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Negotiations will not save the planet

At COP15 world leaders need to reach an agreement to recognize the Earth Charter

Sylvia Borren, former Executive Director of Oxfam Novib

Ruud Lubbers, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands (Christian Democrats)

Sayida Vanenburg, former Netherlands youth representative to the UN commission on Sustainable Development

All three participate in an initiative known as the Worldconnectorsⁱ

During the Copenhagen Climate Summit next week world leaders will negotiate the future of our planet. However, they are not likely to sign a global climate treaty. The views of the various countries and the industrial and political power blocks on the subject of climate control differ too much.

The politicians, civil servants and other participants at the Copenhagen Summit will mainly bombard each other with numbers and figures. Figures on the level of reduction of CO₂ emissions the various nations should achieve, the amount of money they should put up in the years to come, the exact nature of their responsibilities, the number of degrees in temperature increase the Earth will be able to endure at the most, the amount of time that is left for us to keep on waiting.

Indeed, these are all very important issues, but the mere figures are simply not enough. A different approach to the subject is what is called for.

The climate issue can only be solved on the basis of shared, deeply felt ethical principles. Humanity has reached a critical moment in Earth history, one at which peoples and nation states will have to recognize their solidarity – both between peoples and with the Earth – and start acting upon it.

Similar to the way world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000 and the ensuing Millennium Development Goals, today's negotiators will have to commit themselves to creating a basis of shared fundamental ethical principles.

Such a basis is not hard to find. Its inspiration can be the Earth Charter which, launched in 2000, was initiated among others by former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev and by Professor Wangari Mathaai, who received the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts in the Green Belt Movement, a pan-African tree planting initiative.

The climate problem does not stop at borders. In the next few decades a low-lying country like the Netherlands will need to invest billions to intensify its age-old struggle against the rising water.

However, in many other countries the water is flooding over the dikes, both literally and figuratively speaking. It affects particularly those countries that lack the billions of dollars needed to take adequate measures against the rising water, persistent droughts or devastating storms, even though they had nothing to do with the cause of these problems viz. the industrialization of the developed countries.

Apart from necessary, often infrastructural adaptations needed to survive the effects of climate change, enormous efforts to prevent even worse things happening are required. Large investments in forestation, agriculture and energy supply are called for.

In devising solutions the role of women should be the main focus. They are often the first who have to address the problem of gaining access to natural resources and they are capable of playing a major role as pioneers in finding solutions to climate change and the way humankind should adapt to it.

In the short term the world should become a sustainable global society of low CO₂ emitters. This is a world-wide mission for all humankind and one of which patriotic feelings and thinking in terms of power blocks have no place.

The pursuit of a sustainable global society of low CO₂ emitters requires a tremendous effort. Precisely because of this an ethical basis is necessary. A combined and passionate ethical effort will see to it that the negotiating parties - and all those involved - in Copenhagen will not only look at finding solutions to a part of the problem but first and for all at an all-encompassing comprehensive solution.

The climate change issue is too important to leave to the politicians. In Copenhagen it is therefore imperative that not only nation states, but the business community and citizens also combine their efforts to take the initiative to save the climate.

ⁱ Worldconnectors are a group of mainly Dutch people who work in the NGO-sector, for the government, business, media, the world of politics or in the representation of youth. They discuss different themes and issues related to international cooperation and the global community and inspire their work on the UN Millennium Declaration and the Earth Charter.
For more information visit: www.worldconnectors.nl