

ADVISORY LETTER

INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE POLICY

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Date 17 July 2019

Re Advisory Letter on International Climate Policy from the Advisory Council
on International Affairs (AIV)

Dear Ms Kaag,

The Climate Action Summit, an initiative of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, will take place in New York on 23 September 2019. Mr Guterres is deeply concerned about achieving the goals set out in the Paris Agreement and fears that momentum is slipping away. 'Climate change is running faster than our efforts to address it – and political will in many parts of the world is unfortunately slowing down.'¹

The likelihood that the long-term goals set in Paris will actually be achieved does indeed appear to be at risk of diminishing. It will be a major undertaking to limit the rise in temperature to 2 degrees Celsius (and 1.5 degrees if possible). That half a degree may seem like a minimal difference, but the difference in impact is enormous. It is the difference between extreme heat waves every five years for 14% or 37% of the global population, i.e. a difference of 1.7 billion people.² The consequences of climate change include poor crop yields, megacities becoming unliveable, increasing floods, persistent freshwater shortages and greater migration flows worldwide, within and between countries and continents. Those with the lowest incomes will be hit the hardest.³ In its Global Risks Report 2019, the World Economic Forum states that the consequences of climate change can be extremely severe and the probability of their occurring very high.⁴ If global warming exceeds 2 degrees, more and more people will have to try to survive in a climate that is less and less conducive to quality of life.

That said, this is not necessarily the way things have to go. To turn the tide, the international community will have to work together from now; it is a case of 'all hands

1 UN Secretary-General's Address to Fijian Parliament, 15 May 2019.

2 Mommers, J. (2019). *Hoe gaan we dit uitleggen*. Amsterdam: De Correspondent BV, pp. 68-69. See also Matthews, T.K., Wilby, R.L. and Murphy, C. (2017). 'Communicating the deadly consequences of global warming for human heat stress'. PNAS, vol. 14, no. 15, pp. 3861-3866.

3 Ibid. See also UNEP (2019). *Global Environment Outlook 6: Healthy People, Healthy Planet*. This report establishes the relationship between health, wellbeing and climate, as well as showing the complex interaction between the human environment and socioeconomic issues.

4 World Economic Forum (2019). *The Global Risks Report 2019*. Geneva: WEF, p. 8. In terms of probability, extreme weather conditions top the list of global risks, followed by 2) failed adaptation and mitigation and 3) natural disasters. In terms of impact, weapons of mass destruction are the most significant risk, followed by 2) failed adaptation and mitigation, 3) extreme weather conditions.

on deck'. As co-chair of the partnership for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)⁵ in 2019 and 2020, you will be in a unique position to support countries in pursuing the climate goals set in Paris. In the opinion of the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), measures in the form of financial incentives, financing and the development of standards could make a crucial difference. The AIV also considers, in line with the government position, that the Netherlands would do well to actively seek cooperation via the EU and within the European framework and show leadership at the summit in New York. In this advisory letter the AIV provides detailed recommendations on these topics, which it trusts will serve you in implementing the Netherlands' international climate policy.⁶

The Paris Agreement

Current international climate policy is based chiefly on the content of the Paris Agreement. 185 parties to the Agreement have undertaken to achieve global goals relating to mitigation, adaptation and climate finance. Mitigation is defined as: 'holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change'. Adaptation is defined as 'increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development'. Climate finance refers to 'making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development' and to the mobilising of significant funds by developed countries for climate action in developing countries.⁷ The signatory countries agreed to submit their plans to achieve these outcomes in 2020.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecasts that the initial intentions and actions of the signatories to the Paris Agreement will fall short of the agreed climate goals.⁸ The effective temperature rise at this time already represents an increase of 1 degree Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. Without climate policy, mean global temperature in 2100 would be approximately 5 degrees higher than in 1990. With the climate policy as partly elaborated in Paris, the temperature rise will be limited to 3 degrees.⁹ More drastic measures will be needed in order to stay below a

5 The Paris Agreement established that states would announce their ambitions in the form of Nationally Determined Contributions every five years, starting in 2020. These NDCs should 'reflect [the country's] highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances'. See Article 4, paragraphs 2, 3 and 9 of the Paris Agreement, published in OJEU L282/4 (19 October 2016). Retrieved from EurLex.europa.eu.

