

The IARU International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges and Decisions (10–12 March, Copenhagen, Denmark)

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The IARU International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions held in Copenhagen 10-12 March 2009 delivered the Preliminary Messages to the Danish Prime Minister, host of the COP15, on 12 March 2009.

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TWO PRODUCTS FROM THE CONGRESS

Two products are being produced based on the presentations and discussions at the Congress.

The first product will be a synthesis report of the main conclusions from the Congress. The synthesis report will be ready in June 2009.

The synthesis has the purpose of explaining the current state of understanding man-made climate change and what we can do about it to the non-scientist, i.e. politicians, media and interested citizens. The synthesis will build on the messages presented to the Danish Prime Minister, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, host of the COP15, at the closing session of the Congress. These six messages were drafted by the Writing Team (see below) based on input from the session chairs and a reading of the 1600 + abstracts submitted to the Congress.

The second product is a book aiming at an academic audience. The book will include more detailed scientific results from all of the sessions and will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. It will be an extension and elaboration of the synthesis report.

WHO'S WRITING THE SYNTHESIS REPORT AND THE BOOK?

A Writing Team consisting of 12 internationally respected scientists from all continents is responsible for developing both products. When the synthesis report has been drafted by the Writing Team, it will be discussed in the Scientific Steering Committee of the Congress and reviewed by the Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP) and a group of experts identified by the IARU universities. In keeping with normal scientific practice, a procedure for producing the synthesis report that has been adopted optimises the chances of arriving at a product that will receive a broad backing from the scientific community as being a message that can be sent to the non-scientific community and that explains current understanding in climate change science.

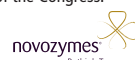
The Writing Team will also be responsible for writing the book.

MEMBERS OF THE WRITING TEAM (in alphabetical order)

- Professor Joe Alcamo, University of Stellenbosch
- Dr. Terry Barker, Cambridge University
- Professor Daniel Kammen, University of California - Berkeley
- Professor Rik Leemans, Environmental Systems Analysis Group, Wageningen University
- Professor Diana Liverman, Oxford University
- Professor Mohan Munasinghe, Chairman, Munasinghe Institute for Development (MIND),
- Dr. Balgis Osman-Elasha, Higher Council for Environment & Natural Resources (HCENR), Sudan
- Professor Katherine Richardson, University of Copenhagen
- Professor John Schellnhuber, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research & visiting professor at the University of Oxford
- Professor Will Steffen, Australian National University
- Professor Lord Nicholas Stern, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
- Professor Ole Wæver, University of Copenhagen



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KEY MESSAGES FROM THE CONGRESS

KEY MESSAGE 1: CLIMATIC TRENDS

Recent observations confirm that, given high rates of observed emissions, the worst-case IPCC scenario trajectories (or even worse) are being realised. For many key parameters, the climate system is already moving beyond the patterns of natural variability within which our society and economy have developed and thrived. These parameters include global mean surface temperature, sea-level rise, ocean and ice sheet dynamics, ocean acidification, and extreme climatic events. There is a significant risk that many of the trends will accelerate, leading to an increasing risk of abrupt or irreversible climatic shifts.

KEY MESSAGE 2: SOCIAL DISRUPTION

The research community is providing much more information to support discussions on “dangerous climate change”. Recent observations show that societies are highly vulnerable to even modest levels of climate change, with poor nations and communities particularly at risk. Temperature rises above 2°C will be very difficult for contemporary societies to cope with, and will increase the level of climate disruption through the rest of the century.

KEY MESSAGE 3: LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Rapid, sustained, and effective mitigation based on coordinated global and regional action is required to avoid “dangerous climate change” regardless of how it is defined. Weaker targets for 2020 increase the risk of crossing tipping points and make the task of meeting 2050 targets more difficult. Delay in initiating effective mitigation actions increases significantly the long-term social and economic costs of both adaptation and mitigation.

KEY MESSAGE 4: EQUITY DIMENSIONS

Climate change is having, and will have, strongly differential effects on people within and between countries and regions, on this generation and future generations, and on human societies and the natural world. An effective, well-funded adaptation safety net is required for those people least capable of coping with climate change impacts, and a common but differentiated mitigation strategy is needed to protect the poor and most vulnerable.

KEY MESSAGE 5: INACTION IS INEXCUSABLE

There is no excuse for inaction. We already have many tools and approaches – economic, technological, behavioural, management – to deal effectively with the climate change challenge. But they must be vigorously and widely implemented to achieve the societal transformation required to decarbonise economies. A wide range of benefits will flow from a concerted effort to alter our energy economy now, including sustainable energy job growth, reductions in the health and economic costs of climate change, and the restoration of ecosystems and revitalisation of ecosystem services.

KEY MESSAGE 6: MEETING THE CHALLENGE

To achieve the societal transformation required to meet the climate change challenge, we must overcome a number of significant constraints and seize critical opportunities. These include reducing inertia in social and economic systems; building on a growing public desire for governments to act on climate change; removing implicit and explicit subsidies; reducing the influence of vested interests that increase emissions and reduce resilience; enabling the shifts from ineffective governance and weak institutions to innovative leadership in government, the private sector and civil society; and engaging society in the transition to norms and practices that foster sustainability.



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