

An open letter to Mr Xie Zhenhua, Climate Change Special Representative of Chinese Government

Today Climate change has become an ever-more important issue that has deeply affected the global population, and thus has caught significant world attention. Extreme weather events and natural disasters wake people up from the myths of the industrial civilization. People realize that effective measures must be taken to deal with the climate change issue. Another round of UNFCCC (United Nations Framework on Climate Change) meetings will be convened in Tianjin, from October 4, 2010 to October 9, 2010. This is the first time, since the adoption of UNFCCC, that relevant negotiations take place in China. More importantly, it is the last meeting before the Cancun Conference in Mexico this year. Thus, we, the undersigning Chinese individuals and organizations, present this open letter to climate change Special Representative of the Chinese Government, Zhenhua Xie, to express our thoughts and concerns.

Being the most populated developing country, China is still under enormous pressure of development and poverty eradication, considering its vast territory, imbalance of regional development, short history of industrialization, and the GDP per capita far behind the average of developed countries. However, as to the issue of climate change, China has already made a great deal of positive and lasting efforts. In recent years, China has closed down or transformed a great number of low-efficiency but high-energy-consumption businesses, such as small coal power plants, small cement plants, small iron and steel smelting plants and small paper mills etc. Besides, China's investment in renewable energy industries, both in absolute value and percentage of GDP, has already surpassed that of the U.S., and is at a leading position internationally. The standards of vehicle fuel efficiency have kept improving, and now are stricter than those in the US. The whole world bears witness of these contributions.

Still, we must keep in mind that the context of China's development is quite different from that with which the western countries started their industrialization. That is to say, our mode of economic and social development cannot repeat the path of the western countries. Otherwise, we would not be able to adapt to the unprecedented severe challenges brought by climate change.

For example,

- Of Chinese population living in absolute poverty, 95% lives in extremely vulnerable environment, and has become the biggest victims of climate change. The negative impact of climate change has become one of the most important reasons that cause poverty, even the return to poverty.
- Although the per capita carbon emissions of China are about a quarter of that in the US, the net exports production carbon emissions consist 22.5% of the whole. These products are not for the Chinese people, but mostly are sold to developed countries. Such export-oriented economic development mode, has gained China its reputation of “world factory”, which in the meantime has incurred considerable environmental cost and put tremendous resource pressure on the country.
- The fetish of the car culture has led to severe traffic jam in cities, which has caused significant inconvenience for the general public. As the oil demand grows, annual import of petroleum has exceeded half of the domestic consumption, which has become the potential threat to the energy security of China.

- Some areas have blindly followed the American-style urban sprawl, which has caused significant waste of the valuable arable land. If this phenomenon continues, it will certainly threaten China's food security. In addition, frequent extreme weathers that happened in recent years, have already caused considerable negative impacts on agricultural production and rural livelihoods.

Consequently, we propose:

- In order to help the most vulnerable people under climate change, the government should adjust relevant policies, to strengthen disaster prevention, mitigation measures, and insurance policies; to enhance research and investment on climate change adaptation. Moreover, the government should invest more in poverty-relief fund, and establish special fund for climate change adaptation, focus on reducing the affect that climate change may bring to regions with vulnerable ecological environment and poverty-stricken population. The government is responsible to improve capacities of the poor, disadvantaged groups, and vulnerable areas to adapt to climate change.

- We should reflect upon and change the export-oriented economic development mode; reduce the export rebate for those products with low added value and high energy consumption, and further charge export tariff for these goods, so as to transform the development model.

- Devote considerable resources to public transportation in urban areas; remove all subsidies that encourage private automobile consumption. Further raise fuel tax; set up high tax rate on high-emission luxury vehicles; collect traffic-jam-tax or fees as subsidies for public transportation.

- China's further energy-saving and emission-reduction efforts should not be limited to upgrades of technologies for industries, but should be extended to lifestyle and consumption issues. The government should inspire low-carbon living, and strengthen demand-side management, for example, by stipulating staircase electricity pricing, limiting and auctioning of license plates for private automobiles, questioning and restricting high energy consumption projects such as "light up the skyline" programme by certain cities.

- Try hard to mitigate the rural-urban split in terms of development, and to advance the economic transformation and industries' upgrading in more developed regions. Stay alert about and prevent highly-polluting and high-energy-consuming enterprises moving to less developed areas in the name of industry upgrading. Establish eco-compensation and resource transfer regime from high energy consumption and high emission urban areas to low energy consumption and low emission rural areas, in order to promote harmonious development of the cities and countryside. Establish absolute emission reduction targets for some high energy consumption and high emission cities and regions.

- Reflect upon the phenomenon that some regions and local governments have blindly followed the American-style urbanization, which causes serious urban sprawl and waste of resources. Inspire the transformation of the consumption pattern and urban planning, to develop and gradually form a resource-conserving, environment-friendly path of sustainable development with Chinese characteristics, through legislative, administrative and economic measures.

- Take lessons from the wasteful American consumption model. Cultivate public opinion to transform the habits and social customs that promote unnecessary luxurious consumption. Promote low-carbon and healthy lifestyles focusing on environmental protection and energy conservation, as well as traditional virtues of frugality.
- Further emphasize the importance of the adaptation issue in international negotiations. For developing countries, adaptation is an urgent task. China should make further efforts to emphasize that adaptation is equally important as mitigation. The tragic inundation that happened in Pakistan this year manifested the vulnerability and urgency for aids of developing countries when facing nature disasters caused by climate change. However, at the same time, developed countries had not realized their commitment during Copenhagen, namely the fast track finance of USD 30 billion. Up till October 2009, only USD7.9 billion is put in place, and only less than one percent of it (USD 700 million) is transferred into the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund. The Chinese Government should urge the developed countries to comply with their promised commitments, at the same time, demand the developed countries to be more responsible for their historical carbon emissions, and take on their indispensable obligations.
- Strengthen South-South cooperation in mitigation, adaptation, technology exchanges and cooperation, and low-carbon development planning, etc. Increase financing and technology support to least developed countries,

The international society is negotiating on the implementation of the “Bali Road Map”, and the comprehensive, effective and sustaining implementation of the Convention and Kyoto Protocol. At this historical moment, we expect the Chinese Government, with its wisdom, determination and courage, while advancing domestic emission reduction practices and strengthening South-South cooperation, can also advocate the world nations to take on their common but differentiated responsibilities. We expect China to make historical contributions in defending the basic human rights such as the right of survival and the right of development of peoples all over the world, especially those from the third world countries.

On behalf of:

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