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COPENHAGEN

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DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES

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MOTION:

**“CHINA AND INDIA
ARE RIGHT
TO RESIST BINDING
CARBON EMISSION
TARGETS”**

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INTRODUCTION

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In December 2009 world leaders congregated in the Danish capital city Copenhagen for the United Nations COP15 conference on climate change [Ref: [COP15](#)]. It was widely hoped that they would agree on a binding deal to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in an attempt to ensure global temperatures do not increase by more than 2°C. However, after much tense negotiation [Ref: [New York Times](#)], very few commentators were satisfied [Ref: [BBC News](#)] with the resulting Copenhagen Accord [Ref: [Grist](#)] – drafted by the US and the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) - which failed to set such targets [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)]. At the conference, delegates of the G77 developing nations [Ref: [G77.org](#)] staged a walk-out over the ‘Danish Text’, a proposal put forward by the host country which they felt was an attempt by rich countries to impose carbon limits that would hold back much-needed economic growth in poorer nations [Ref: [The Times](#)]. The diplomatic rows between countries, with China in particular taking much of the blame, reveal a fundamental division in responding to the challenges posed by climate change. Does the West have a moral responsibility to restrict carbon emissions in a way in which developing countries do not? Alternatively, is it fair that Western countries shoulder the burden of a global problem and risk disadvantaging their economies at a time when China and India are becoming both significant economic actors and major carbon emitters? Do we require immediate and drastic solutions, or is there a chance the scale of the problem has been exaggerated? What are the alternatives to setting carbon targets?

What's at stake?

While the science around climate change is complex and the range of likely temperature increases remain uncertain and highly contested, the leaders of the most developed countries (the G8) have loosely agreed to a commitment to attempt to keep global temperature increase from pre-1800 levels to 2°C, requiring an estimated 80% cut in carbon emissions from current levels by 2050 [Ref: [New Scientist](#)]. This, however, will involve significant changes in how we organise society and live our lives [Ref: [Wall Street Journal](#)]. As the G8 represents only one fifth of the world's population though, this poses even more serious problems for future global development, especially in the rapidly industrialising BASIC countries. Industrialisation is a dirty business, says James Woudhuysen, and he argues that maintaining current levels of economic growth within low-carbon limits is fanciful [Ref: [spiked](#)]. Many argue that as global warming has been primarily caused by emissions from developed Western nations, they have a moral duty to take a lead in reducing their contributions, and allow poorer ones time to reach the level of Western development before worrying about the planet [Ref: [New Scientist](#)]. Arvind Panagariya argues that in India alone 300 million people live in abject poverty and the primary goal of the Indian government should be to provide them with 'a humane existence' which contradicts the aim of curbing carbon emissions. Particularly for countries who have a memory of colonialism and Western exploitation, there is an understandable desire to express their independence and reject foreign interference in their affairs. There is a suggestion that the West's attitude towards carbon mitigation is hypocritical and concerned more with protecting their own economic interest:

China and India would be disproportionately hit by carbon limits, because their economic growth is founded on manufacturing and providing goods for the increasingly post-industrial, low-carbon West [Ref: [Telegraph India](#)].

Global solutions or carbon colonialism?

At the outset of the conference, former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan warned that national differences needed to be put aside to face this 'enormous challenge' [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Environmental campaigners warn that with China opening two coal-fired power stations a week and India's carbon emissions rising by 55% in little more than a decade, the developing world is not a problem which can be ignored for long, unless we want to face even worse alternatives in the future [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. While there is a sensitivity to the historic injustice of colonialism and the necessity of allowing development, the USA's leading climate negotiator Todd Stern argues that the world must 'do the math': we need less carbon in the atmosphere. In particular it is observed that power relations between East and West are shifting in the wake of the financial crisis [Ref: [The Times](#)], and that the dynamic innovation of developing economies means that China and India are now leading the way in the development of green technologies [Ref: [Washington Post](#)]. Setting binding targets now, it is argued, will offer an incentive for them to ensure future economic growth will be greener and environmentally sustainable.

Peril or panic?

Before the conference, leading environmental campaigners such as Al Gore warned that failure to set binding targets would be

'catastrophic' [Ref: [Scientific American](#)] Many argue that we are at a 'tipping point' where serious environmental damage can no longer be avoided, but merely contained [Ref: [Independent](#)]. Given the time required and political difficulty of implementing these targets, it is argued, Copenhagen was the last chance to avert climate disaster. But at the outset of the conference, the 'Climategate' scandal (over leaked e-mails from the UK's major climate research institution) reinforced suspicions that the risks posed by climate change were exaggerated in order to force through policies which would otherwise be politically contentious [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Even before the scandal broke, many leading scientists – including many sympathetic to the environmental cause - expressed concern that contestable scientific evidence was being misrepresented as fact and exaggerated by campaigners [Ref: [The Times](#)]. Shortly after the conference, the UN's highly influential Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were forced to apologise for making highly misleading claims on the melting of Himalayan glaciers [Ref: [The Times](#)], and went on to face further controversies, including an allegedly 'superficial' link between climate change and natural disasters such as hurricanes [Ref: [The Times](#)]. As climate scientist Mike Hulme reminds those on either side, it is an essential aspect of this debate to recognise the significance of the political issues at stake in discussions, and not try to hide these arguments behind scientific data [Ref: [Seed Magazine](#)].

Are carbon limits the only way forward?

