

## Climate Conversations.

March 2009

The scenarios emerging from the preliminary Copenhagen discussions are bleak. Some scientists are saying it is too late to restore the climate, oceans are rising faster than expected, turning more acidic, the rainforests are disappearing and the ice sheets are retreating faster than forecast. The worst scenarios as given in the IPCC 4<sup>th</sup> Reports of 2007 now look optimistic. Pessimism easily becomes defeatism as prospects of mitigation turn to adaptation to the inevitable changes. Others are more optimistic, but time is short.

**Given BAU what would now seem to be inevitable by 2100 or sooner are,**

- A human population of 7-9 billion.
- A temperature rise of at least 2°C possibly a disastrous 5°C if nothing is done.
- At least 1 metre or higher sea rise by 2100 due to thermal expansion and glacial and ice caps melt.
- Increased desertification in the middle latitudes causing food shortages.
- Increased acidity of the seas as they absorb the CO<sub>2</sub> causing a decline in coral reefs and sea plankton reducing the biodiversity and resources of the oceans, reducing the ability of the seas to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Extinction of 25%-35% of species due to human actions as an optimistic scenario.
- Above 2°C tropical and other forests decline due to increased CO<sub>2</sub> and temperature rises releasing carbon, not absorbing it.
- Methane locked in the permafrost and the Arctic and Antarctic seas released as temperatures increase thus creating a warming feedback. Methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Migration of human beings due to climate change, desertification, and sea rise to Northern latitudes and elsewhere where the climate retains the ability to support humanity..

**Sir Nicholas Stern in his Report of 2006 wrote that BAU, Business as Usual is no longer an option as the cost of action is much less than the consequences of inaction.**

Being positive there are actions we can take now to live a greener life. The politics that accepts the need to live a sustainable life and looks long term and not short term can make a difference locally, nationally and globally. Humanity could deliver a better, healthier and happier lifestyle and preserve the planet for future generations. We are at the point in many economies where economic growth no longer brings improvements in the quality of life, in fact the reverse. We have no option other than to 'try it'.

As some changes are inevitable and the scientific debate is where, what and when. There is a need not only to mitigate the worst effects of human production of excess CO<sub>2</sub> but also to adapt to changes that are seen as inevitable as well as change to our lifestyles. Mitigation plus adaptation.

The eight actions proposed by Jeffery Sachs that are needed for each individual to fulfil the hopes of this generation are ....

1. Learn about the challenges. Understand the science
2. Travel, especially the young. Understand and experience other places and other cultures.
3. Join or start an organisation committed to Sustainable Development. There are several in Cumbria.
4. Encourage your community/church to join the cause of Sustainability.
5. Promote sustainability in personal lifestyle and community.
6. Get politically engaged.
7. Engage your workplace.
8. Live personally according to the standards of the Millennium Goals; ie eradicate poverty, universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, Combat AIDs and malaria etc, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership.

The very serious challenges and threats of Climate Change are also the greatest opportunities of this millennium. Ours is a generation where we can harness science, can understand and serve the processes of the planet, find a new ethic of global cooperation with each other and creation and bequeath a healthy planet or human civilisation to future generations. Christ, Christians believe, came to share our life on this planet, can we do the same? Is our redemption through Christ a renewal of our intelligence and ecology?

**Using God, Nature and Climate Change I suggest that we begin a process of small group Climate Conversations in local churches, or elsewhere using Jeffrey Sachs eight actions as a basis. Would the group be prepared to promote such ‘ Conversations ‘ ? Papers could be written and are available to support this.**

### **The Target.**

**By New years day 2101, humanity will have survived the worst of global warming, higher temperatures and sea levels, the intense droughts and storms and has somehow succeeded in stabilizing the Earth’s climate below 2°C. Atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations have peaked and are declining, global temperatures are returning to their pre-warming levels, the natural world is gradually healing and the social contract, agreed at Copenhagen in December 2009 held. Humanity, though lower in numbers and living sustainably is as a whole, better fed, healthier and more prosperous in community than it was in 2009 as human beings have managed to save a threatened world from the catastrophes of their own making. A more secure, stable world, growing strongly with a safe natural environment and with less poverty. A world acting together.**

How do we achieve this?

- Thinking long term, minimum a century. Climate change is a long term problem as its effects are gradual on the human time scale. Actions today are visited on future generations and we need to act as if the future of the planet matters beyond our own short lives.
- Innovation. The world needs to develop and widely disseminate technologies that produce carbon free energy, minimizing cost and maximising convenience. Investment in energy efficiency and new technology . Risk growth that is sustainable that does not produce CO<sub>2</sub>, including carbon absorbing.
- Human population. There needs to continue the open dialogue on human population, promote policies and programs that will eventually reverse the current trend of growth. The world’s nations made a commitment in 1994 to meet the family planning, health and education needs of women. This needs to be honoured as an essential first step.
- Changing lifestyles. The way we live will have to change. We will have to live without oversize cars, oversize homes, status based consumption for its own sake, cheap world travel, meat with every meal, natural resources instead of oil based products and frugal but good living. Doing without too much luxury, living more naturally on enough and living more equitably. Sharing more can make communities stronger where people are much much happier. Small scale solutions within a large scale agreement, sharing more and stronger communities.
- Healing the land. We need to reverse the flow of Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from destroyed forests and land and by rightly managing the soil it will remove these gases from the air. The land can become a carbon sink if properly managed and many more forests planted.
- Strong institutions. An effective United Nations Environmental Programme, reliable economic support with governments who will agree, institute and apply carbon reducing policies. This will have public agreement and promoted as a democratic priority.
- The Equity imperative. A climate agreement that shares the burdens and costs. The Third World, the larger part of the population, bear the major burdens of climate change, whereas citizens of the First World; the USA, contributing 20 times the carbon waste to the problem as do China, Europe and India. Contraction and convergence as an agreed international policy.
- Economic stability. Although the global economy has foundered in 2008/9 there will be a need for equity of economies in bad as well as good times supported by international agreements. A fair sharing of the sustainable resources of the planet.
- Political stability. A world distracted by terrorism, and wars will not be able to focus long term. Internationally and nationally there must be mechanisms which increase equality, defuse violence, conflict, and terrorism, practice peace and look to sustaining the interdependence of the planet. This includes the rights of other life forms as well as human rights.
- Mobilizing for change. Seeing climate change as real opportunities not insoluble problems; new energy industries, new economies based on living equally with the planet not competing with it/her.

**The Copenhagen Climate Conference of December 2009 must succeed if the future is to be assured.**

### **Sources**

- **Layard, Richard.** Happiness; Lessons From a New Science. Allan Lane, 2005.

- **Sachs, Geoffrey.** Commonwealth; Economics for a Crowded Planet. Allan Lane 2008.
- **Stern, Nicholas,** A Blueprint for a Safer Planet; How to Manage Climate Change and create a New Era of Progress and Prosperity. Bodley Head, 2009.
- **Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate.** The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always do Better. Allen Lane, 2009.
- **Worldwatch Institute.** State of the World 2009. Confronting Climate Change. Earthscan, 2009