now far exceed the natural range over the last 650 000 years. Without a serious global commitment to reduce greenhouse gases (GHG), climate change will, in the long term, be likely to exceed the capacity of nature and mankind to adapt.
3. Setting the limit to the global average temperature rise to 2°C above the pre-industrial level is considered by the scientific community as a threshold beyond which climate change would become far more dangerous, with the risk of irreversible and potentially catastrophic environmental changes.
4. According to the scientific reports, the average global temperature has increased by 0.8°C over the past 100 years and is now rising by around 0.2°C per decade. Given the significant time delay between the release of GHG emissions and temperature rise, the window of opportunity to remain below the 2°C temperature ceiling is closing very fast. The IPCC estimates that a 50% to 85% reduction of global GHG emissions is necessary by 2050.
5. Today there is a clear recognition that global action is vital. However, there is little political consensus on how to share the burden to achieve the necessary 50% to 85% reduction by 2050, and even less consensus on how to set mid-term economy-wide quantitative targets for 2020. The consensus is difficult to reach even amongst the economically most developed countries.
6. The Assembly regrets that the current commitments under the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC amount to only 5% of overall reduction of GHG emissions from developed countries (countries listed in Annex I) over a five-year period from 2008 to 2012. Moreover, few Parties to the Kyoto Protocol are in a position to meet their current GHG reduction targets, and some developed countries will considerably exceed those targets. As it currently stands, the Kyoto Protocol cannot generate the level of cuts in GHG emissions to maintain a stable climate system.
7. The Assembly therefore calls on the Parties to the UNFCCC at their next meeting in Copenhagen to reach an ambitious, binding global agreement for a future “low-carbon” world. The world has less than a decade to radically change course. Urgent action is therefore needed right now.

1. *Assembly debate* on 29 September 2009 (30th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12002](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Prescott; [Doc. 12037](#), opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Blom; and [Doc. 12040](#), opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, rapporteur: Mr Choje). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 29 September 2009 (30th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1883 \(2009\)](#).



8. Renegotiating the global agreement on climate change for the post-Kyoto period, after 2012, represents a challenge to reach a fair balance between the interests of the rich industrialised countries, which carry the overwhelming responsibility for past GHG emissions; the interests of the developing countries, which have fast-growing economies and populations and which contribute an increasing share of current GHG emissions; and the interests of the world's poorest countries, which are most affected by climate change and have less capacity and fewer resources to adapt to life-threatening changes.

9. The Assembly is aware that poor countries and vulnerable citizens will suffer the most, even though they have contributed the least to global warming. Their level of poverty is already extremely high and is further increased by factors such as global growth, the global economic recession and global climate change. These loom as multiple disasters for the poorest countries.

10. The Assembly is deeply concerned that failure to act will consign the poorest 40% of the world's population – 2.6 billion people – to a grim future, further jeopardising their right to life, and their access to water, to food, to good health, to a gainful livelihood, and to decent housing and security. The Assembly supports the view expressed in the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2008 that climate change demands urgent action in order to address the threat to the two most vulnerable groups with a weak political voice: the world's poor, and future generations.

11. Climate change raises important questions about social justice, equity and human rights across countries and across generations. The Assembly asserts that the battle against climate change can and must be won with sufficient political will to do so. The world lacks neither the financial resources nor the technological ability to act.

12. The Assembly believes that climate change represents not only a threat, but equally an opportunity to envisage a new form of economic and human development. Given that the 19th century was founded on mass production and the 20th century on mass consumption, the 21st century should focus on quality of life, respect for nature and sustainable development. It is therefore important to invest in the green economy, which will set in train a lasting process of change and meet the economic and environmental challenges ahead.

13. With a view to achieving a lasting global agreement, the Assembly considers that the Parties to the UNFCCC should strive to agree on two long-term objectives in the post-Kyoto negotiations: respect for social equity and respect for equity in energy and resource consumption (ecological footprint). Under the assumption that equal GHG emissions per capita should be set as targets for all countries by 2050 (at a level of 2 tonnes CO₂ equivalent per capita), the developed countries will have to take a strong lead to initiate deep and early cuts in GHG emissions. They must demonstrate that a low-carbon economy is possible and affordable.

14. According to the 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, mitigating climate change is affordable if action is taken quickly to reverse the current trends. Meeting the 2°C target could be achieved with annual global GDP losses of around 1% per year by 2050 if early action is taken. When taking into account co-benefits in terms of energy saving, air pollution reduction and improvements in human health, net costs could be even significantly lower. The costs of early actions to reduce climate change are small compared to the relative costs of impacts due to inaction, which are estimated to amount to between 5% and 20% of annual global GDP in the long term.

15. The Assembly welcomes the strong lead taken by the European Union, as in the formulation of the Kyoto agreement, in committing to reduce GHG emissions by 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020, and its readiness to sign up to a 30% reduction target if a sufficiently ambitious and comprehensive international agreement is reached in Copenhagen that will provide for comparable reductions by other developed countries and appropriate actions by developing countries.

16. The Assembly urges other leading developed countries to match or exceed the unilateral pledge of the European Union.

17. The Assembly welcomes the conclusions of the World Business Summit on Climate Change (Copenhagen, 26 May 2009) and is convinced that investment in new clean technologies cannot fail to be of economic benefit to industry and to corporate development.

