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Climate change and natural disasters

Motion for a recommendation
presented by Mrs de Melo and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

Global warming poses a growing threat to our environment and to humanity, and basic elements of life on earth such as water resources, food production, health and major natural balances are likely to be disrupted. All the evidence points to an increase in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of ice and rising global mean sea levels. Eleven of the last twelve years rank among the twelve hottest years since 1850.

Glaciers, snow cover and the polar ice caps have shrunk in both hemispheres, thus contributing to an increase in sea level. Temperatures are higher, there is less rainfall, ocean surface temperatures are changing, winds and marine currents are affected. All these changes are leading to longer and more severe droughts, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions, and to catastrophic flooding in other parts of the globe. The frequency of heavy rain events has increased in most regions. Extreme temperature changes have been observed: cold days, cold nights and frost have become less frequent, while hot days, hot nights and heat waves have increased in frequency.

The European Union accounts for nearly 15% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, the main factor responsible for global warming. So far it has managed to keep its emissions at the 1990 reference level, but it is far from certain that it will achieve the target of an 8% reduction in its share of emissions by 2012, as stipulated in the Kyoto Protocol.

In his 2005 review of the economic impact of global warming, Sir Nicholas Stern, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, estimated that climate change will cost the world 5,500 billion euros by the year 2100 unless immediate action is taken. Based on official economic models, the review shows that if nothing is done, the consequences of climate change could cost 5% of annual global GDP, starting now, and that collateral damage could even increase that cost to 20% of global GDP, if not more, whereas action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would involve expenditure of around 1% of annual global GDP, provided action is taken now.

Decision-makers the world over are aware of the challenge involved in achieving sustainable development of the planet. Governments and industrialists must take drastic urgent action to reduce man-made carbon dioxide emissions and reverse the trend towards global warming through technological and scientific innovation and changes in economic models.

The Assembly urges the European Union, the Council of Europe member states and the entire international community to take urgent and stringent measures to ensure that global climate change does not have irreversible consequences.

To this end, the rise in global temperatures must be limited to 2°C above the pre-industrial level and, as proposed by the European Commission, the group of developed countries should cut

their CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions to 30% below their 1990 levels by 2020 under a new international agreement.

The Assembly recommends that European countries show the way by undertaking unilaterally to reduce their emissions by at least 20% by 2020, this figure being increased to 30% once an international agreement has been signed. In the longer term, emissions will need to be reduced still further and the developing countries, in particular the major emerging economies, will also have to contribute to the global effort: by the year 2050, worldwide emissions will have to have been reduced to 50% below the 1990 level.

The European Union and, on a broader scale, the Council of Europe must help to make Europe a leader in action to bring about a rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Europe's economic and geographical diversity gives it the necessary experience to lead progress at global level.

The Assembly considers that the Council of Europe member states have a crucial and exemplary role to play in reconciling the continent's development needs with the preservation of its environment and that they must co-operate in an integrated regional sustainable development policy from which other regions of the world might draw inspiration.

The Assembly calls on the member states to support efforts to arrive at a new international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2012. For this purpose, it urges the member states in particular to introduce tougher rules for reducing their fossil fuel consumption.

The Assembly supports in particular the European Commission's proposals presented on 10 January 2007 and calls for rapid harmonisation and co-ordination of the national energy policies of all European countries with the aim of adopting a common European policy in this field.

It recommends that the Committee of Ministers instruct:

- the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement to develop new activities relating to climate change;
- the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) to consider all appropriate measures for mitigating the effects of climate change in Europe.

*Signed*¹:

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¹ SOC: Socialist Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democratic Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
NR: not registered in a group