



Viterbo Memorandum

Conclusions from the 7th Greenaccord International Forum

“Climate is Changing: Facts, Stories and People”

Viterbo, Italy, November 25-29, 2009

The “Green Accord” for Journalists

In 2003, during the First International Forum for Environmental Protection, opened by Prof. Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, more than 100 journalists from all over the world were invited by Greenaccord to Rapolano (Siena–Italy), where they signed a “Green Accord” for Journalists. The text began with the following considerations:

We know the climate is changing, probably as a result of humanity’s pollution; species are disappearing fast; deforestation is rampant; over-fishing is rife; water shortages are increasing; resource consumption is growing and so is the world’s population.

Let us project ourselves a hundred years into the future. If we take the wrong path, we could face a world where temperatures have soared, with potentially devastating consequences for life as we know it. Economic activity would be severely disrupted. Mass migration of environmental refugees would bring misery to millions. People previously dependent on fish would face serious problems with nutrition. Grain belts may shift and food security be disrupted. More wars would erupt over natural resources. The poor will bear the brunt, but no one will completely escape.

If at that time we were driven by doubtful fears, today, unfortunately, science has focused and confirmed the risks to which humanity is exposed.

What we know:

Scientific analyses on different topics agree in considering that the next decades are crucial for the future of humanity. Anthropogenic pressures on the Earth System converge to a critical point and, by negative synergy, risk to produce irreversible changes in parameters which have driven life on our planet during the entire development of human civilization. All the participants to this Forum agree that an urgent global deal is needed to avoid the collapse of civilization and open a new era of progress for entire humanity.

- Greenhouse gases emissions produced by human activities raised CO₂ atmospheric concentration up to 385,57 ppm in 2008, well over the limit of 350 ppm considered a cap not to be exceeded in order to avoid dangerous and irreversible climate change.
- The number of people suffering from hunger started to grow again, reaching 1 billion in 2009. Climate change, modifying hydrological cycles and soil fertility, will deeply worsen the situation in the next decades.
- The number of species threatened with extinction, driven up by the growing anthropogenic pressure on natural ecosystems and worsened by the rapid modification of habitat caused by climate change, points to the risk of a sixth major extinction event in the history of life on Earth.
- We are pushing the planet outside Holocene - a ten thousand years era of relatively stable environment, with all parameters that regulate life fluctuating within a narrow range of variability, which allowed the development of human civilization - and entering Anthropocene, a new era where humans constitute the dominant architect of change to the Earth System (Crutzen 2002; Steffen et al.2007)
- Rapid melting of the arctic ice shelf during summer, the retreat of Greenland glaciers and West Antarctic ice sheets, a four degree latitude pole-ward shift of subtropical regions, the increased bleaching and mortality in coral reefs, an increased rate of sea-level rise, the increasing number of great flood events, and the weakening of the oceanic carbon sink capacity, clearly show the gravity of the situation and call for effective actions and statements.

In the Rapolano "Green Accord" we said that:

If this catastrophe unfolds, historians will look back and ask how that was allowed to happen with so little media debate. They may wonder what stories journalists were telling while the world was transformed around them.

Now we know that:

The most urgent challenge - which underlines all the others and enhances their negative effects - is certainly climate change. The need to implement strategies for emissions reduction and the delay of positive effects occurring in atmosphere indicate that urgent effective commitments should be immediately implemented by all countries, especially by industrialized countries. Current economical difficulties cannot be taken as a reason to delay such commitments, since investments in clean technologies and reworking energy systems towards renewable sources already represent a great opportunity today, and a strong tool to re-launch the global economy.

- The current financial crisis may turn out to be a golden opportunity to move towards low-carbon growth. The countries' efforts to reinvigorate their economies through a variety of fiscal stimulus packages offer an unprecedented opportunity to shift off higher carbon business-as-usual growth paths. A "green" fiscal stimulus of approximately \$400 billion in the next year, directed towards clean power generation, energy efficiency and fuel switching, would be consistent with long-term climate ambitions, while simultaneously providing an effective boost to the economy, and building the foundations for a strong and sustainable future growth. *Urgent attention is needed to ensure that implementing the stimulus packages does not aggravate the mitigation challenge by locking in high-carbon infrastructure.* These packages should rather be used to provide developing countries with additional incentives to "green" their recovery programs. [World Bank, "Financing technology to support low-carbon and climate-resilient growth", G8 Siracusa, April 22- 24, 2009].
- It is necessary to spread across the entire society the awareness that we are at a turning point. The challenge for climate change implies the need to phase out, as soon as possible, the current economic system, which is predominantly supplied by fossil fuels and not by renewable energy; and because the world's reserves of coal, natural gas, oil and uranium are bound to finish sooner or later.
- Furthermore, it is needed to implement a more efficient economic system, focused on producing goods that, in turn, are truly effective in producing well-being. If we want to continue to create well-being for a future humanity, and extend it to the entire world population, we have to shift urgently to an economy based predominantly on renewable sources available locally.
- A radical change, such as the one mentioned above, implies a great economical, scientific, cultural and technological effort, which must be supported by a growing engagement in the research and development of new, clean and efficient technologies. The fear of change - which follows the illusion that we may carry on into the future while following the same patterns of the past, or the impulse to stay put and wait for better times and a slower change, for the sake of not upsetting the current economic equilibrium - really seems to be the major risk; the approaching dangerous physical boundaries, and the timeframe needed to implement the energy revolution, implies an extreme urgency to immediately define and implement a coherent global strategy.
- In order to make such a strategy more effective, it is important to disseminate the correct perception of risks. The need for action concerns all humanity, and the responsibility lies within all social levels, whether political, economic, scientific, or individual.

Resolution

Scientists, journalists, and all the witnesses who shared their personal experience of climate change during the Greenaccord International Forum in Viterbo, ask all the parties involved in the UNFCCC Copenhagen Conference to draw a road map representing a binding agreement for a total de-carbonization of the world economy before 2050, and every country must assume a responsibility based on its emissions and its economic level.

For their part, the Greenaccord participants vow to cooperate, in order to disseminate correct and accurate information on the risks related to climate change, and to make the public aware of the fact that their individual contributions is as simple as adopting a more sustainable lifestyle.