The Elders

Elders Statement on Climate Change

18 July 2016

As the countries of the world meet this week to discuss progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leaders must back up words with action on climate change.

In 2015, the nations of the world came together to agree both the landmark Paris climate deal and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the most ambitious set of global development goals ever. But where do we stand six months on? Have nations started to deliver on their promises?

The Elders strongly advocated for, and welcomed, the Paris climate change agreement. Sadly, what we are seeing so far this year does not convince us that leaders, especially of wealthy and large emitting countries, are acting in accordance with the vision they publicly embraced in Paris.

Ministers will gather in New York to discuss the actions they are taking at the national level to implement the SDGs, which include an important goal on climate action. The discussion will be of plans made, actions taken and the steps ahead to meet the Goals by 2030. As the focus shifts from the fine words and international diplomacy of 2015 to the day-to-day decision-making of governments and parliaments in 2016, it is vital that the peoples of the world hold their leaders to account and ensure they back up their words with actions.

Climate change matters to every aspect of the new development agenda. Without action to reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience, development cannot be sustainable. That is why action on climate change is critical to the achievement of the SDGs and must be central to discussions in New York this week.

As things stand, The Elders have two major concerns:

1. *None of the top 10 emitters of greenhouse gases have ratified the Paris Agreement*; ratification is a critical step towards cementing the Agreement's provisions in international law. The 19 countries that have to date deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval with the UN account for only 0.18 % of total emissions. They need to be joined by some of the big emitters to reach the threshold of 55% of global emissions required for the Agreement to enter into force.

The promises made by China, India, the US and others to ratify the Paris Agreement this year are welcome. We also note the steps taken by EU member states, in particular France and Hungary, to ratify the Agreement domestically, and hope their leadership prompts others to follow suit and thereby enable ratification by the EU as a whole. But now, six months after the Agreement was adopted, we urgently need to see more political leadership worldwide.

2. *Leaders are still making investment decisions that run contrary to the Paris Agreement*. Article 2 of the Agreement commits countries to making financial flows consistent with a pathway towards low carbon and climate resilient development. However, when the G7 met in Japan in May, it failed to take action to end fossil fuel subsidies, merely reaffirming the intention to end all 'inefficient' fossil fuel subsidies – a commitment that is too vague.

G20 governments are still providing US$444 billion a year in support for the production of fossil fuels, including through subsidies, public finance and state-owned enterprise investment. Some countries are even increasing subsidies to fossil fuel production.

This is simply not good enough. While all countries need to act, the industrialised and wealthy countries must lead by example. As well as ratifying the Paris Agreement, we call on them to:

- *Deliver urgent action to lower emissions*: accelerate short-term action on climate change by starting to implement the SDGs. This will maximise the chances of peaking emissions by 2020 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 – both of which are critical steps on a pathway to keep global warming well below 2^{o}C and vital for the pursuit of a more sustainable, and desirable, 1.5^{o}C goal.

- *End fossil fuel subsidies and invest in the low carbon economy*: any kind of fossil fuel subsidy is not consistent with a low carbon pathway and all fossil fuel subsidises should therefore end now. The sooner financial flows are directed towards low carbon alternatives the greater the chances of achieving the SDGs.

- *Put a price on carbon* - another key strategy to reorient financial flows is carbon pricing. Consistent with the calls of the Carbon Pricing Panel we urge those countries that have not yet done so to place a price on carbon. Those countries which already have a price on carbon should increase it over time.

- *Support developing countries' efforts to take part in the transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient development*. For developing countries to play their role and deliver on their commitments they need access to climate finance and technology and require help with capacity-building. It is in our collective self-interest that these countries develop in a low carbon way to avoid further dangerous global warming that affects us all. In Paris, leaders promised to deliver US$100 billion per year by 2020 to support developing countries take climate action. They must not break their word.

Paris was an important moment. It showed what world leaders can achieve when they decide to pull together in response to a shared threat. But, without ratification and early action, the good words uttered will have little effect.

As the countries of the world gather in New York this week to assess collectively what progress is being made towards sustainable development, let us not forget that real action, now, on climate change is fundamental if we are to secure a liveable planet for our children and grandchildren.

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