

National Council for Environment and Sustainable Development (CNADS) Statement on the Challenge of Climate Change

The global climate change, arising from human intervention, will have profoundly adverse effects in the biophysical systems and in the viability of several socio-economical sectors (namely water resources, agriculture, forest, biodiversity, coastal zones, human health and migration flows). There are already unmistakable signs of the climate change, especially visible in the rise of the global medium temperature in the lower atmosphere and in the superficial ocean waters, as well as a greater frequency in extreme weather and climate phenomena. Such situation will imply urgent decisions concerning the ethical paradigm that will preside over a good world government, especially focusing on safeguarding social and natural equity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has already called attention to the fact that the less developed countries and some social groups in developed countries will be the ones to suffer more with climate change. That is due to their lesser capability to adapt to climate changer and to the fact that their way of life directly depends upon activities such as agriculture, forest and fishery.

To stabilise today and, in a medium run, to diminish the global emissions of greenhouse gases is an intra and intergeneration ethical issue, that corresponds to one of the greatest challenges that Mankind faces in the beginning of the XXI century. The current dependency on fossil fuels, which is around 70% in the primary energy sources, will have to be reduced: that will only be achieved through a global understanding of a common sharing of quality of life standards and responsibilities. This challenge is unsurpassable and will have to be assumed.

Internationally, we are going through a particularly delicate stage, for we are coming near the end of the Kyoto Protocol enforcement period, in 2012, and the first meetings to negotiate the post-Kyoto climate regime will be held in Bali, from 3 to 14 of December, as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Portugal has increased responsibilities in this process, as the country exercising the Presidency of the European Union's Council. It would be dramatic and unacceptable that the international community was left without a common and vigorous answer to such a serious global threat in post-Kyoto and unable to contribute to establish a regulatory framework that will arise after 2012 and should be more focused on aspects relating to adaptation policies. The EU should become a dialogue and understanding promotion vehicle between countries so important as the United States, China and India, without which it will not be possible to succeed in the inevitable fight against the global threat of climate change.

The CNADS subscribes the goal of reducing greenhouse gases global emissions in comparison with 1990 in, at least, 20% until 2020 and in, at least, 50%, until 2050, so dangerous anthropogenic impacts upon the climate system are avoided. If these reductions are not achieved, it is very likely that the global medium temperature in the lower atmosphere will rise more than 2° Celsius, in comparison to values before the Industrial Revolution, causing serious damages in several regions of the world, particularly in the most vulnerable, such as Southern Europe and the Mediterranean area, where Portugal is located.

Faced with the disastrous consequences, that are partly not possible to be avoided, of an anthropogenic climate change in a country such as Portugal, especially vulnerable in several sectors and systems – water resources (for instance, scarceness of water, difficult access to water, floods), biodiversity, coastal and river areas, food quality, human health (for instance, heat waves and diseases carried by vectors) and tourism –, the CNADS appeals that a growing importance is given to the adaptation side, that is, to minimising potentially adverse impacts. Furthermore, it will be ethically necessary to mobilise the economic agents and the civil society so as to build an adaptation strategy to climate change in Portugal. The making of this strategy can benefit from the recent EU Green Paper on Adaptation – “*Adapting to Climate Change in Europe – options for EU action*” (COM (2007) 354).

Therefore, the CNADS considers that the European Union in the Bali negotiations should adopt a forceful position so as to limit the global emissions to levels that will avoid a dangerous anthropogenic interference upon the climate system. It is urgent to include the decision-makers and the civil society in the analysis and discussion of the future sharing of responsibilities between Member States in emission reduction, something that is needed to achieve the EU's global goal and in the way Portugal will honour the commitments.

The CNADS considers the answer to the climate change challenge, as urgent as it is, will not stop from being a long, complex, error and correction-prone process. This answer shall have to be global, implying a reorganisation, under the sign of cooperation, of governing institutions and mechanisms of the international community. In this answer it is important to respect the equity principle in sharing efforts and benefits between countries and inside the nations.

Finally, bearing in mind the unprecedented and serious nature of this crucial threat, especially since it is a long-term civilisation process that will deeply affect society and will have implications in vital sectors such as energy, water and biodiversity, challenged by the short-term character of the political cycles, the CNADS considers it to be urgent to promote, along with an adjusted and persistent information campaign, a long-term educational program in the several teaching, scientific investigation and professional training levels, namely in the Central and Local Public Administration, so that Portugal can effectively face the global challenges that oppose themselves to sustainable development and, thus, contribute to fight climate change.

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The President

Mário Ruivo