6 The Netherlands' international climate policy focuses on non-Dutch actors that are relevant to climate action – including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the EU – as well as on Dutch and other measures with a climate-relevant extraterritorial effect. In drafting this advisory letter, the committee spoke to more than 40 people from civil society organisations, knowledge institutions, embassies and government ministries, among others.

7 See also the Paris Agreement, published in OJEU L282/4 (19 October 2019). Retrieved from EurLex.europa.eu.

8 See for example the 5th and 6th Assessment Reports by the IPCC.

9 Climate Action Tracker.

3 degree increase, let alone 2 degrees or 1.5 degrees. The AIV does not rule out that it may become necessary to consider a wider use of nuclear energy, in combination with facilities to ensure its long-term safety.

The Paris Agreement pays particular attention to the position of developing countries and the relationship between rich and poor countries. Many developing countries lack the financial resources to take the necessary measures. Moreover, developing countries are not the biggest source of cumulative greenhouse gases per capita.¹⁰ It would also not be desirable for these countries to follow the same path of damaging economic and industrial development as wealthy countries did. For that reason, it has been agreed that the 40-some developed countries will take the lead in mobilising climate finance. Between 2020 and 2025, \$100 billion in climate finance, from both public and private funds, will have to be provided annually. A new financing target will be set for 2025, which will have to be higher than the \$100 billion annually agreed for 2020.¹¹

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and, more specifically, Sustainable Development Goal 13 – aims to combat climate change. Developing countries in particular will suffer the worst impacts of climate change, such as poor harvests, declining economic productivity, desertification, flooding, health impacts and migration flows. The preamble to the Paris Agreement references human rights – and with good reason. Although it is clear that rising temperatures soon put socioeconomic rights at risk – such as the right to a reasonable standard of living and the right to health – the human rights dimension is not addressed in further detail in the body of the Agreement. The AIV believes that human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals – including SDG 13 – can reinforce each other. This is explained in AIV advisory report no. 110 entitled 'Sustainable development Goals and human rights: an indivisible bond'. In that report, the AIV recommended that climate reporting systematically address the human rights dimension and draw attention to the need for arriving at an inclusive climate policy. Following on from that recommendation, the AIV is of the opinion that human rights could be a standard element of frameworks for assessing the expediency and effects of mitigation and adaptation measures.¹² This could be achieved via participative processes which ensure that the position of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples, is sufficiently taken into account.

From Paris to New York and beyond

The Climate Action Summit being held in New York on 23 September 2019 is not only an opportunity to underline the urgency of the climate issue once again; it also offers an excellent chance to emphasise the possibilities for a joint approach, thus giving renewed impetus to the development of the new climate plans that countries are required to submit by 2020.

10 See Ritchie, H. & Roser, M. (2019). 'CO₂ and other Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Per Capita CO₂ Emissions'. Published online at OurWorldInData.org.

11 See the letter of 19 February 2016 from the State Secretary for Infrastructure and the Environment to the House of Representatives, on international climate agreements. Parliamentary Paper 31 793, no. 136.

12 This is in line with the work being done by the UN Human Rights Council in this regard; see the section on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) entitled 'Human Rights and Climate Change'.

However, quite a few countries lack a sense of urgency and whether they will honour their commitments is increasingly becoming a matter for discussion. Moreover, there is growing opposition to the considerable costs of climate mitigation measures and the possible distribution of those costs. International policy efforts depend on the extent to which countries fulfil their national pledges. If global progress is to be achieved, then such progress must be pursued and attained in as many countries as possible. The argument that the Netherlands is supposedly too small to have any impact on climate change is not a valid one, as it is the sum of all national efforts that guarantees the essential global result.

The advisability of immediate intervention is also clear from a financial perspective. Although in this case too, the costs precede the benefits, ultimately the benefits of timely intervention against climate change will significantly outweigh the cost of doing nothing. An authoritative report estimated that if the whole world were to take a passive approach to climate change, the cost to society would be equivalent to a loss of at least 5% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) annually.¹³ Moreover, research by the EU Climate Cost project shows that failure to take timely action will have major economic and societal consequences for EU member states. Europe would see an average annual GDP loss of 4%, whereas implementing mitigation measures could reduce this loss to between 0.5 and 1%.¹⁴ Recent research fully confirms this estimate.