18. The Assembly believes that international co-operation has a critical role to play at many levels. Co-operation must be boosted to provide the necessary capacity, technology and finance for the developing countries, assisting them to adopt and implement low-carbon development strategies within a set timeframe. These strategies should define a credible pathway to limit the country's emissions through nationally appropriate mitigation actions that cover all key emitting sectors, especially the power sector, transport, the

major energy-intensive industries, the coal and nuclear sectors and, where significant, forestry and agriculture. The global effort to reduce GHG emissions would be considerably improved if a post-2012 Kyoto framework incorporated efficient mechanisms for finance and technology transfers.

19. A future agreement will follow the principles of the Kyoto agreement on climate change but will need to be essentially different in that it will have to apply universally and no longer be limited to the richer developed countries. It will have to take into account the necessity of establishing carbon emission targets for each country. The Assembly fully supports a more equitable and differentiated approach that gives due recognition to a country's population, industrial development and poverty. Equality and social justice need to be at the heart of the global climate change agreement.

20. The Assembly regrets that, despite human migration possibly becoming the gravest consequence of global warming, this aspect has not been taken fully into account in the process of negotiations for the new climate change agreement. The Assembly deems it essential that the outcome in Copenhagen should acknowledge the links between the effects of global-warming-induced environmental degradation on migration and displacement, and the states' obligations to address these issues.

21. The credibility of the future global agreement will hinge on the strong participation of major GHG emitters in the developing world such as China, India, Brazil and Mexico. To meet the 2°C objective, IPCC reports indicate that developing countries will need to limit the rise in GHG emissions to 15% to 30% below baseline by 2020. However, developing countries ought to have sufficient flexibility to make the transition to low-carbon growth at a rate consistent with their capabilities. The great diversity of situations, vulnerabilities and mitigation potentials among developing countries has to be recognised and taken into account in the global agreement.

22. The credibility of such an agreement will also rely on the commitment of all stakeholders. It must be fully inclusive and integrate the decisive role of local and regional authorities in greenhouse gas reduction policies. Indeed, these levels of governance hold responsibilities in several fields which determine the intensity of GHG emissions. They have already taken many steps to prepare for a "zero carbon" future and to adapt their territories to the new climatic conditions. Their action is crucial if national greenhouse gas reduction targets are to be met. The Assembly welcomes the efforts undertaken in this field by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and by the leading local and regional government associations and networks in Europe and in the world.

23. The Assembly believes that the global challenge of climate change requires international co-operation on a scale which is unprecedented. It requires a global deal. The Assembly therefore urges the Council of Europe member states and observer states to negotiate an integrated package comprising the following key elements which must be part of the new global climate change agreement:

23.1. reduce world emissions by at least 50% by 2050 compared to 1990, which should be reflected in targets fixed in Copenhagen and in emission trading;

23.2. set immediate and binding targets of 20% to 40% by 2020 and commit to a reduction of at least 80% by 2050 for all developed countries, which have to lead by example;

23.3. reinforce the role of local and regional authorities in national action plans, establishing strong partnerships and empowering them with capacities and resources;

23.4. convincingly demonstrate that low-carbon growth is possible and affordable in developed countries, including sharing technologies and creating trading and other financing mechanisms with developing countries;

23.5. undertake nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) in developing countries and commit to take on targets at the latest by 2020;

23.6. adopt national emission reductions and carbon trading schemes in developed countries, which are designed to integrate trading mechanisms with other countries, including with developing countries both before and after they adopt targets;

23.7. devise an effective international carbon trading regime with sufficient incentives;

23.8. developed countries to commit to research and development, demonstration and sharing of new technologies and dissemination of existing technologies, for example, developing and scaling up near-commercial technologies for wind power; solar water heating, biomass and biogas; creating breakthrough technologies, including advanced solar technologies and energy recovery from waste; making a financial commitment to feed-in tariffs for carbon capture and storage (CCS) for coal;

23.9. include, in the carbon trading mechanism, measures aiming to avoid deforestation and to fight erosion, soil degradation, desertification, sea-shell farming and oil pollution of the marine environment;

23.10. conserve natural terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems and restore degraded ecosystems according to the overall goals of the UNFCCC;

23.11. give priority to the needs of the most vulnerable communities and those most affected by environmental degradation induced by global warming, and improve international mechanisms for prevention, vulnerability reduction, adaptation and humanitarian response to climate change;

23.12. apply ecosystem-based adaptation, which integrates the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services into an overall adaptation strategy and which can generate social, economic and cultural co-benefits and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity;

23.13. allocate overseas assistance to support development goals in a more hostile climate as a basic requirement of equity. Those new development goals need to break away from the current development model which is based on the intensive use of hydrocarbons from which the whole world must now depart;

23.14. find economic solutions based on clean forms of energy.

24. In conclusion, the Parliamentary Assembly invites the participants in COP 15 in Copenhagen to reach an agreement on significant global reduction of greenhouse gases. The Assembly urges the developed countries to show leadership and demonstrate the possibility and economic feasibility of substantial reduction of emissions. For this to happen it is necessary to integrate all the tools of GHG emission reduction so that they will reinforce each other. The window of opportunity is narrow so the time to act is now. The Assembly recalls that an agreement is also needed at Copenhagen for social justice reasons, because developing countries and the least advanced countries are particularly vulnerable, as they will suffer most from the impacts of climate change.