

Check Against Delivery

Bianca Jagger* **From Climate Chaos to Climate Justice**

There is no denying it: *the rich world is causing climate change and the poor world is suffering.* The industrial countries that have pioneered fossil fuel technology are primarily in the cold north, while the warmer countries of the south still use far less oil, gas and coal. As climate change kicks in, the tropical and subtropical countries of Africa, South Asia and Latin America will heat up more and more, with temperatures becoming increasingly intolerable. Droughts will affect large parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Melting glaciers will flood river valleys and then, when they have disappeared, unprecedented droughts will occur. Poor, low-lying countries such as Bangla Desh will find it much harder to cope with sea level rise than Holland or Florida.

If current trends are allowed to continue, hundreds of millions of people in the poorer countries will lose their homes as well as the land on which they grow their crops. And then there is the threat of diseases: By the end of the century 182 million people in sub-Saharan Africa alone could die of diseases directly attributable to climate change, according to Christian Aid.

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Hamburg, 10 May 2007

We must therefore insist on a dramatic change in direction that goes way beyond the actions currently taken by governments. It is crucial for organisations such as the World Future Council – that have the big picture in mind – to speak up for future generations and to indicate appropriate measures that go to the root of these great problems.

There are laws in place on which we can build: For example, it is illegal under *international* law for one State to cause harm to another State. It is illegal under the *domestic* law of many countries for polluters to cause nuisances to the public and to market defective products, and damages must be paid. If such laws were enforced all over the world, they could help to combat climate change and to ensure that the necessary cuts in greenhouse gas emissions were made.

From Climate Chaos to Climate Justice – how can such a transition be achieved?

There are two key issues:

1. The rich countries need to dramatically reduce their use of fossil fuels. At the present time, we are burning a million years worth of fossil fuel deposits every year. This makes the unprecedented standards of living of a large portion of people in the rich countries possible. Meanwhile rapid economic growth is also disproportionately increasing the living standards of minorities in developing countries. But all this is possible

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only because we are running down the earth's capital assets, and particularly its fossil fuel resources, at an unprecedented rate whilst damaging the earth's atmosphere in the process.

It is becoming clear that the rich countries need to take vigorous measures to rapidly reduce their dependence on fossil fuels, and to accelerate the development of renewable energy as the basis of a whole new energy system for the planet. Climate Justice means giving the poorer countries privileged access to renewable energy technologies to help them with truly sustainable development. The Kyoto treaty's 'clean development mechanism' is a useful start, but much more needs to be done. Only if we can show the plausibility of *development without fossil fuels*, can we encourage third world countries to initiate their own emissions reductions.

2. Humanity needs to make every effort to protect the world's ecosystems, such as forests and coral reefs, and to initiate large-scale projects to reforest denuded areas of land, above all else for the benefit of local populations. Economic and urban development in the last 200 years has largely been at the expense of the world's ecosystems. Forest cover across the world has been reduced by about 50 per cent and the indigenous people, particularly in the tropics, have suffered terribly in the process. Ways have to be found to pay developing countries for the global 'ecosystem services' provided by

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their forest cover – and their capacity to absorb carbon dioxide and to release moisture to distance places. Under the auspices of climate justice this is a historic responsibility, and it needs to benefit the poorer tropical and subtropical countries of the world and their people above all else.

Affirming the principle of *Ecological Debt*, we need to acknowledge the entitlement of the victims of climate change to have their ecosystems restored, and to address the loss of land and livelihood they have suffered, and to establish legal precedents to that effect.

Climate Justice requires that we make personal and collective choices to use the Earth's resources prudently, and particularly to minimise our use of fossil fuel energy. We are challenged to rebalance our lifestyles to assure that unborn generations have adequate natural resources, a stable climate and a healthy planet.

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