Recommendations

The AIV notes that the harmful consequences of climate change have been more than sufficiently substantiated by science and that human behaviour is clearly a key factor in such change. It is both necessary and possible for states and other actors to take action to keep climate change within the limits set by the Paris Agreement. Fast, powerful intervention is therefore desirable. Achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement was the defining ambition in drawing up the following recommendations, which focus in particular on mitigation and on coherence between aid, trade and financing.

1. Promoting the use of financial incentives

The third goal of the Paris Agreement refers to making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development, as well as mobilising significant funds in developed countries for climate action in developing countries. You have also announced mobilising finance and facilitating implementation of climate action and investment plans as priority themes in your role as co-chair of the NDC Partnership.¹⁵ The AIV concurs with the importance of these priorities, since current funding is insufficient to achieve the climate goals that have

13 Stern, N.H. (2007). *The Economics of Climate Change: the Stern Review*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

14 Watkiss, P. (Editor) (2011). *The Climate Cost Project. Final report. Volume 1: Europe. The impacts and economic costs of climate change in Europe and the costs and benefits of adaptation*. Stockholm: Stockholm Environment Institute.

15 The Government of the Netherlands (12 December 2018). 'Netherlands to assist developing countries with climate plans'. Retrieved from www.government.nl.

been set.¹⁶ Three financial instruments are described below which, in the opinion of the AIV, are relevant in this regard: carbon pricing, phasing out investment in fossil fuels and developing fiscal incentives. Since such financial reforms require well-coordinated international action, these topics are especially suited to being discussed and organised at multilateral level.

a) Carbon pricing

In the AIV's opinion, it is important to aim for realistic, wide-ranging pricing for externalities – the unintended harmful effects of economic activity. Effective carbon pricing will first of all be necessary for the international community to bring about an actual energy transition. Laws and regulations can be used to create a 'level playing field', so undesirable derivative effects can be avoided. This will strengthen public support for stricter legislation. The AIV recommends initiating this from within the EU and engaging in international coalitions via that route.

b) Fossil fuels

Subsidies, export credits and taxpayers' money are currently used for international trade and investments in fossil fuels. This is not in line with the goals formulated in Paris. The AIV therefore recommends rapidly phasing out public financial support for fossil fuel exploration and the associated international investments in infrastructure in both developing and developed countries.¹⁷ Instead, public funding should go towards sustainable development and towards renewable energy research. This will also prevent developing countries from being saddled with a growing reservoir of potential stranded assets (financial assets that are prematurely devalued).

c) Fiscal incentives

Effective climate policy requires changes to tax regimes. Priority should be given to decisively combating tax evasion and discouraging tax avoidance, especially in fossil-fuel related industries. The resources this would yield are sorely needed to achieve a structural sustainable transition. Fiscal incentives can stimulate the circular economy, promote renewable energy and help create jobs.

2. New and supplementary funding

New and supplementary sources of funding are needed to finance other forms of international collaboration on environmental and other issues. This includes climate finance. In Paris, the parties to the Agreement pledged to provide \$100 billion annually to developing countries by 2020. The OECD has calculated that the amount currently made available is \$67 billion; that is not enough. The AIV is of the opinion that the Netherlands must honour that pledge and provide clarity regarding the higher

16 UNEP (27 November 2018). *The Emissions Gap Report 2018*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme.

17 This recommendation is in line with the letter of 13 July 2018 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the House of Representatives on the revised action plan and annual report on policy coherence for development (Parliamentary Paper 33 625 no. 265) and with the policies of the World Bank Group (see World Bank (2018). *The World Bank Annual Report 2018*, Washington, DC: World Bank, p. 28; Elliot, L. (2017). 'World Bank to End Financial Support for Oil and Gas Extraction', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2017; and Speech by World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim: 'Sending a Signal from Paris: Transforming the Economy to Achieve Zero Net Emissions', 8 December 2014. Retrieved from Worldbank.org).

contribution for the 2025 financing goal. After that, the Netherlands will also be able to more convincingly emphasise the need for new and supplementary funding at international level. In this way, additional international efforts to achieve the goal set can be promoted.

3. The development of internationally applicable standards

The ability to systematically track the finance flows that support climate adaptation contributes significantly to helping societies address the negative impacts of climate change more effectively. In this context, more insight into the adaptation and mitigation activities of financial institutions and companies is urgently needed, as it will lead to a better understanding of the impact of financial climate measures.

