
[Taking climate back to people's hands](#)

The Durban Group is a coalition of NGOs, social and environment activists, communities, academics, scientists and economists from around the world concerned about climate change, who call for a global grassroots movement against climate change. The group denounces the current flawed approach of international negotiations and claims that it must be met by the active participation of a global movement of Northern and Southern peoples to take the climate back into their hands.

Several members of the Durban Group participating in the 5th World Social Forum held at Porto Alegre, Brazil, gathered there to exchange information and elaborate strategies for action regarding climate change. One of the outcomes was an open letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to convey him “two convictions: first, that another world is possible; second, that it will not be possible if people do not have a climate they can live in.”

The letter was drafted in Porto Alegre and launched on February 15, coinciding with the Kyoto Protocol's entering into force. The Kyoto Protocol had been agreed in 1997 in the UN Convention on Climate Change, allegedly to establish concrete commitments to reduce fossil fuel emissions from Northern countries. However, the Durban Group claims that the climate treaty not only fails to cut greenhouse gas emissions enough to avert climate catastrophe, but also steals from the poor to give to the rich.

In the letter sent to Kofi Annan, the group expresses disappointment that international climate negotiations resulting from the Framework Convention on Climate Change of 1992 did not “effectively address the threats to life, livelihoods and peace posed both by climate change and the continuing extraction of fossil fuels that causes it. We had expected the negotiations to tackle the climate crisis at its root: the transfer of oil, coal and gas from underground to the surface.”

This excessive burning of fossil fuels is now jeopardising Earth's ability to maintain a liveable climate. However, the group notes that “Instead of mandating steep reductions in the extraction and burning of coal, oil and gas, and reducing the capital diverted to oil exploration, the United Nations, under the influence of the United States, has spent a disproportionate amount of time and resources on developing a complicated global climate market.”

The Durban Group's letter tells UN Secretary-General that through the new carbon market, “industrialized countries and their corporations are acquiring valuable formal rights over the earth's capacity to recycle fossil fuel emissions while also being encouraged to use land and other resources in the South to ‘mitigate’ continued Northern greenhouse gas emissions.” Helping in the latter project has been the World Bank, which, through its various carbon funds, is backing “carbon-saving” projects throughout the South.

The Durban Group criticizes the UN for failing “to move toward, or even encourage debate about, sensible and equitable alternative policies of regulation, taxation, termination of subsidies for fossil fuel extraction and use, and support for sustainable local energy. At the same time, a smokescreen of specialized ‘carbon market’ jargon has prevented the public from understanding or exercising

control over climate policy.”

“The purpose and legitimacy of this carbon market,” the letter continues, “is being questioned by many who see it as biased in favour of the short-term interests of industrialized countries and their corporations”.

The letter was accompanied by a press release noting that “while many are celebrating the Kyoto Protocol's entering into force this week, others are finding cause for grave concern” and posing the question “Kyoto: What's to Celebrate?”

The press release exposes the arguments of members of the Durban Group regarding the present situation: “We're creating a sort of 'climate apartheid,' wherein the poorest and darkest-skinned pay the highest price -- with their health, their land, and, in some cases, with their lives -- for continued carbon profligacy by the rich,” said Soumitra Ghosh of the National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers in India.

“Even in purely economic terms, a market in credits from 'carbon-saving' projects will fail,” said Jutta Kill of Sinkswatch, a British-based watchdog organization. “You simply can't verify whether a power plant's emissions can be 'compensated for' by a tree plantation or other project. Ultimately investors are bound to lose confidence in the credits they buy from such projects.”

Ricardo Carrere of the World Rainforest Movement added that “so-called carbon sink plantations will result in the further spread of monoculture tree plantations, which are already having enormous impacts on people and the environment”.

The Kyoto Protocol also allows genetically engineered trees to be used in carbon-absorbing plantations. “This will open up a Pandora's box of impacts we can't even guess at,” said Anne Petermann of Global Justice Ecology Project in the US.

Regarding the role of the World Bank as a promoter of the carbon market, including “carbon-saving” projects in poor nations, Nadia Martinez of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Network in Washington declared that “It's ridiculous that the Bank, which has a mission of entrenching the fossil fuel industry, is now advertising itself as solving the climate crisis.”

“If we are to avert a climate crisis, drastic reductions in fossil fuel investment and use are inescapable, as is the protection of remaining native forests,” confirmed Heidi Bachram of Carbon Trade Watch.

Global trends of privatization of water and biodiversity have now encroached on climate too. To tackle the climate crisis, the Durban Group is calling on Northern and Southern grassroots activists and organizations to help reinforce a peoples' movement that rise up against those processes and “take the climate back into our hands.”

The open letter can be accessed at <http://www.carbontradewatch.org/durban/letter.html> and the full press release at <http://www.carbontradewatch.org/durban/kofi.html>.

