

Stephen Byers' Talk in St Luke's Church, Wallsend. 4 July 2008

Stephen Byers introduced himself and advised that he is co-chair, with Olympia Snowe (Maine Senator) of the International Climate Change Task Force (ICCTF).

He then alluded to the G8 summit in Gleneagles and the largely-accepted view that countries were not living up to the promises made. He felt that it was also apparent that, possibly due to tensions, the G8 + G5 (China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico), which together are responsible for 75 per cent of total world carbon emissions, had come to the end of its formal partnership but that there would remain a need for dialogue and negotiation.

Stephen has seen first-hand the impact of extreme weather - due to climate change - in vulnerable parts of the world when he accompanied reps from Christian Aid and Oxfam to Kenya and Uganda.

He explained that in these countries, Tribal affiliations are sacrosanct and that each tribe will have its own land and particular farming methods. Climate change forces tribes to move, often onto land belonging to another tribe, resulting in tribal conflicts. Also, in Western Kenya, climate change has decimated the fishing industry.

He also visited India and was impressed by their use of natural sources of power, particularly the sun, for example solar ovens and solar lighting.

Moving on to the Climate Change Bill, he made the point that this is a world first. He believes that the UK is on target for a 26% reduction in carbon emissions from 1990 figures by 2020 and a 60% reduction on those figures by 2050 although he further believes that this latter target may rise somewhat if not all the way to an 80% reduction target when the independent committee chaired by Lord Adair Turner reports at the beginning of December.

It is his understanding that the committee will report on progress every five years and the Government will have to respond. There will be five-year carbon budgets and perhaps targets too.

Alongside these considerations, Mr Byers feels that re-cycling must be encouraged; that the bill will be amended to include domestic aviation and shipping and that there will be a legal duty for companies to advise their carbon emissions.

There are difficulties with international aviation and shipping of goods. EU airlines will have a cap whilst American Airlines are vetoing as they believe this to be against World Trade Agreements.

The Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. The US is not signed up and whilst China and India have signed up, they do not have to cut their emissions. However, Mr Byers believes that whoever wins the next US presidential election, the US will come on board. However, there are many challenges ahead.

The principles of the international successor to the Kyoto Protocol must be agreed when the world meets in Copenhagen at the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, to take place Nov. 30 to Dec. 11, 2009, otherwise it will be too late. Problems:

- o General concern with politicisation
- o Cross-border issues - trade disadvantages because US and EU impose tariffs and this will impede the process. Part of the answer might lie in introducing a tax on non-confirming countries.

Considerations:

- o Mr Byers believes that we will end up with a 2050 target of 80% because of lobbying
- o Goods become more expensive if the Government reduces emissions. One method could be to apply differential rates on non-conformers.
- o Use of the Clean Development Mechanism - is this an effective way of getting money from rich countries to developing ones?
- o Construction industry is one of the biggest offenders - but there is a carbon reduction cost.
- o The current economic slow-down (as it then was) will put pressure on aid budgets
- o Mr Byers believes that we will meet our 2020 target

Various questions were put to Mr Byers from the audience on such matters as:-

- o Recycling - he agreed that there was confusion and there ought to be standardisation.
- o Military shipping and aviation - No, not included he thinks.
- o Using taxation to secure reductions in carbon emissions - Mr Byers felt that this was rather tricky as if the Government introduced taxation it would be viewed as a stealth tax.
- o Biofuels - his opinion was that some were good and some bad. There needs to be a clearer definition of their role.
- o Technology to produce cleaner energy - his opinion was that we do not have the technologies in place as yet but there need to be strong targets to drive it forward.

In conclusion, whilst the threat is real, there is hope. But Governments will only act if under pressure to do so. The lobbying must be kept up and it was Mr Byers' opinion that it was the global movements such as the Jubilee Drop the Debt Campaign and Make Poverty History that had brought us thus far.

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