

CHANGING COURSE

Women unite to transform U.S. climate policy



Women's Environment &
Development Organization

SERIOUS THREAT

Only swift and sustained global action will stave off the direct consequences of climate change. Yet the United States, the world's only super power and a major player at the United Nations, has refused to join the global effort to address climate change. Actions by other countries alone simply can't address climate change without meaningful U.S. action—and nations have less incentive to take concrete steps if one of the world's largest contributors to climate change won't.

Nearly every country in the world has signed and ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol—the only legally binding international agreement that requires cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. But in 2001, the U.S. rejected the Kyoto Protocol on the grounds that it would damage the U.S. economy and has since refused to mandate GHG reductions—even though the U.S., while only 4 percent of world's population, produces more GHGs per capita than any other country. The next phase of the Kyoto agreement is set to be negotiated by 2009, lending even greater urgency to the need for U.S. engagement.

Meanwhile, people around the world are experiencing the results of U.S. inaction on climate change, the most serious of which are felt in developing countries. Erratic weather causes ill health, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, forced migration, conflict and even death. In the U.S., —where a majority of Americans (89%) believe global warming is a serious threat—severe floods in Texas, drought in the west, unusual heat, earlier springs, mild winters and dangerous storms like Hurricane Katrina are already harming people's lives.

Across the U.S., local actions by states, cities and civil society groups are helping to create the political will necessary for the U.S. to step up and rejoin the multi-lateral processes on climate change, including the next phase of the Kyoto agreement. Women, in particular, in the U.S. and abroad are demanding U.S. action on climate change.



WOMEN & CLIMATE CHANGE

The U.S. stance on climate change harms women in the U.S. and globally, who are especially at risk when it comes to the negative consequences of climate change. Women comprise the majority of the world's poor, which automatically amplifies the destructive impact climate change has on women. From New Orleans to Bangladesh, more women die and suffer from disasters. At the same time, women have an important role to play in taking action on climate change – as leaders in community resource management, catalysts of change, innovators, farmers, and caretakers of families. Policymakers have much to learn from poor women throughout the world who have been adapting to swift environmental changes for centuries.

November 1998

The U.S. becomes the 60th nation to sign the Kyoto Protocol.

March 2001

U.S. formally withdraws from Kyoto Protocol; declares U.S. CO2 emissions will not be regulated, breaking Bush campaign promise. (1)

May 2001

National Energy Plan released, prioritizing U.S. gas and oil production, proposing 1,300-1,900 new power plants by 2020, and no mandatory cap on GHG emissions. (2)

CONSEQUENCES OF U.S. INACTION

The costs and consequences of climate change in the U.S. today are no longer in doubt. Human activities are increasingly altering the Earth's climate. In the future these temperature rises will lead to more frequent heat waves and droughts, more severe floods, degraded water quality and the spread of infectious diseases.

Domestic Impact

▶ National Security

Climate change will put U.S. national security at risk, according to a 2007 report by military and security experts. As natural and humanitarian disasters increase, so will instability in countries and regions already struggling with serious social, economic and environmental challenges. While men are more likely to be killed or injured in fighting, women suffer greatly from the indirect consequences of conflict. (8)

▶ Environment

Scientists have linked an increase in the number and severity of tropical storms and hurricanes in the North Atlantic to warming seas. (9)

By 2030, all the glaciers in Montana's Glacier National Park may disappear. (10)



▶ Public Health

More intense heat will become more frequent, with particularly negative effects on the health of people with cardiovascular and respiratory conditions. A recent study suggests that during this century, along with temperatures, death rates in the U.S. for both women and men will rise steadily. This will translate into economic losses of \$31 billion a year. (11)

▶ Economy

Hurricane Katrina caused losses of over \$120 billion and entrenched poor African American women, already the most impoverished group in the nation, in deeper levels of poverty. (12)

