

“A Challenge for the U.S. To Match China's Efforts to Address Climate Change”

An open letter to Todd Stern, US special envoy on climate change

We, the undersigned Chinese individuals and organizations, deliver this open letter to Todd Stern, US Special Envoy on Climate Change, and through him to the government of the United States during the United Nations climate negotiations in Tianjin, China between October 4 and October 9, 2010. We call upon the United States to stop drawing attention away from its own inadequate domestic efforts by trying to divert attention to China. The United States must match and exceed China's efforts to address climate change, instead of continuing to use China as an excuse for inaction.

The United States has called for an international agreement that applies “symmetrically” to itself and to China and other large developing countries. Some critics in the United States have implied that China should act first when it comes to emissions reduction. We believe these calls fail to reflect both the principle of common but differentiated responsibility for climate change, and the facts on the ground.

China has experienced a recent economic boom, but it remains fundamentally a developing country. More than 40% of the population does not have access to improved sanitation. 18% of the rural population does not have access to improved drinking water sources. Yet, China is not shying away from its responsibility to address climate change. Indeed, its efforts compare favorably with the United States, given their relative contributions to climate change:

- The United States is and remains the world’s largest contributor to climate change. With less than 5% of global population it accounts for 29% of global cumulative emissions (between 1850 and 2006) that are causing climate change; China accounts for a mere 8.62% with 20% to 22% global population¹.
- Today, average citizens in the United States continue to pollute about four times as much as people in China – at 19.2 versus 4.9 metric tons per capita in 2008.
- China set up a comprehensive National Climate Action Program in 2007; the United States continues to have no comprehensive national climate legislation.
- China’s vehicle fuel efficiency standards are more stringent than those in the United States, with 34 miles per gallon and 27 mpg respectively².
- China’s investment in clean energy dwarfs that of the United States. In 2009, China put into clean energy \$34.6 billion investment (or 0.39% of its GDP), while the United States only put in \$18.6 billion (or 0.13% of its GDP)³.
- In the last five years, while closing thousands of small inefficient coal-fired plants and iron-smelting facilities, China has doubled its wind newly-installed capacity every year, and its solar PV production and newly-installed capacity has grown 240% and 37% annually. The growth rate of renewable energy in the United States is significantly below China's.
- China pledged to reduce emissions intensity by 40 to 45% by 2020 in comparison to 2005. The United States pledged to reduce emissions 17% by 2020 in comparison to 2005. According to a UNFCCC analysis⁴, the U.S. pledge translates to approximately

¹ Cumulative emission data was calculated by WRI Carbon Analysis Indicator Tools (<http://cait.wri.org/>).

² PEW Center on Global Climate Change. *Comparison of Actual and Projected Fuel Economy for New Passenger Vehicles*. <http://www.pewclimate.org/federal/executive/vehicle-standards/fuel-economy-comparison>

³ The PEW Charitable Trusts, *Who’s Winning the Clean Energy Race? Growth, Competition, and Opportunity in the World’s Largest Economies*, 2010.

⁴ This estimation was calculated by the UNFCCC Secretariat and documented in their *Preliminary Assessment of pledges made by Annex 1 Parties and voluntary actions and policy goals by a*

0.8 Gt CO₂ of effort in 2020, and China's pledge is calculated to amount to approximately 2.5 Gt CO₂ in 2020, or approximately 3 times the United States' effort.

We acknowledge that China is not perfect, and will probably never be so. In a separate letter addressed to Xie Zhenhua, China's Special Representative on Climate Change, we discuss what the Chinese government and people can and should do to address sustainable development issues, including climate change.

But here we want to emphasize that China is not and must not continue to serve as an excuse for continued inaction by the United States, especially as China is moving forward with serious efforts. The United States, as the world's richest country and its greatest historical polluter, must fulfill its obligations under the UNFCCC and Bali Action Plan. We call upon the United States to respect and contribute to the UN process, instead of undermining it and becoming a shield for other Annex I countries to hide behind.

Despite President Obama's rhetoric of constructive engagement on climate change, the United States remains the only Annex I country that has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol. It has failed to establish effective national climate legislation. It has offered weak emission reduction pledges for 2020 – only 3% to 4% below 1990. And it has instead sought to draw attention away from its own failures in part by focusing attention on China, even though it lags behind China in many emission reduction measures, as shown above.

