



Australian Bahá'í Community

SUBMISSION TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TREATIES REVIEW OF KYOTO PROTOCOL

The Australian Bahá'í Community welcomes this opportunity to provide its views to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in regard to the Kyoto Protocol, ratified by the Australian Government on 12 December 2007.

We are encouraged by the Australian Government's long-term commitment to taking steps toward climate change adaptation, reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions and helping to shape a global solution. In ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, we believe the Australian Government has demonstrated its willing and full participation in international efforts to address climate change, which will be further evidenced by the integrity with which it acts on its obligations here in Australia. Entering into a binding international agreement legitimises the Australian voice in the worldwide challenge to mitigate climate change. It is indicative of real membership in the global community and of true commitment to responsibly chartering humanity's common fate with regard to climate change.

It is obvious that the challenge of climate change cannot be solved by any one nation alone; the solution to climate change requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to its means. As negotiations proceed to set the rules and establish the mechanisms that will determine how governments assist vulnerable countries and approach this global challenge, they will test the resolve of the international community to address comprehensively and justly the shared threat of climate change.

Clearly, the United Nations Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol are only the first steps in mitigation and adaptation. By the time the first commitment period concludes in 2012, the international community will need to be ready to make the transition to a redefined agreement. In addition to technical and policy issues, the negotiations will have to address difficult questions about justice, equity, responsibility and obligation.

In the face of the harmful impacts of climate change – exacerbated by global extremes of wealth and poverty – the need for new approaches based on the principles of justice and equity is becoming increasingly evident. The discourse on the ethical dimensions of climate change has highlighted the role of ethical inquiry in solving some of the most difficult substantive and process-related challenges.¹ The fundamental questions it seeks to address include: Who is responsible for the consequences of climate change? Who should pay for the damages? How should target levels of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere be determined?

¹ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change began to operationalise the ethical approach to climate change by putting forward principles to guide States' Parties' actions to achieve the objective of the Convention. These principles included: attention to the specific needs of developing countries; adoption of precautionary measures and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

What procedures will ensure fair representation in decision-making? And, if nations have a responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, how do those responsibilities devolve onto the various units of government, organisations, individuals and non-state actors?² The challenge before the global community, then, is not only technical, but one which calls for the transformation of thoughts and behaviours so as to allow our economic and social structures to extend the benefits of development to all people.

In order to help forge a coherent ethic for the resolution of the climate change crisis, we recommend that the principle of the oneness of humankind become a guiding principle for all nations, including Australia, in their responses to the challenges posed by climate change. The reality is that there is only the one human race. We are a single people, inhabiting the planet Earth, one human family bound together in a common destiny. The principle of human oneness is not another way of talking about the ideal of brotherhood or solidarity. It reflects, rather, an eternal spiritual, moral and physical reality that has been brought into focus because, for the first time in history, it has become possible for all of the peoples of the world to perceive their interdependence.

The financial, technical, human and moral resources required to respond to climate change will only be released when the peoples and governments of the world adopt this shared and connected sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the wellbeing of the entire human family. We believe the Australian Government can offer the best policy options to Australians by addressing climate change in an international context and stress our conviction that the individual and national interests of Australia are best served in tandem with the progress of the whole of humanity.

We also propose that Australia could play a much needed role in encouraging the United Nations and its member states to give more attention to the gender dimensions of climate change. As observed at this year's session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, with women making up the majority of the poor in developing countries and in communities that are highly dependent on natural resources, practical solutions to the escalating climate change crisis hinge on women's participation in all aspects of the climate change debate, including mitigation and adaptation. Climate change is not a gender-neutral process but affects men and women differently, because, in most cases, their roles and responsibilities are based on inequalities. Across the world, women are largely responsible for securing food, water and energy for cooking and heating. Scarcity of resources arising from climate change intensifies their burden and leaves less time to earn an income, attend school or care for the family. Moreover, natural disasters exact a heavier toll on women given their lack of access to information and resources, and, in some cases, their inability to swim, drive or even leave the house alone.

Yet women are not just victims; they represent perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to overcome the challenges of climate change. Their responsibilities in families, in communities, as farmers and as stewards of natural resources make them uniquely positioned to develop strategies for adapting to changing environmental conditions. Women's distinct knowledge and needs

² An analysis of the ethical dimensions of climate change is provided in: Brown, D. et al. 2006. *The White Paper on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change*. The Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change, Rock Ethics Institute, Penn State University: State College, Pennsylvania.

complement those of men, and must be considered so that the most effective strategies for mitigation and adaptation can be devised.³

The search for solutions to climate change presents Australia with a great opportunity. It is the opportunity to take the next step in the transition from a state-centred mode of interacting on the global stage to one rooted in a consciousness of the unity which connects us all as the inhabitants of one planet, the citizens of one world and the members of one human civilization. We hold firm to the hope that Australia will take its place on this stage, displaying a leadership consistent with its economic capacity and historic responsibility as well as its aspirations to be an international good citizen.

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³ For a brief overview, see <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/wom1669.doc.htm>