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CLIMATE NOTES

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Are Developing Countries Already Doing as Much as Industrialized Countries to Slow Climate Change?

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Developing countries are already effective participants in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, since the signing of the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) developing countries may have achieved greater carbon dioxide emission savings than industrialized countries.

Negotiations to strengthen the Climate Convention risk being derailed by the increasingly popular argument that industrialized countries should not commit to greenhouse gas reductions unless developing countries agree to reductions. This position backtracks on the pivotal compromise reached in the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), which balanced the timing and strength of actions by industrialized countries (which are largely responsible for the climate change that is now underway) with those of developing countries (which ultimately will be the major source of emissions). But the position also rests on a faulty assumption. Even without commitments to limit emissions, developing countries are already taking significant steps to rein in greenhouse gas emissions.

Industrialized countries account for more than two-thirds of annual carbon dioxide emissions worldwide and an even larger share of the radiative forcing of greenhouse gases. Consequently, under the FCCC these nations accepted a greater burden than developing countries for slowing the growth of greenhouse gas emissions. However, by 2020, developing country emissions are projected to exceed those of industrialized countries.[1] To prevent dangerous impacts from climate change, developing countries will eventually need to reduce the rate of growth, and, ultimately, the level of their emissions.

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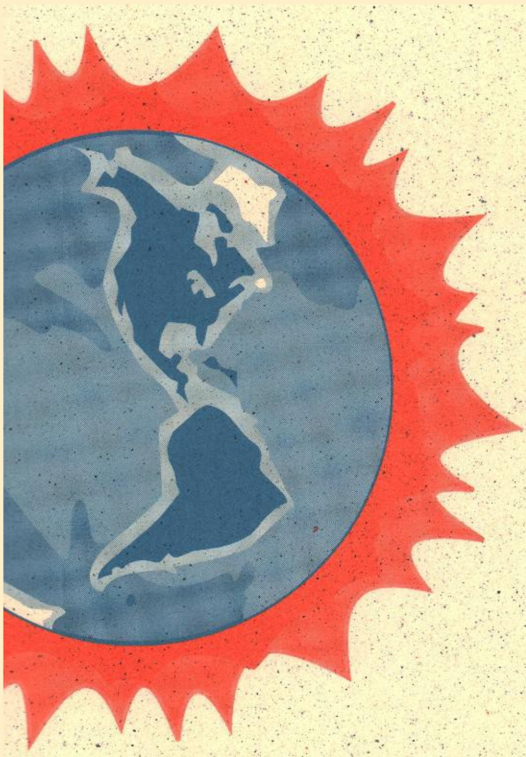
In keeping with the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" agreed to in the FCCC, countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) set voluntary targets of stabilizing carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. These countries will largely fail to meet their voluntary commitments: Of the nine OECD countries with 1990 emissions greater than 50 million metric tons of carbon (MtC) only two—the United Kingdom and Germany—are likely to have emissions at or below 1990 levels in 2000.[2] U.S. emissions have increased each year since 1991 and now appear likely to be 13 percent above the promised target in 2000[3] (Figure 1).

In April 1995, parties to the Climate Convention agreed to the "Berlin Mandate," which established a two-year negotiating process to develop a protocol that will set quantified limitation and reduction objectives after 2000, in all likelihood including a cap on emissions among Annex I countries (i.e., OECD and countries with economies in transition). The parties agreed not to introduce new commitments for developing countries in that protocol; however, the Berlin Mandate does specify that developing countries should advance the implementation of their existing commitments.



RISKY BUSINESS:

Why Joint Implementation is the Wrong Approach to Global Warming Policy

A Global Problem...

Global warming is a pollution problem. It is caused by emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide that result from burning gasoline in cars and coal, oil, and to a lesser extent natural gas in power plants and factories. No country is immune to the threat that global climate change poses on human health, fragile ecosystems, countless species of plants and animals, and the world economy. One of the most likely effects is a rise in sea level, which could inundate coastal areas that support 70 percent of the world's population. In addition, global climate change may bring severe droughts, more intense hurricanes, and more illness and death from deadly tropical diseases such as malaria and cholera.

While all countries will be affected by global warming, not all countries are equally at fault — the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions come from industrialized countries. As the primary global warming polluters, industrialized countries should take the lead in reducing emissions.

The international community recognizes the threat of global warming and has responded by ratifying the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an international treaty developed to promote coordinated action to curb global warming pollution. The treaty sets a broad objective of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels that would prevent harmful climatic change. As a first step towards achieving this goal, the treaty calls for industrialized countries to develop national strategies to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Yet scientists agree that capping greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels is only a first step — only major emissions reductions that bring us well below 1990 levels will stop global warming.

The good news is that industrialized countries can lower emissions in a way that is good for the economy and the environment — by promoting energy efficiency. Underdeveloped energy efficiency "reserves" dwarf new sources of oil and coal and can provide more energy and save money while reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Energy efficiency offers the safest and most economical near-term strategy for slowing carbon dioxide buildup while industrialized countries lay the foundation for a renewable energy future.