Rather than matching and exceeding China's efforts, there is a real risk that the United States may undermine them. On September 9th, the United Steelworkers filed a legal case accusing China of illegally subsidizing clean energy and asking the U.S. Government to file a WTO case against China. This event raises the question of whether existing WTO rules unduly constrain the ability of developing countries to act in the public interest, in this case, to enact climate friendly policies.

It is ironic indeed that some actors in the United States simultaneously attack China for increasing emissions and also for the measures taken to switch from carbon-intensive fossil fuels to renewable clean energy. Finger-pointing and efforts to dismantle climate policies using the trade system risk a race to the bottom and threaten efforts to address the colossal challenge of climate change. Instead, we need cooperation and positive competition – a race to the top and a race to the future.

As Chinese citizens and groups, we do not stand alone. In a joint NGO analysis entitled, "What Role for the U.S.? A Question for the Rest of the World,"⁵ civil society groups around the world expressed concerns about the growing gap between the United States' rhetoric and the reality of its climate efforts. They stated:

In Bali, the United States was told to 'lead or get out of the way'. True leadership from the US would require a 'new paradigm' indeed: to admit it cannot lead, not now, but that the global architecture and global ambition are more important than looking like a leader for its domestic audience.

In a recent media release⁶, a major environmental group in the United States expressed,

It is clear that domestic politics at this time will not allow the United States to lead global efforts to tackle climate change. The Obama administration must stop pretending

number of non-Annex I Parties. (This leaked document was widely circulated, and made available at, for example, http://www.graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/science/17dotearth_3degrees.pdf).

⁵ "What Role for the U.S.? A Question for the Rest of the World."

http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/climate/pdf/assessments/Bonn_II_U.S_Assessment_11_June_2010.pdf

⁶ <http://foe.org/new-storylines-emerging-climate-negotiations>

it can lead. It must cease its efforts to drag the rest of the world down to its very low level of ambition, when what the climate crisis demands is far higher ambition from all developed countries.

We echo such sentiments expressed by global civil society. It is time for the United States to stop using China as a scapegoat, and to move forward with whatever honest efforts it can come up with.

Here we wish to offer the following challenge. We call on the United States to deliver in the next five years, the growth in renewable energy production which China brought into being in the last five years: : double newly-installed wind capacity every year, match the high growth rate for solar as well. The United States has many technologies and options at its disposal and given its status as the world's richest nation, it should at least match China's efforts, and do much more. The aforementioned challenge, therefore, is our call to the US Government.

On behalf of:

Prof. Wang Hui, Tsinghua University	Green Watershed
Prof. Zheng Yisheng, Chinese Academy of Social Science	Green Zhejiang
Dr. Yu Xiaogang, Goldman Environmental Prize and Magsaysay Award winner	Hangzhou Eco-culture Association
Prof. Zhang Haibing, Beijing University	Shanshui Conservation Center
Prof. He Xuefeng, Huazhong University of Science and Technology	Green River
Prof. Lin Chun, London School of Economics	Greenpeace, China
Prof. Jiang Shigong, Beijing University	Green Kunming
Dr. Dong Xulin, retired UN staff	The Green Volunteers League of Chongqing
Li Li, China Youth Climate Action Network	
Dr. Liang Fan	
Prof. Xu Xiangyang, China University of Mining & Technology	
Ma Jun, Magsaysay Award winner, Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs	
Prof. Yan Hairong, Hongkong Polytechnic University	
Prof. Pan Yi, Hongkong Polytechnic University	

We, the undersigned organizations, support the position expressed here by our Chinese colleagues:

Third World Network
Nord-Sud XXI
COECOCEIBA - FoE, Costa Rica
Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale (CRBM), Italy
CESTA, Friends of the Earth El Salvador
Pan African Climate Justice Alliance
Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education)
Asian Indigenous Women's Network
World Volunteers for Development, Togo
The Solar Generation, Zimbabwe
World Information Service on Energy, Netherlands
Friends of the Earth Malaysia
Consumers' Association of Penang
Pesticide Action Network International
Action 2030 Institute, USA
Friends of the Earth, England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Jubilee South - Asia/Pacific Movement on Debt and Development