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Victor Menotti

15 October 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Friends and Colleagues of the International Forum on Globalization (IFG)

FROM: Victor Menotti, Executive Director, IFG

RE: Emergency efforts on climate, moving towards Copenhagen

Last week, the IFG was in Bangkok at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations because setting strong ecological limits is essential in our fight for a global economic transition.

I am writing to update you on our emergency efforts to still make something meaningful happen at the summit to take place less than two months from now (December 7-19, 2009) in Copenhagen, where 180+ nations will convene to address our global climate crisis and negotiate the next steps after the Kyoto Protocol. Prospects for a transformative deal are dimming, but we see some important steps that are possible to achieve in a final push. What we do in Copenhagen can also set the context for necessary change in 2010 and beyond.

Bridging North-South Divisions

The simple truth is that the Obama Administration is risking a much-needed deal by failing to establish trust and by deepening divisions with developing countries. The President's climate team is still ignoring what the rest of the world says are necessary elements for a fair deal within scientific reality. Even though some members of the Philippines' delegation lost their homes in recent extreme weather events, top US negotiators are still questioning the sincerity of developing country leaders in seeking an effective deal.

No adequate agreement is possible unless dynamics between the White House and developing country leaders change, and change soon. Otherwise, we face collapse of the foremost process for nations to cooperate to counter climate change. All of our local initiatives and personal efforts may continue to drive change from the bottom up but we still need the world's governments to do their job by setting the rules of commerce correctly so that we conserve natural resources and accelerate transition towards a fossil-free future.

IFG plays a unique role bridging these North-South, rich-poor divides, and by bringing forth progressive internationalist perspectives. We do this by working closely with leaders from developing countries and communities to project their concerns into the political discussions and identify real policy solutions. And we ground these demands in the grassroots groups here at home in the US. We prioritize the issues that matter most to them, such as financing for clean technology transfer (i.e., solar and wind, not nuclear and "clean" coal), plus the protection of indigenous rights. Together, these issues cover many aspects of the world we want, where new energy infrastructure is subject to democratic control and traditional peoples regain power over their lands, territories, and resources.

In Bangkok, the United States finally tabled its first proposals for financing efforts by poor countries to adapt to climate change and access clean energy, some of which included important ideas proposed by IFG's "Call for a UN Global Climate Fund" and our recent roundtables on technology sharing. We also took part in serious discussions to ensure strong indigenous rights in a climate deal. But there was little reaction to any of the substance in these proposals since people were so outraged by U.S. proposals to reduce its own commitments to cut carbon emissions while increasing the requirements of other countries less responsible for the crisis! Clearly, this is an unacceptable scenario that must change. How?

Obama must lead, really lead

Despite his urging the world to act now, President Obama is currently allowing a divided Congress to hold hostage any truly meaningful action on climate. It may sound smart when his White House advisors warn that, "We don't want to get burned again, like in Kyoto," (referring to the time the US signed a climate treaty Congress would not accept). But when a house is on fire, true leaders do not wait for total agreement on if, when, or how, to put it out. They see the emergency, and they act upon it.

American presidents have previously taken positions on the global stage without explicit Congressional mandates, though too often it's to promote narrow private agendas rather than the public interest, let alone that of the planet. This spring, President Obama joined G20 leaders in London by pledging \$850 billion to expand the International Monetary Fund, then a month later pushed through Congress \$100 billion with no real debate. In summer, he called—against campaign promises—for the conclusion of a new WTO deal that Congress has already voted against. Underestimating the negative impact of a failed Copenhagen outcome not only risks efforts to restore America's responsible standing in the world but also prospects of getting another, better agreement in the near future.

True, no one knows for sure if we're frogs slowly boiling to death in water or if we're approaching the "tipping point" of irreversible ecological consequences. What we do know from the cost curves of McKinsey & Co. is that acting now is way cheaper than waiting. Put it in perspective: we've spent trillions this year bailing out banks with sinfully big bonuses, sending our troops overseas to defend oil fields, and cashing in clunkers only to replace them with vehicles that get as little as four miles more per gallon. If you think we can't afford to act now, wait till you see the bill for ignoring the problem.

Urgent action needed now

The next two months are critical in the mobilization for global climate justice. The United States is currently seen as the biggest obstacle to sealing a deal. Countries like China, which the US once used as an excuse for inaction, are now leading the way in the development of a new green economy.

Your contribution will go directly towards our work over the next few months toward Copenhagen. We will mobilize public pressure that moves US decision-makers to provide a clear contribution to our international responsibilities for climate solutions. IFG is also organizing US stakeholders in the green economy to have an informed, unified, and effective voice to ensure that Washington hears that Americans want our country to lead the transition to a sustainable future, not to be the obstacle to innovative and essential solutions.

Your donation will also help us increase support for applying the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into the negotiating texts of any UN climate agreement. Later this fall, IFG is convening indigenous leaders from around the world, together with our non-indigenous colleagues in the global environmental and human rights communities, to detail how to protect and promote the rights of the peoples who are stewards of the remaining forests and ecosystems so critical to our planet's health and survival.

IFG's work has never been more important, and our role never more critical. Your generosity will ensure that we continue our work leading up to this most important December meeting in Copenhagen. We sincerely thank you for your support.

PS – Every donor to this letter will receive an invitation to participate in IFG's upcoming "Pre-Copenhagen Climate Briefings" – at an upcoming evening in our office or by joining us on a conference call.