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## **Accept the Reality of Global Warming**

By Zack Gross

The world's nations met this week for a "climate summit" in Nairobi, Kenya. Kofi Annan, who will leave his position as UN Secretary-General at the end of the year, characterized climate change and global warming to be as grave a threat to our planet today as poverty, war and the spread of weapons, large and small. He decried the "frightening lack of leadership" that exists among the 189 nations in attendance in tackling environmental issues. Skeptics who doubt the fact of climate change, he said, are "out of step, out of arguments, and out of time".

To help Third World countries develop their economies with less impact than Western countries have done, Annan announced an Adaptation Fund by which African countries can access UN funds for "clean" projects, such as renewable energy and forestry. As Africa is the poorest continent, it is expected that Africans will suffer the most from climate change. This, however, doesn't solve the far greater problem of the world's two major polluter nations, the United States – largely because of its tremendous consumption – and China, due to its huge population and growing economy.

The US, now with over 300 million inhabitants and growing more quickly than most other Western nations, is using up natural resources, such as water, timber and oil while fouling its air, waterways and landfills with many forms of garbage. China, meanwhile, with 1.4 billion people, has already passed the US in total consumption of basic resources (except for oil).

Lester Brown, President of the US-based Earth Policy Institute and a long-time author and activist, has just released a new book: Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress & A Civilization in Trouble. He argues that if China models its economy after the US – what he calls the "throw-away economy" – the two will overwhelm the world's ability to provide what it needs for us to survive. For instance, we would need twice the paper we are now producing, more oil daily than can now be produced, and more than a billion cars.

Says Brown: Forests are shrinking, water tables are falling, fisheries are collapsing, soils are eroding...and we are discharging greenhouse gases into the atmosphere faster than nature can absorb them. History illustrates how misuse of the environment destroyed civilizations such as the Sumerians and the Mayans.

The potential solutions to our environmental and lifestyle dilemma are the growing use of renewable energies, such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydro and biofuels, and the use of alternative means of transport such as hybrid cars, bicycles and light rail. Manitoba, of course, has been recognized as a world leader in "green development strategies", with its hydro, wind farms and other initiatives.

Says Lester Brown, from the US perspective, a resource such as wind power “is abundant, cheap, climate-benign, and it’s ours: No one can cut off the supply, and the price never goes up”. This may be a bit naïve, as some jurisdictions have found ways to tax the use of solar energy, but the point is well taken: we need to find sustainable ways to develop our economies and improve our societies.

Canadian Environment Minister Rona Ambrose is anticipating another rough week, as she attends the Nairobi climate summit and will be called upon to explain her government’s seeming abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. While Ambrose is the out-going president of the climate talks – Stéphane Dion had chaired the previous round in Montreal – she sent a video of her remarks rather than attend the opening meeting. Ambrose has skipped most international environmental conferences during her tenure.

The new Clean Air bill, put forward by the Conservative Harper government, faces a united opposition in Parliament in Ottawa. Liberal leader Bill Graham has accused the Conservatives of destroying Canada’s environment, its foreign policy and its international reputation. A recent CBC poll determined that three-quarters of Canadians believe our government is not doing enough about climate change and that the environment is second only to health care as a priority for Canadian voters.

Harper responds that the previous government set unrealistic and hypocritical targets for emission cuts. We are now 35% above the targets we set and emissions will rise even more steeply as the oil-rich tar sands are opened up in the Conservative power base of Western Canada. Voters in Quebec, whom Harper would dearly love to have on his side in the next election, lead the country in concern about the environment.

Climate change is real. A survey of almost a thousand recent scientific research papers showed that none dispute that reality. Only a small number of US politicians (some of whom were discredited in this month’s mid-term elections) and oil industry spokespeople (who have a serious conflict of interest) stand contrary to the overwhelming evidence. So, as Kofi Annan asserts, we need only the political leadership to take immediate and measurable steps to set the world on a course toward environmental survival.

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