As early as 2015, the world's leading institutions for finance for development took a key step towards more consistent monitoring of the finance flows that help countries and people deal with the consequences of climate change.¹⁸ However, there are currently no uniform, applicable international standards for defining and measuring sustainability and climate impacts in terms of finance. Moreover, the availability of climate impact data within the private sector is limited.¹⁹ This delays efforts to make the financial system greener. Within the EU and the World Bank²⁰, a taxonomy (classification system) is currently being developed to identify the financial impact of climate change and, by extension, policy for providing access to financial information (financial disclosure policy). The AIV recommends further developing Dutch expertise in this field and making it internationally available for the development of internationally applicable standards. Analogous to the AIV advisory report on 'Sustainable Development Goals and human rights: an indivisible bond', a reporting obligation could also be introduced for this issue.

4. EU leadership in New York and beyond

The AIV concurs with the government's decision to channel Dutch climate efforts via the EU as much as possible, as joint European agreements yield the most results in the long run. Through the EU, the Netherlands can influence the global implementation of the Paris Agreement. The EU itself has quite a bit of work left to do as well. The European Commission's latest report showed that the proposals submitted by the member states are collectively lacking in ambition and are not tangible enough.

On the eve of the informal European Council meeting in Sibiu on 19 May 2019, a leading group of countries (France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden, Spain and Portugal) released a non-paper issuing a call for EU leadership in New York – and with good reason. During the European Council meeting on 20 and 21 June 2019,

18 The six major multilateral development banks (MDBs) and the International Development Finance Club (IDFC, a network of national, regional and international development banks) reached agreement in that year about a series of common standards for monitoring financial commitments. European Investment Bank (9 July 2015). 'Development Banks Agree on Common Approach to Measure Climate Finance'. Retrieved from www.eib.org.

19 This is one of the findings of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosure (TCFD), see TCFD (2017) 'Recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. Final Report' and TCFD (2018). 'Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures: Status Report 2018'.

20 Hallegatte, S., et al. (2016). *Shock Waves: Managing the Impacts of Climate Change on Poverty*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

it became apparent that a joint EU position at the climate summit is not feasible. Although a number of countries, including Germany, joined the leading group's initiative, a commitment to a climate-neutral Europe by 2050 was considered premature by various other countries, including Poland.

The AIV believes that the EU is duty-bound to make a good showing at the Climate Action Summit in September 2019 and would like to see the European heads of state or government attend the summit in person and commit to the goal of being climate-neutral by no later than 2050. The Netherlands could actively advocate this course of action. The AIV supports the government's efforts at EU level to raise the EU-wide target for a 55% greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2030. The AIV also considers that the United Kingdom – despite its probably inevitable withdrawal from the EU – should remain involved in the initiatives of the leading group even after a possible Brexit, in view of that country's progressive climate policies.

The AIV is of the opinion that, from within the EU, existing coalitions could also be expanded with India, China and African alliances such as the African Union (AU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), including Polynesia and the Caribbean islands that are part of the OCT-EU Association (Overseas Countries and Territories). China and India, which together emit over one third of all greenhouse gases, are key partners for the EU as a whole. These two countries have been developing into economic superpowers with massive populations; they are already facing major water shortages, flooding and drought, partly as a result of climate change. China and India also offer significant new markets for zero-carbon mitigation and adaptation technologies. Since the US is expected to play a limited role at the summit in New York, the AIV recommends that the EU – building on the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change and the India-EU Partnerships for Sustainability, Clean Energy and Climate Action – take the initiative to join forces with China and India to make phasing out investment in the fossil fuels sector a priority issue on the international climate agenda. The Netherlands has specific expertise to offer in the field of water management.

The African continent and the ACP countries are especially vulnerable to all the negative consequences of climate change. The AIV considers that, in New York, the EU should undertake to make an extra effort to prevent deforestation and damage to ecosystems, restore soil quality and promote renewable energy, sustainable water harvesting and more sustainable land use, working in conjunction with local communities and companies. In this way climate policy can contribute to broader development goals, particularly those concerning health, employment and good working conditions.

Final remarks

In the opinion of the AIV, the recommendations above can contribute to a successful outcome of the Climate Action Summit in New York and to future international climate negotiations. Time is short and the international community needs to embrace its responsibility.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

Chair of the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV)

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