There is clearly a delicate balance to be struck between allowing economic development and responding to a world with an unpredictable climate. The most significant of these involves

creating a 'carbon market' where permits to emit greenhouse gases could be traded, putting a price on emissions that would penalise polluters and reward those that reduce emissions. While there is a technical discussion about how this is to be implemented, Robert Stavins is convinced it is the best way to achieve low-carbon adaptation without destroying the economy [Ref: [Wall Street Journal](#)]. Bjorn Lomborg also raises concerns that the obsession with curbing climate emissions through market-based intervention actually puts a drain on the kind of technological innovation which will provide a long-term solution to climate change [Ref: [Washington Post](#)]. But critics can counter that until that occurs this remains a speculative solution: and the world faces immediate problems and immediate action [Ref: [Register Guard](#)]. Meanwhile, others say that the devastation caused by natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina offer a reminder that resources should be focused on adapting to our environment, regardless of whether such extreme weather events are caused by carbon emissions or not [Ref: [spiked](#)].

ESSENTIAL READING

Good COP, Bad COP?

Maywa Montenegro Seed 11 January 2010

Why did Copenhagen fail to deliver a climate deal?

BBC News 22 December 2009

China and U.S. Hit Strident Impasse at Climate Talks

New York Times 14 December 2009

World starts to act on climate change

Fred Pearce *New Scientist* 20 July 2009

FOR

From Copenhagen's ashes, a better way to fight global warming

Bjorn Lomborg *Washington Post* 15 January 2010

India and climate change talks

Arvind Panagariya *Economic Times* 27 August 2009

Shifts on climate change

Chandrashekhara Dasgupta *Telegraph Calcutta (Kolkata)* 1 September 2008

Like it or not, coal is vital to Asia's growth

James Woudhuysen *spiked* 12 September 2007

AGAINST

Climate change puts us all in the same boat. One hole will sink us all

Kofi Annan *Guardian* 10 December 2009

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No 'Pass' for Developing Countries in Next Climate Treaty, says

U.S. envoy Darren Samuelsohn

New York Times 9 December 2009

What would failure at Copenhagen mean for climate change?

Douglas Fischer *Scientific American* 10 November 2009

Climate questions we don't want to ask

Alex Hesz *Guardian Comment is free* 11 September 2009

IN DEPTH

The inconvenient truth on climate change

Carl Mortished *The Times* 23 December 2009

Can countries cut carbon emissions without hurting economic growth? Robert Stavins vs Steven Hayward

Wall Street Journal 21 September 2009

Fair carbon means no carbon for rich countries

Jim Giles *New Scientist* 21 September 2009

For now, cap and trade all we've got to save planet

Bob Doppelt *Register Guard* 1 July 2009

Let's make the world storm-proof

Stuart Derbyshire *spiked* September 2007

BACKGROUNDERS

[The Truth About Climategate](#)

Sharon Begley *Newsweek* 5 December 2009

[‘Show your working’: What ‘Climategate’ means](#)

Mike Hulme and Jerome Ravetz *BBC News* 1 December 2009

[Climategate: Why it matters](#)

Andrew Orlowski *Register* 30 November 2009

[Climategate: the final nail in the coffin of ‘Anthropogenic Global Warming’?](#)

James Delingpole *Daily Telegraph* 20 November 2009

[China outperforms US on green issues](#)

Jim Giles *New Scientist* 29 October 2009

[India’s carbon fighters](#)

Rama Lakshmi *Washington Post* 19 October 2009

[New Script for India on Climate Change](#)

Jim Yardley *New York Times* 3 October 2009

[The wonderful politics of cap-and-trade](#)

Robert Stavins *Belfer Centre* 27 May 2009

[The case for carbon tax over a cap-and-trade system](#)

Ft.com blogs 3 March 2009

[China’s Big Push for Renewable Energy](#)

David Biello *Scientific American* 4 August 2008

[Op-ed: Cap & Trade vs Tax](#)

Eileen Claussen and Judith Greenwald *Pew Centre on Global Warming* 12 July 2007

[Scientific American](#)

[Real Climate](#)

[New Scientist](#)

[The Ecologist](#)

[Climate Resistance](#)

[Guardian Copenhagen coverage](#)

[COP15](#)

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ORGANISATIONS

[10:10: Cutting 10% of emissions in 2010](#)

[Campaign Against Climate Change](#)

[Global Climate Campaign](#)

[Greenpeace International](#)

IN THE NEWS

UN wrongly linked global warming to natural disasters
The Sunday Times 24 January 2010

World misled over Himalayan glacier meltdown
The Times 17 January 2010

UK emissions cuts 'meaningless' without global deal, warn MPs
Guardian 11 January 2010

India must not lag behind in climate change initiatives: PM
Times of India 3 January 2010

Copenhagen treaty was 'held to ransom' says Gordon Brown
Guardian 21 December 2009

Ed Miliband blames China for 'disappointing' results
Daily Telegraph 21 December 2009

Low targets, goals dropped: Copenhagen ends in failure
Guardian 19 December 2009

Copenhagen climate deal meets qualified UN welcome
BBC News 19 December 2009

Copenhagen: Danish text row rumbles on
BusinessGreen.com 9 December 2009

Copenhagen summit: wealthy nations accused of 'carbon colonialism'
The Times 9 December 2009

Copenhagen Climate Summit in disarray after 'Danish Text' link
Huffington Post 8 December 2009

'Climategate' at centre stage as Copenhagen opens
The Times 7 December 2009

Copenhagen summit urged to take climate action
BBC News 7 December 2009

Halve world carbon emissions by 2050: Danish text
Reuters 30 November 2009

Exaggerated claims undermine drive to cut emissions, scientists warn
The Times 30 October 2009

EU mulls carbon tax to curb global warming
Euractiv.com 29 September 2009

Scientists identify 'tipping points' of climate change
Independent 5 February 2008

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ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

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- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
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**“TEENAGE CITIZENS
THINKING DEEPLY
ABOUT...SOCIAL
ISSUES”**

IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA

