

## The world must act on climate change despite Bush

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Date: September 12, 2005

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Hurricanes can speak louder than bombs. Katrina brings home the words of David King, the British prime minister's chief scientific adviser, that climate change is a greater threat to humanity than terrorism and no less urgent. As the great ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica melt and move towards the sea, presaging a series of planetary chain reactions that could become unstoppable, the evasion that climate change is a long-term problem that can be dealt with later rings hollow. The accelerating instability of the world's climate system, leading to more frequent and devastating storms, droughts, floods and other wild events, is hitting not only millions of people in the poor world but also the rich – and the insurance industry.

Yet, at the Group of Eight (G-8) summit in Gleneagles in July, fine words about technology, even if spiced with subsidies, could not obscure the adamant refusal of George W. Bush to join in a collective response. President Bush's call to Americans to spare the gas is good news. But business leaders require a global framework to mobilise long-term investment and innovation. The task of statesmen is to provide it.

By implementing the Kyoto treaty, Europe and others have taken a first important step without America. But far deeper cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions – of at least 60 per cent by mid-century – are needed and time is running out. From the end of 2005, Kyoto signatories must shape a longer term agreement for the next "commitment period" starting no later than 2012 and bringing in developing countries. After 15 years of waiting for and talking to America, the rest of the world must move decisively and define how this task has to be shared.

As president of the European Union (EU), Mr Blair should move on from the failure at Gleneagles and show leadership. The EU is in disarray on institutional matters but could prove its value by offering an imaginative long-term climate deal to the developing world. At Gleneagles, the big four developing countries refused to commit to limiting emissions so long as the rich north, with its far

higher per capita emissions, fails to offer equity. But India has long urged a deal that combined the necessary reductions with gradual convergence to equal emission entitlements for each person on an agreed date. The Africa Group and at one time China have backed this concept. This "contraction and convergence" model could mobilise the rising powers of the southern hemisphere, clarifying both their entitlement and task.

If the EU accepts this principle there are signs that, even without America, the Indian government would be prepared to talk. Brazil has proposed a different formula but a conference in Sao Paulo in July explored whether the "contraction and convergence" model can meet Latin America's requirements – a key factor in forging a common approach by developing nations. This could be crucial, just as the emergence of a common southern front on trade has precipitated serious trade negotiation in the Doha round.

The EU should invite key developing countries to join it in crafting such an equitable global deal, open to all willing states and leading to the implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change despite the Bush blockade. The EU Council of Ministers has explored the objective of 80 per cent cuts this century that could enable it to play its part. Its emissions trading scheme could be extended to include all countries committed to the necessary emission cuts, providing an incentive to energy saving and new carbon-free technologies and transferring resources and capacity to developing states with surplus emission entitlements to sell. US states that are committed to real emission reductions despite the myopia of their federal government could join too. Action to meet the climate crisis by the world's majority could in time spur progressive US companies and inspire America to join.

Mr Blair needs to explore the potential for co-operation between India and Europe to initiate a global partnership of willing states to address the climate challenge. He should put it at the top of the EU agenda, while inviting the Commission and other

member states to explore how the flagging European economy can gain new vitality from north-south leadership and innovation in the post-carbon age. Many of Europe's political leaders are on the ropes. The EU is in shock. By addressing the threat of climate change, the Blair presidency could provide a theme for European foreign policy that bridges north and south and resonates as powerfully as the theme of peace and reconciliation which gave birth to the Community half a century ago.