

Reaching International Cooperation on Climate Change Mitigation

Organizers: Yoram Margalioth, Yinon Rudich & David Weisbach

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Conference's Rationale

As the world's greatest collective action problem, climate change is a daunting challenge. There are no historical precedents for international cooperation in which so many countries cooperate over such high stakes. Since 1992, when an almost universal agreement was reached under the Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) to achieve "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system," global carbon dioxide annual emissions have *increased* by about 45 percent, reaching an all-time record in 2010. The pledges by countries to date to reduce GHG emissions (even if we unrealistically assume that the pledges would be kept) do not put us on a path to meet the globally agreed-upon target of limiting average global warming to 2°C above preindustrial levels. Achieving that goal would require a dramatic global acceleration of efforts. As a result, the probability of reaching the 2°C goal is very small.

On top of the collective action problem is the severe tension between developed and developing countries regarding who should bear the burden of averting the problem as a matter of justice. Developing countries, including China, view the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" as the core and bedrock of international cooperation on climate change that must never be compromised. They interpret it to mean assigning lower (often zero) demands from developing countries to reduce emissions, effectively expecting developed countries to reduce global emissions to the required level on their own. Developed countries, most notably the US, demand that developing countries, or at least the major emitters, three of which are represented at this conference, subject themselves to substantial limitations on emissions, and offer to compensate them through other mechanisms such as payments or technology transfers.

The conflict between developed and developing countries is difficult to resolve due to a combination of the following two factors:

- (a) Partial geographical coverage, called for by developing countries, makes it more costly (and potentially outright impossible) to reach a reasonable GHG concentration goal because efficiency requires the marginal abatement cost to be globally equalized. Moreover, so-called "carbon leakage" may result: energy-intensive production may migrate to uncovered countries, and lower

fuel prices because of reduced demand on covered countries may result in higher fuel usage and emissions in uncovered countries.

- (b) Developing countries might agree to take upon themselves the same limitations on GHG emissions as taken by the developed countries, if global emission permits were allocated on a per-capita basis and/or if developed countries would compensate them. In both cases, their requests amount to transfers of trillions of dollars (some of the money is needed to finance adaptation, even without promising to limit GHG emissions) and it is highly unlikely that the developed countries will be willing to pay such sums, especially now that the global economy in general, and the US and Europe in particular, are struggling.

For these reasons there appears to be very little prospect of reaching a comprehensive and binding international climate framework, or even new Kyoto commitments after 2012. This became clear at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009. A different path forward, albeit a very modest one, was taken at COP 16 in Cancun in 2010, which attempted to strengthen existing frameworks in the areas of finance, transparency, adaptation, forestation, and technology. This incremental progress is important, but is unlikely to be sufficient to reach the GHG concentration goal necessary to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. New emerging technologies offer some hope, but with the exception of geo-engineering, they too are unlikely to be sufficient. However, geo-engineering does not necessarily reduce the risk of catastrophe. Even if successful in preventing climate change, it nevertheless replaces the risk from climate change with a different type of risk, and raises a new set of questions of international governance.

This conference brings together experts on climate change from a variety of academic disciplines and from the majority of the countries that are key to the global solution, including the US, China, India and Brazil, as well as Europe. These countries also represent many different aspects of the international cooperation problem, such as the developed/developing divide; the question of how to account for sinks (forests) and deal with deforestation; the shift away from nuclear energy; and the tensions between the global superpowers.

The papers, as well as the participants' diverse backgrounds, nationally and professionally, promise that most of the issues relevant to solving the international cooperation problem will be discussed. These include questions of design of bottom-up partial coverage mitigation schemes; the possibility of overcoming differences in interpretations of how the burden of GHG emission mitigation and adaptation to climate change should be shared across countries; what forms of global mitigation and finance schemes are most likely to support cooperation, or are likely to be formed; what can we expect of new technologies; and the novel challenges posed by geo-engineering for global governance.

List of Participants in alphabetical order in each country:

1. David Fahey (NOAA Earth System Research Laboratory) the US.
2. Ted Parson (University of Michigan, Law, School of Natural Resources and Environment) the US.
3. Richard Stewart (New York University, Law) the US.
4. David Weisbach (University of Chicago, Law) the US.

5. XI Wenhua (International Solar Energy Center for Technology Promotion and Transfer, Lanzhou, China). China.
7. Jie Yu (The Nature Conservancy China Office, Climate Change Policy Director) China.
8. Eduardo Viola (University of Brasilia, International Relations) Brazil.
9. Lavanya Rajamani (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi) India.
10. Navraj Singh Ghaleigh (University of Edinburgh, Law) Scotland.
11. Guy Brasseur (Climate Service Center, Hamburg) Germany.
12. Miranda Schreurs (Freie Universität Berlin, Environmental Policy) Germany.
13. Avner De-Shalit (Hebrew University, Political Science) Israel.
14. Dorit Keret (Tel Aviv University, Public Policy) Israel.
15. Yoram Margalioth (Tel Aviv University, Law) Israel.
16. Dan Rabinowitz (Tel Aviv University, Anthropology) Israel.
17. Yinon Rudich (Weizmann Institute, Environmental Sciences and Energy) Israel.