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## Climate change beyond our control

June 03, 2007

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The basic problem I have with the Kyoto Protocol – and much of the environmental advocacy set to take place when the G8 nations meet in Germany next week – is its promulgation of an illusion of control when it comes to addressing the long-term effects of climate change.

By negotiating country-by-country emission reductions first for 2012 and then even tougher targets for 2020 and beyond, the perception fostered by the Kyoto Protocol is that the international community can ensure that global warming becomes a manageable disease as opposed to a truly life-threatening condition.

I would argue to the contrary that the balance of evidence suggests future climate change will be driven by forces largely beyond Canadians' control.

Take China and India for example. Both countries have repeatedly flagged to the international community that they will resist any post-2012 Kyoto agreement to address climate change that threatens their future economic development.

For these emerging economic juggernauts the argument is simple: why shouldn't developing economies follow a process of industrialization similar to what the West underwent and accrue, over time, the same social and economic benefits?

When one considers, however, that China has only just entered what economists characterize as its period of "light industrialization," with India not much further ahead, the extent of both countries' future impact on climate change quickly becomes apparent.

By the time the first round of the Kyoto Protocol wraps up in 2012, India and China will have constructed some 800 new coal-fired power plants plus potentially hundreds more the international community will never know about.

The resulting emissions in India and China from coal alone from 1990 to 2012 have been estimated at a staggering 2.5 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. This compares to the best-case scenario under Kyoto for the same time period of 500 million tons of reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions if every country that has signed the treaty, including we laggards in Canada, meets its 2012 targets.

The harsh reality is that despite being the largest producers of greenhouse gases on a

per-capita basis, developed countries will soon tumble down the list of largest overall carbon emitters as the developing world starts to industrialize in earnest. It has been estimated, for instance, that the seven largest emerging economies alone could more than triple the world's annual carbon emissions to 25 gigatons by 2050 if they fail in the Herculean task of reducing energy use by 1 per cent a year from now through to the mid-century.

These kinds of emission levels could push the world by 2050 into the danger zone of a 3- to 4-degree increase in global temperatures leading to the extinction of 20 per cent or more of the world's known species, massive disruptions in global trade and global economy, and the displacement of up to a billion people by rising sea levels and droughts.

The inconvenient truth about Kyoto is that it is not the all-encompassing solution to global warming we so desperately wish it was. Yes, reducing carbon emissions and greening our economy are both prudent and the right thing to do. But Canada also needs to start preparing now to address the massive economic and social consequences of rapid climate change within our borders.

This will require investing billions annually in everything from strengthening our transportation infrastructure to cooling our fast-warming cities to welcoming ever greater numbers of climate change refugees.

Next week in Potsdam, by all means let's renew Canada's commitment to "go green" but not at the cost of losing the economic levers we will need domestically in the decades ahead to weather the climate change storm brought on by the fast industrializing developing world.

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