Joint Implementation — More Business As Usual

The bad news is that some advocates of "business as usual" ignore this obvious solution and instead advocate a scheme that is unlikely to work and that shifts the onus onto those countries least responsible for creating the problem and least equipped to affect a solution. This scheme is called joint implementation, or JI.

JI would allow industrialized countries to avoid ▶

Joint Implementation Will Not Work Because:

- JI is unenforceable and will be difficult and costly to monitor.
- JI will result in higher costs of curbing global climate change in the future.
- JI will allow "business as usual" pollution in industrialized countries.
- JI will cause industrialized countries to abandon their leadership role and will reduce incentives to create new technologies.
- JI will allow industrialized countries to pollute more if they plant some trees abroad.
- JI will lead to fraud and sham transactions.
- JI is unfair.

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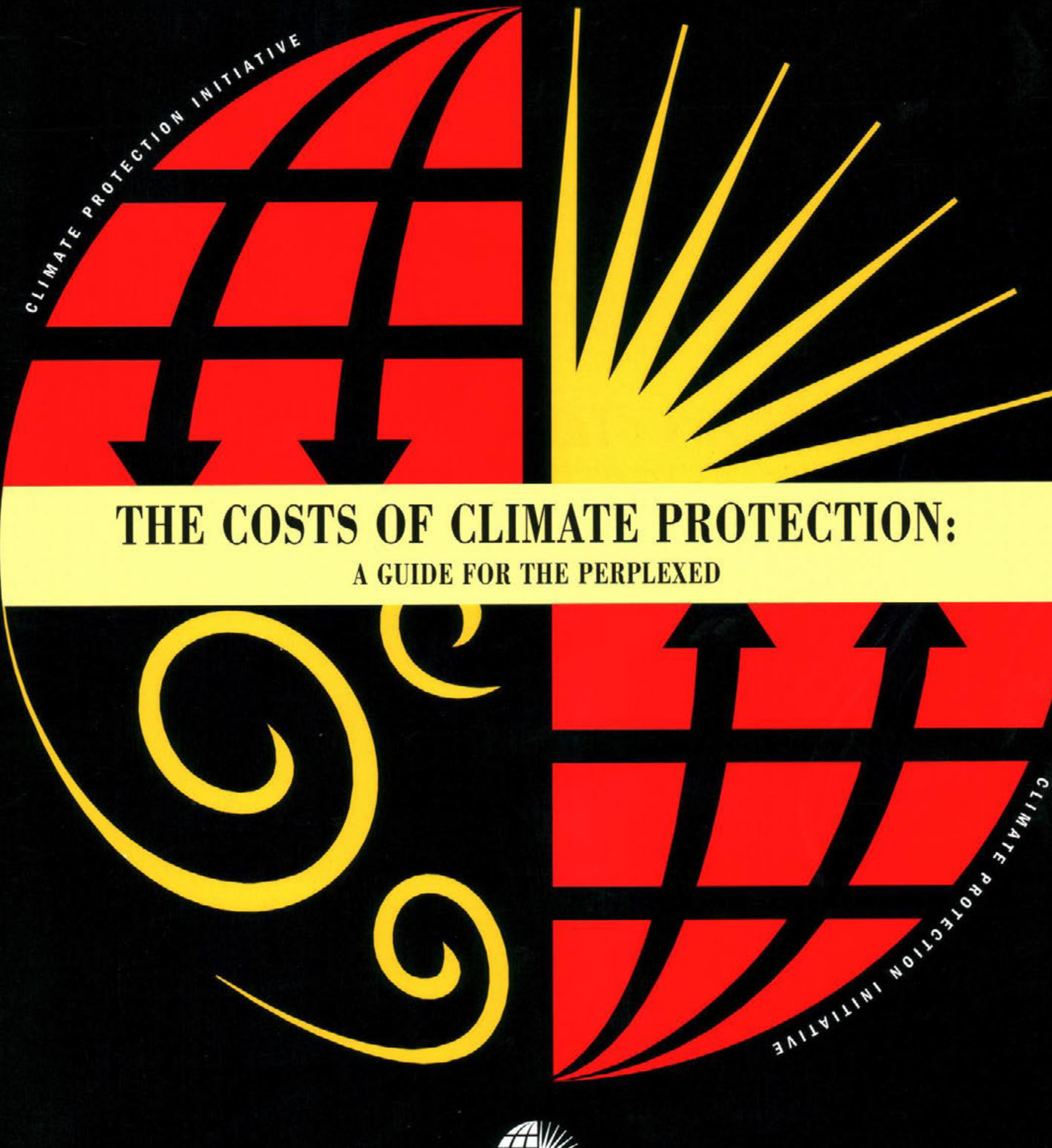

THE COSTS OF CLIMATE PROTECTION:
A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

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