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"A Climate for Change: Sustainable Modalities of Governance"

Abstract

In his speech to the 10th cohort of the Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship Programme on their graduation day, Martin Lees delivered this impactful reflection on the current state of affairs, the very real and imminent threat of climate change and how it will continue to affect humanity in the deepest of ways, and the fundamental importance of education for peace on a worldwide scale.

Ideas for peace



Introductory Statement by Dr. Martin Lees at the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the APS Programme in Japan

Martin Lees

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Ladies and gentlemen, we are living at a dangerous and complex time in world affairs when the norms, the relationships and the balance of power which have guided action and cooperation for so long are in a process of deep transformation and under threat. History shows us how easy it is, blinded by arrogance, ignorance or mistaken calculation to drift into conflict. In a world which spends around \$1.7 Trillion per year on armaments, it is therefore all the more essential to work for conflict prevention and the building of peace. This has been the high mission of the University for Peace (UPEACE) since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1980. As Kofi Annan once told me, its goal must be "to become the centre of a worldwide network of education for peace."

Since leaving UPEACE in 2005, I have focused first as Secretary General of the Club of Rome, on the linkages between economic growth and sustainability and, for the past 12 years on the critical issue of climate change from the perspectives both of science and policy. I have been asked in our panel, to make clear the essential linkages between global climate change, peace and development and to outline how sustainable modalities of governance can help us to master these intensifying threats to the future of us all.

Let me start with one important observation. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations are very different in their nature. In particular, we must recognise that Goals 13 on Climate Action, 14 on Life below Water, 15 on Life on Land and 16 on Peace and Justice are fundamental to achieving all the SDGs, because, if we fail to manage them effectively and in time, they will pose existential threats to the future of humanity.

We already begin to see around us the consequences and risks of accelerating climate change as I will explain. In addition, we humans are provoking the 6th mass extinction of species across the world, coupled with the degradation and destruction of terrestrial and ocean ecosystems. And we can see every day, the rising threats of inequality and exclusion, entrenched poverty, polarisation, violence and conflict.

Let me state clearly the existential threat to the future of humanity as demonstrated by science and evidence across the world: if we do not organise and act rapidly to manage the connected challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, we will not be able to preserve world peace or achieve just and successful world development.

In my experience, we spend too much time and energy debating what should be the goals of policy and not enough time focused on the practicalities of "political engineering", how we can achieve results in the real world. It is in this perspective that the focus of this conference on the design, reform and management of institutions to build sustainable, peaceful, just and strong societies is of fundamental importance. For it is through our institutions, for good or ill, that we cooperate to transform our aspirations, values and policies into reality. And I should underline here the simple point: that institutions are constituted by people. They are designed and driven by the knowledge, attitudes and motivations of the people involved. For this simple reason, the issue of education, which brings us together here today, is of such fundamental importance.

It is education which will enable leaders, officials, scientists and experts in all walks of life, and also the general public, to properly understand and act on the connected and systemic issues which now threaten the future of humanity itself and of the other living species with which we share our fragile planet. And, it is a sad commentary on the values and priorities of our leaders — which I know from personal experience at UPEACE — that vast resources are made available for armaments and war while it is intensely difficult to raise minimal support for education and the building of peace.

I will now outline very briefly the realities of climate change and then suggest their profound implications for peace and development and how the modalities of governance may be adapted to improve the prospects for stable and sustainable development.

The realities of climate change

I will use four figures to summarise the realities and implications of climate change:

- First, the extreme weather events - from which the people of the Philippines have suffered directly the devastating consequences - the droughts, floods fires and melting ice caps that we see around us today have been brought about by a rise in global average temperature of "only" 1°C since preindustrial times.
- Second, governments have determined - for political rather than scientific reasons - that the target for the international negotiations, for example at COP 21 in Paris in 2015, should be to contain the rise in global average temperature below 2°C or, more hopefully 1.5°C, so as to avert the risks of "dangerous climate change." However, when we consider the devastating impacts of the rise of 1°C which we see around us today, we should be deeply concerned about the consequences of a rise of 2°C or more.
- Third, if we continue on the present "business as usual path", global average temperature could rise by around 5° to 6°C by the end of this century, which would have catastrophic consequences for human civilisation.
- Finally, my fourth figure: if governments do implement all the commitments entered into in the Paris Agreement, we will still remain on a path to a rise of around 3.5°C which would have devastating consequences for food water and human security, undoing the gains of development so painfully achieved.

Let me underline four key implications of this very brief review:

First, I am speaking here of average figures. In many regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, the North and South Poles and at high altitudes, the temperature rise will be double these figures or more, with immense consequences for water security, agriculture, livelihoods and sea level rise.

Second, the linkages between climate change and the conservation of terrestrial and ocean ecosystems are of essential significance: for these wonderful natural ecosystems absorb around 50% of our emissions. Evidently, as they are degraded and destroyed, they absorb less greenhouse gases, so the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will increase.

Third, the natural systems which drive the global climate are complex and interconnected. We cannot expect that they will behave in predictable and linear ways. We must anticipate sudden changes and shocks. We must above all, avoid pushing these systems beyond the thresholds where we can no longer influence their behaviour. This underlines the importance of focusing on resilience and adaptation in national development strategies.

For all these reasons, scientists across the world are clear that, due to our failure to act effectively over the past 20 years, we now have very little time left to act to avert the risks of dangerous climate change.

I hope that this swift overview has made clear that the prospects for economic growth, human development and social justice in any country, rich or poor, will be determined in large part by our ability to manage and avert the grave challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation to the future.

I will now turn to the implications of this overview for the modalities of governance.

