
The illusion of the Kyoto Protocol

The Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention on Climate Change will be meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina this month. Through the media, the public will receive the good news that the Kyoto Protocol has been approved in spite of the refusal of the world's main polluter -- the US -- to ratify it. Most people will thus feel relieved, thinking that the climate crisis will now be averted.

Unfortunately, the real situation is quite different. First, the emission reductions that the Kyoto Protocol has set for industrialized countries are only 5.2% below 1990 levels —which most scientists agree is completely inadequate to effectively address global warming. Second, even these inadequate targets are being evaded through schemes through which rights to emit extra carbon dioxide are earned by, for example, setting up monoculture tree plantations as "carbon sinks."

Concern about this state of affairs -- which has resulted largely from the pressure of powerful corporations on the climate negotiations -- prompted representatives from organizations and peoples' movements from around the globe to come together in Durban, South Africa, in October 2004 to discuss more realistic avenues for addressing climate change. The group emerged from the meeting with a call for a global grassroots movement against climate change (see Durban Declaration at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/CCC/justice.html>).

Participants concluded that Kyoto's attempt to give carbon a price "will not prove to be any more effective, democratic, or conducive to human welfare, than giving genes, forests, biodiversity or clean rivers a price."

At the same time, the Durban Group reaffirmed "that drastic reductions in emissions from fossil fuel use are a pre-requisite" for addressing the climate crisis and affirmed its "responsibility to coming generations to seek real solutions that are viable and truly sustainable and that do not sacrifice marginalized communities."

The Group further committed itself "to help build a global grassroots movement for climate justice, mobilize communities around the world and pledge our solidarity with people opposing carbon trading on the ground."

Participants also agreed to declare December 10 (Human Rights Day) as "International Climate Action Day" as a means of stressing that a liveable climate constitutes a basic human right and that this right is being violated by those same governments that pretend to be addressing the climate crisis.

WRM fully supports these viewpoints. Its campaigning activities against monoculture plantations have long stressed that planting trees is not only not going to slow climate change, but will also create new problems for people living in the areas to be occupied by so-called carbon sink plantations.

It is ordinary and vulnerable people who will suffer most from government inaction and corporate greed unless something more is done -- and fast -- to deal with the environmental destruction and

human suffering which will be wrought by climate change. In consequence, WRM firmly believes that, for crisis to be headed off, the peoples of the world need to take the climate issue back into their own hands. It is not Kyoto, but people, who will save the climate.