In coming decades, thousands of miles of U.S. coastline may be under water. Before the century ends, seawater in Florida may advance by 400 feet, flooding coastal homes and hotels, engulfing beaches, and contaminating freshwater supplies as salt water moves inland. (13)

International Impact

▶ Latin America

In 2004, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) identified the first hurricane to ever reach South America. (14)

▶ Africa

Food emergencies, often the result of drought or floods, have gone up three-fold every year in Africa since the mid-1980s. Conflicts that arise from shortages of natural resources magnify existing gender inequalities. (15)

▶ Asia

About three quarters of the world's population living in low elevation coastal zones resides in Asia, where sea level rise and natural disasters are wreaking havoc among the poor. Women made up 55-70% of the Banda Aceh tsunami deaths. (16)

TIMELINE: U.S. INACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

February 2002

Bush Administration releases alternative to Kyoto plan, setting voluntary target of reducing GHG intensity of U.S. economy 18% by 2012, although overall emissions would likely rise 32% above 1990 levels. (3)

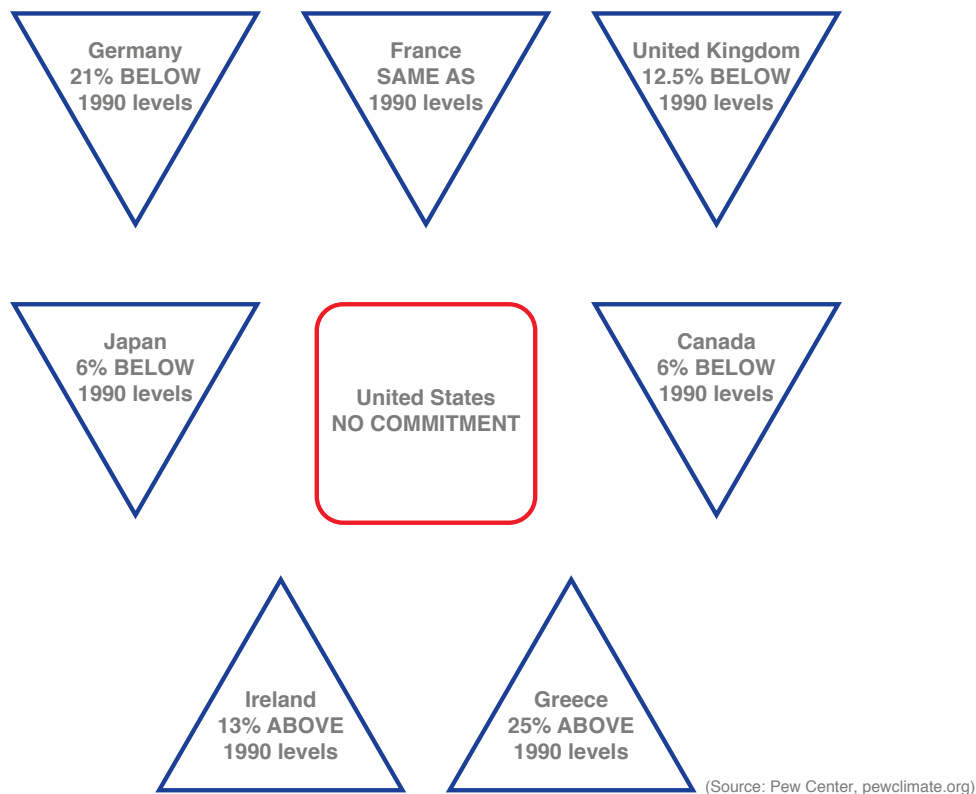
2002-2005

Administration fights all climate change amendments proposed in the U.S. Senate and opposes efforts to raise vehicle fuel economy standards or require expanded use of renewable energy in electricity generation. (4)

INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS

The U.S. lags far behind most industrialized countries in commitments to reduce emissions. To date, 175 countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, which requires a 5 percent reduction below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. The U.S. is the only industrialized country to not have ratified the convention.

