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The spoken word is final!

Doing nothing harms the environment and mankind

UN Climate Conference 19 November 2010 – 10 December 2010, Cancun
President Doris Leuthard

Excellencies,

Climate change affects everyone

Doing something costs money.
Waiting until someone else does something costs more.
Doing nothing costs far more.
In 2006 Sir Nicolas Stern estimated the consequential costs of unhindered climate change at up to 20% of world GDP.

We are all directly affected by climate change.
If the glaciers disappear, the water and food supplies of almost one billion people in southern Asia will be at risk.
If sea levels rise, many islands, villages and towns in coastal areas on all continents are at risk.

Doing nothing has not only economic consequences.
Doing nothing also leads to the destabilisation of entire regions.
No water in Darfur, too much water as a result of flooding in Pakistan – in both cases the basic resources needed to grow food are lacking.
In both cases the result is poverty, violence, conflict and migration.

That's why it is in all our interests to act.
And we all know that national climate policy is important, but that climate policy must not cease at national borders.
Only with global cooperation can we put a stop to the destruction of our global biosphere.
Promises do not further our cause.
All nations have to do their part.
Only then can we overcome the climate blockade.

Co-determination requires co-responsibility

Today, in a rapidly changing world, many states, including emerging countries, can benefit from the economic blessings of globalisation and growth.
They also call for a greater say.
This is doubtless legitimate.
But greater influence and more rights also mean greater responsibility.

In order for that to happen, the question arises: Is the undifferentiated distinction between industrialised, developing and emerging countries still relevant?
Should other parameters be applied in a future architecture: the polluter-pays principle with regard to climate issues, for example, with transitional rules based on past emissions?
A common yet differentiated responsibility requires that all large emitters assume their share.
Only then do all states have an interest, irrespective of their level of development, in behaving in a climate-friendly manner and reducing emissions.

Using technology globally

We all know that an effective climate policy is more than purely environment policy.
Ecology and economics is not a contradiction in terms.
Today there are technological solutions for a wide range of problems.
Others are sure to follow given the intensive research efforts under way.
The economy, primarily the private sector, has an interest in investing, if we create the necessary incentives, ensure technology transfers and if new, environmentally-friendly goods are affordable for consumers.

This can best be achieved through price incentive mechanisms.
A price has to be put on CO2.
Reduction targets have to be set in all countries so that new, climate-friendly technologies are put to use. We in Switzerland have the technological know-how in water protection, in buildings, energy use and air quality management.
Wealthy countries have to support poorer countries.
Efforts in research and technology development have to be strengthened.

Common rules for sustainable success

What we do not want in the new world economic order is for the law of the strongest to dominate, or that unfettered growth is pursued at all costs.
We want to see the rule of law and a reliable, internationally-supported set of rules.

That is important for the environment.
Each country needs to have the certainty that it is not acting alone, that others are also prepared to make ambitious contributions.
For that there needs to be a binding framework that applies for all and that envisages clear, comparable and verifiable commitments, particularly for the larger emitters and further developed countries.
There needs to be ambitious targets for reduction goals and clear rules for market mechanisms.
The economy is dependent on clear signals and continuity.

In the closing declaration of the Francophonie summit held in Switzerland in October, participants called for a strengthening of the fight against climate change and for a binding set of rules in the framework of the UN. La Francophonie represents country groups from all categories represented here at the climate negotiations. On behalf of La Francophonie, I can assure you that we are all committed to the adoption of a global and binding treaty.
I would also like to say a few words on behalf of the Environmental Integrity Group, which comprises Mexico, Monaco, Liechtenstein, South Korea and Switzerland. Here in Cancun, the Environmental Integrity Group is prepared to take a big step forward on the path to sustainability. We would like Cancun to be remembered as the COP conference at which the participants agreed on an ambitious, balanced and fair agreement, which paved the way for a legally binding treaty.
Switzerland intends to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.
Together with other industrialised countries it should even be possible to raise this threshold to 30%.
In addition, we are committed to the goal of limiting global mean warming as a result of the greenhouse effect to under 2 degrees.

That way, here in Cancun, we can send a clear signal.