Sustainable modalities of governance

Governments across the world face the challenge of adapting their development models and plans, and their institutional frameworks. in response to the rising threats and impacts of climate change, and more generally, to move towards a more sustainable trajectory of growth. Solutions are very diverse. Each government adopts an approach consistent with its traditions, resources aspirations and institutional arrangements.

Let me now suggest four key issues in the choice of modalities of governance for sustainable and equitable development.

1. First, it is essential to adopt a coherent, cross-cutting and inclusive approach to define a strategy which takes proper account of the critical links between the major development issues which are most often analysed and treated separately. It has been a major mistake to focus on climate change as if it were a separate "stand-alone" environmental issue which can be resolved by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. As the Club of Rome made clear already in 1972 in *Limits to Growth*, climate change, together with the overuse of the biophysical and other resources of our fragile planet with the related environmental degradation, pollution and waste are the direct consequences of our models and strategies for economic growth and consumption.

Thus, climate change must be understood as a symptom and consequence of the growing scale and intensity of our economic activities. It follows that. if we are to avert dangerous climate change, we must address its fundamental causes which lie in the structures and processes of the real economy, that is to say, in the patterns of consumption, production. energy use agriculture urbanisation and transport. This has immediate

implications for the strategies and structures of government. These must be based on a government-wide approach to restructure the economy and the related energy systems to address the drivers of climate change. There is growing interest at OECD and elsewhere in the relevance of the tools and methods of systems thinking to develop more coherent and realistic approaches to research, policy formulation and action.

2. Second, climate change presents grave challenges to the continuation of our civilisation but it is not only an issue for the future: it is an immediate issue today as it is already damaging the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, especially of the poor and destitute who are the least responsible and the least able to adapt their lives.

The new modalities of governance must therefore be based on wide consultation and participation to listen to the voices of the poor so as to develop coherent and inclusive strategies which will integrate climate action with the goals of national development, human security and justice. Rather than ad hoc, short-term responses, this requires a combination of immediate action and longer-term vision to mobilise the capabilities of government and civil society towards the goals of sustainable development.

3. Third, the efforts of the world community of nations to contain the threats and risks of climate change have been in progress now for almost 25 years. But during this time, little practical action has been taken to reduce emissions which have in fact increased by around 70%. As a result, it is now inevitable that climate change will have increasingly damaging impacts on human lives and livelihoods, on infrastructure

and resources and thus on the prospects for development. New modalities of governance must therefore combine mitigation to avert further aggravation of the climate crisis with a strong emphasis on adaptation to those impacts which are now inevitable. Government strategies must therefore be formulated around resilience, anticipation and the management of risk under conditions of uncertainty.

4. The fourth essential aspect of governance is the need to mobilise all social forces to achieve sustainable and equitable development. Effective and predictable government policies, incentives and regulation are essential but the climate crisis cannot be mastered through government action alone. Cities, states and regions, industry, agriculture, finance and academia must all be mobilised, based on wide consultation and public participation.

It may appear that these four considerations are theoretical. But they lie at the roots of the transformation of the Chinese economy in recent years in response to the threats of climate change to which China is very vulnerable. I have had the privilege of working with leading personalities in China since 1980 on issues related to the reform and opening up of the Chinese economy to the wider world, then on the gradual move towards a new balance of economic growth and environmental protection vital to China's future.

The first step in China's response to the threats of climate change was the formulation of an over-arching national climate strategy. On this basis, a Leading Group of around 17 Ministers was established, chaired by the Premier. The secretariat of this powerful and comprehensive body is not the Ministry of the Environment but the National Development and Reform Commission which has competence for economic and investment decision making. Through these modalities of governance, China has assured that climate strategy is grounded in national realities and is implemented by all

the Ministries and Agencies of government in terms of immediate action and coherent longer-term goals.

In addition, China established some 25 years ago, the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development which provides the leadership with coherent, systemic proposals for action and ensures that China can, carefully and selectively, learn from the exchange of international experience on all these issues.

I will conclude by emphasising four fundamental considerations to achieve effective governance for sustainable development.

I would emphasise first, the central importance of values, justice and human rights in formulating climate strategy and action. As you will all know, His Holiness Pope Francis has played a leading moral and practical role in the efforts of the world community to address the existential threats of climate change. In preparing the vital Encyclical "Laudato Si", he did not assign the responsibility to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences as many expected, but to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. He thus positioned the issue of climate change in the context of human rights and human development of inequality, of the exploitation of nature and of world peace.

Second, we must recognise that climate change is not simply an analytical issue of concern to scientists and environmentalists but that it is highly ideological and raises fundamental issues of power, of influence and of commercial, financial and political interests. Therefore, when we consider issues of governance, these issues of power and interest must be taken fully into account.

We are here together today because we recognise the profound importance of preserving peace, without which the improvement of the human condition becomes impossible. It is now increasingly recognised that climate change is emerging as a grave non-traditional threat to peace. In most countries, the

lives and wellbeing of citizens, whether rich or poor, are more threatened in real terms by the impacts of climate change than by terrorism or conflict. Nevertheless, we continue to spend vast financial and human resources on armaments and find it almost impossible to commit the resources needed to assist poor countries to adapt to the consequences of a warming and increasingly unstable climate.

I have sketched for you a wide range of worrying issues which will intensify unless we take effective action soon. I would like to conclude with a more positive perspective which should encourage the younger generation to visualise and achieve a better future. The move towards environmental responsibility and sustainable development is not a question of adding costs to the economy or reducing the prospects for employment. Our present models of economic growth are failing, not only in environmental and social terms but also in terms of economic justice, inclusion and stability. We can find much better paths towards sustainable world development which can improve social cohesion, human health and security and reduce the injuries to the environment. I hope that the young people here from Ateneo de Manila University, the University for Peace and beyond will commit themselves to achieving a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future for humanity.