Kyoto Targets: Country Commitments in relation to 1990 (GHG) Emissions



Though developing countries are not bound by reduction targets—an aspect of the Kyoto Protocol that the U.S. has denounced and used to defend its own position of non-compliance and refusal to adopt the protocol—those that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol are required to take steps to slow GHG emissions. Many developing countries are taking action. (17) For example, China is engaging with neighboring Japan on measures to reduce GHG emissions, and India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa all have GHG emissions reduction activities, especially in the energy sector. (18) The next phase of the Kyoto agreement could nullify the U.S. position by requiring developing countries to set targets.

CARBON TRADING

The idea of carbon trading emerged from the Kyoto Protocol as a market-based approach to reducing GHG emissions. Countries and corporations can purchase emissions credits by investing in projects in developing countries that are designed to reduce or sequester emissions. Unfortunately, this approach has not proven to significantly reduce emissions, and local projects have not favored renewable energy or reached the poorest populations. U.S. corporations, in particular, have participated in carbon trading while continuing to promote U.S. inaction on global climate policy through campaign contributions and lobbying.

July 2005

Bush rejects mandatory GHG reduction targets at G-8 Summit (Group of 8 world economic powers); Administration blocks language in G-8 statement that global warming is a fact and that developed countries must demonstrate leadership on climate change. (5)

April 2007

U.S. Supreme Court rules, against Bush Administration, that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has authority to regulate GHGs emitted by transportation sector. (6)

May 2007

Bush Administration plans meeting of 15 nations on voluntary GHG reduction plan, a unilateral action that disregards the Kyoto process; also waters down strong G8 statement on climate change. (7)

U.S. STATES AND CITIES SET PACE

Even though the U.S. government has rejected reducing GHG emissions, states and cities across the country have adopted legally binding targets for lowering GHGs. (19) Their example offers a model for national-level U.S. action:

- ▶ New Jersey: reduce GHGs to 80% below 2006 levels by 2050
- ▶ Arizona: 50% below 2000 levels by 2040
- ▶ New Mexico: 75% below 2000 by 2050
- ▶ Oregon: 75% below 1990 levels by 2050
- ▶ New York: 10% below 1990 levels by 2020
- ▶ California: 80% below 1990 by 2050
- ▶ Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont are part of a Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) that aims for emissions reductions of 10% by 2019 (20)

Too much time has already been wasted. It's essential that the U.S. government take the following steps:

■ **Make** climate change a legislative, policy and budget priority.

■ **Sign** on to and ratify a multilateral legally binding process such as the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty that sets the framework for intergovernmental efforts to reduce global warming.

■ **Adopt** a leadership role in discussions about the creation of a strong, new, global treaty to come into force when the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol begins in 2012.

■ **Commit** to significant reductions in domestic GHG emissions and the rapid transfer of clean energy technologies to developing countries.

■ **Increase** U.S. development aid for vulnerable countries and populations to adapt to climate-induced disasters.

■ **Establish** incentives and disincentives for the private sector to reduce GHGs and invest in more efficient, climate-sensitive ways of doing business at home and abroad.

"We cannot achieve the transformation we need, both in the United States and throughout the international community, without mandatory action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution."

– Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives (21)

WHAT CAN BE DONE?



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ABOUT WEDO

The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) is a global advocacy organization that has pioneered efforts to bring a gender perspective and women's voices into policy on sustainable development since the UN Earth Summit in 1992. This fact sheet is part of WEDO's campaign, Women Demand U.S. Action on Climate Change, an education and advocacy initiative designed to mobilize the U.S. public, and women in particular, to push for U.S. re-engagement in global post-Kyoto negotiations.

To learn more about WEDO's work on climate change and find out how to get involved, visit: www.wedo.org and join the WEDO sustainable development listserv by sending an email to: WEDOSustDev2002-subscribe@yahoo.com.

This factsheet was made possible through a generous contribution by the Global Fund for Women.



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