



2009 October 9

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

As Canada prepares to send a delegation to Copenhagen later this year to negotiate the successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, the future of humanity depends on the strength and vision of the agreement that is negotiated. The Green Party of Canada strongly urges Canada to take responsibility and lead constructive negotiations.

The goal of the UNFCCC negotiations is preservation of a hospitable world.

Humanity has no greater responsibility than to deliver a bright future to succeeding generations. Attempting to water down the negotiations for short-term political expedience is dangerous and unconscionable. This is not a quaint environmental issue. It is an issue of survival for many of the world's people and possibly for humanity itself.

We have no time to delay.

In the past, climate scientists have argued for rapid emissions reductions on the basis that delay would make the necessary changes more painful later. Our past delays have made more drastic changes inevitable. We can no longer hope to avoid some catastrophic changes: rising sea levels drowning low-lying coastal areas, persistent droughts in Australia, the retreat of glaciers that feed the world's mighty rivers and within Canada the melting of sea ice, the thawing of permafrost, prairie droughts, east coast storms, insect plagues destroying whole forests and the arrival of new diseases.

But while the last two decades would have been the preferred time to make the transition to a low-emissions economy, failure in this decade is likely to unleash forces that will leave us with a vastly impoverished planet no longer capable of supporting all the people on the planet today. We urgently need a strong global commitment to address climate change now.

We must reduce emissions now with currently available tools.

We can no longer afford to delay emissions reductions. Past delays while waiting for technological solutions that might allow us to continue with a high energy lifestyle have proven very damaging as the solutions have been elusive, too expensive or unworkable. It would be spectacularly irresponsible to repeat these mistakes again today. Any further delays in actual reductions would be responsible for

untold suffering in Canada and around the world.

Emissions can and must be reduced now with proven, existing solutions – dramatic increases in efficiency, serious conservation measures, energy retrofits and the cheapest and quickest low-emissions generation options currently available.

Canada must at least meet the emissions reduction range it has already agreed to aim for.

In Bali in 2007, Canada agreed to work along with other developed nations towards an emissions reduction goal of 25-40% below 1990 levels by 2020. Scientific updates since that time have indicated that this entire range may well be inadequate to protect humanity. Under no circumstances can Canada enter negotiations with a projected emissions reductions goal less than 25% below 1990 levels. Canada's proposal to develop a different base year from 1990 has no legitimacy. It puts humanity at even greater risk, threatens the negotiation of a useful global treaty, and belittles our government and all of Canada.

Any changes to global targets must be made on the basis of scientific merit.

Canada must not enter into negotiations with a stubborn stance that the emissions reductions called for are too difficult to achieve. Political and economic expedience do not sway the relentless advance of climate change processes. Many leaders may wish to argue that the emissions reductions are not acceptable because their country is too poor, or too cold, or with a rapidly growing population, or too dependent on oil, or growing by leaps and bounds, or shrinking instead. Every country has a special reason to plead for exceptions. Canada is by no means especially unique. We are a wealthy country with an abundance of resources and expertise to meet our challenges. It is clear from the Stern Report and other reliable assessments that the costs of climate change will be far in excess of the costs to prevent it. Canada must finally take responsibility, commit to the needed targets and then encourage other countries to do the same.

There is a scientific basis for adopting emissions reduction targets greater than 40% below 1990 levels by 2020 – the prognosis for climate change is significantly more dire than it was 2 years ago when the 25-40% targets were negotiated, and even at that time they were recognized to be made partly from a position of political expedience.

Any change in the distribution of responsibility must result in appropriate overall reductions.

While it's understandable for Canada to want other nations to carry a bigger burden of responsibility for emissions reductions, it is irresponsible to hold the world hostage to Canadian demands. It is understandable and appropriate for developed countries to demand that developing countries also agree to some emissions limits. However, developed countries have the responsibility to take the lead. It is also understandable and appropriate that developing countries demand that developed countries take on a portion of the costs involved.

Lack of responsibility in climate negotiations has depleted Canada's moral authority in the world. Under no circumstances can Canada be so persistent in its demands that no agreement is reached nor that the agreement bears no relationship to any established scientific consensus on what is appropriate.

There must be provision made in any new accord to adapt to emerging science.

The science of climate change is rapidly evolving. The speed of global warming is proceeding at an alarming pace. When the last IPCC report was issued in 2007, the recommendations it contained were already out of date. In March of this year, a special International Scientific Congress on Climate Change convened in Copenhagen to update climate science in advance of the upcoming Conference of

the Parties. The sobering assessments from this meeting point simultaneously to the inadequacy of the last IPCC report and to the need for updated recommendations with contributions from new analyses and empirical evidence. For example, in the 2007 IPCC report, the Arctic was projected to be summer sea ice free by 2050 to 2100, but now an ice-free Arctic is expected by 2015 to 2020.

There is a strong possibility that within a year or two, there will be an overwhelming global consensus around an emissions reduction target greater than 40% below 1990 levels by 2020. Any new accord must anticipate this possibility. The situation is simply getting too critical to let another decade slip by with targets that prove to be inadequate yet again.

Canada must show compassion.

The Organization of Small Island States has appealed to all nations to take into consideration the fact that with current levels of greenhouse gas emissions and the associated sea level rise, many nations will simply disappear beneath the sea. Indigenous peoples of the Canadian Arctic have been very aware that the melting of our glaciers is directly causing this dire situation. Under no circumstances must these peoples be ignored so that more prosperous communities can continue with destructive practices. Canadians do not want to take further responsibility for the crises we have been helping to set in motion.

Canada must be a leader and a team player.

For the last few international conferences, Canada has been singled out for its unhelpful and obstructionist stance to widely accepted agreements. In Bali in 2007, Canada stood out as the only country in opposition to every other Kyoto signatory nation, The agreement ultimately had to be watered down to gain Canada's acceptance.

It is time for Canada to take responsibility. This time, Canada must be a leader.

Sincerely,

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copy to: Hon. Jim Prentice, Minister of the Environment
Hon. Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon. John Baird, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities