

guardian.co.uk

Copenhagen climate summit

December 7-18



Copenhagen climate change conference: 'Fourteen days to seal history's judgment on this generation'

This editorial calling for action from world leaders on climate change is published today by 56 newspapers around the world in 20 languages

[Copenhagen climate change summit - opening day liveblog](#)

Editorial

The Guardian, Monday 7 December 2009



Today 56 newspapers in 45 countries take the unprecedented step of speaking with one voice through a common editorial. We do so because humanity faces a profound emergency.

Unless we combine to take decisive action, climate change will ravage our planet, and with it our prosperity and security. The dangers have been becoming apparent for a generation. Now the facts have started to speak: 11 of the past 14 years have been the warmest on record, the Arctic ice-cap is melting and last year's inflated oil and food prices provide a foretaste of future havoc. In scientific journals the question is no longer whether humans are to blame, but how little time we have got left to limit the damage. Yet so far the world's response has been feeble and half-hearted.

• How the Copenhagen global leader came about

• Write your own editorial

solved by everyone.

The science is complex but the facts are clear. The world needs to take steps to limit temperature rises to 2C, an aim that will require global emissions to peak and begin falling within the next 5-10 years. A bigger rise of 3-4C — the smallest increase we can prudently expect to follow inaction — would parch continents, turning farmland into desert. Half of all species could become extinct, untold millions of people would be displaced, whole nations drowned by the sea. The controversy over emails by British researchers that suggest they tried to suppress inconvenient data has muddied the waters but failed to dent the mass of evidence on which these predictions are based.

Few believe that Copenhagen can any longer produce a fully polished treaty; real progress towards one could only begin with the arrival of President Obama in the White House and the reversal of years of US obstructionism. Even now the world finds itself at the mercy of American domestic politics, for the president cannot fully commit to the action required until the US Congress has done so.

But the politicians in Copenhagen can and must agree the essential elements of a fair and effective deal and, crucially, a firm timetable for turning it into a treaty. Next June's UN climate meeting in Bonn should be their deadline. As one negotiator put it: "We can go into extra time but we can't afford a replay."

At the deal's heart must be a settlement between the rich world and the developing world covering how the burden of fighting climate change will be divided — and how we will share a newly precious resource: the trillion or so tonnes of carbon that we can emit before the mercury rises to dangerous levels.

Rich nations like to point to the arithmetic truth that there can be no solution until developing giants such as China take more radical steps than they have so far. But the rich world is responsible for most of the accumulated carbon in the atmosphere — three-quarters of all carbon dioxide emitted since 1850. It must now take a lead, and every developed country must commit to deep cuts which will reduce their emissions within a decade to very substantially less than their 1990 level.

Developing countries can point out they did not cause the bulk of the problem, and also that the poorest regions of the world will be hardest hit. But they will increasingly contribute to warming, and must thus pledge meaningful and quantifiable action of their own. Though both fell short of what some had hoped for, the recent commitments to emissions targets by the world's biggest polluters, the United States and China, were important steps in the right direction.

Social justice demands that the industrialised world digs deep into its pockets and pledges cash to help poorer countries adapt to climate change, and clean technologies to enable them to grow economically without growing their emissions. The architecture of a future treaty must also be pinned down — with rigorous multilateral monitoring, fair

rewards for protecting forests, and the credible assessment of "exported emissions" so that the burden can eventually be more equitably shared between those who produce polluting products and those who consume them. And fairness requires that the burden placed on individual developed countries should take into account their ability to bear it; for instance newer EU members, often much poorer than "old Europe", must not suffer more than their richer partners.

The transformation will be costly, but many times less than the bill for bailing out global finance — and far less costly than the consequences of doing nothing.

Many of us, particularly in the developed world, will have to change our lifestyles. The era of flights that cost less than the taxi ride to the airport is drawing to a close. We will have to shop, eat and travel more intelligently. We will have to pay more for our energy, and use less of it.

But the shift to a low-carbon society holds out the prospect of more opportunity than sacrifice. Already some countries have recognized that embracing the transformation can bring growth, jobs and better quality lives. The flow of capital tells its own story: last year for the first time more was invested in renewable forms of energy than producing electricity from fossil fuels.

Kicking our carbon habit within a few short decades will require a feat of engineering and innovation to match anything in our history. But whereas putting a man on the moon or splitting the atom were born of conflict and competition, the coming carbon race must be driven by a collaborative effort to achieve collective salvation.

Overcoming climate change will take a triumph of optimism over pessimism, of vision over short-sightedness, of what Abraham Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature".

It is in that spirit that 56 newspapers from around the world have united behind this editorial. If we, with such different national and political perspectives, can agree on what must be done then surely our leaders can too.

The politicians in Copenhagen have the power to shape history's judgment on this generation: one that saw a challenge and rose to it, or one so stupid that we saw calamity coming but did nothing to avert it. We implore them to make the right choice.

This editorial will be published tomorrow by 56 newspapers around the world in 20 languages including Chinese, Arabic and Russian. The text was drafted by a Guardian team during more than a month of consultations with editors from more than 20 of the papers involved. Like the Guardian most of the newspapers have taken the unusual step of featuring the editorial on their front page.

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 Contributor

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MacGyver

6 Dec 2009, 6:57PM

Nothing puts me off a cause more than being preached to by 56 of the usual suspects. Still, you're probably right though.

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Bluecloud

6 Dec 2009, 6:57PM

Great to see united action by the press on climate change!

Now can we see the **politicians** acting accordingly?

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**mainstreamliars**

6 Dec 2009, 7:02PM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

**smellthecoffee**

6 Dec 2009, 7:02PM

Anything that has a negative affect the rich isn't going to happen - and that includes the proprietors of said newspapers.

Why don't you name and shame the worst culprits? Publish and be damned.

[Recommend?](#) (103)

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**LucyQ**

6 Dec 2009, 7:02PM

We will have to shop, eat and travel more intelligently. We will have to pay more for our energy, and use less of it.

How will this advice be received in our shopping malls where seasonal tunes currently blare out from loudspeakers seducing/inducing consumers with too much stuff in the first place to acquire more useless things?

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**wikipedia**

6 Dec 2009, 7:03PM

Way cool! :-)

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**Celtiberico**

6 Dec 2009, 7:04PM

After what I've seen in Spain's south-eastern provinces, I've given up hope of *homo*

sapiens getting its act together (or deserving its name). It's a farm in Asturias for me, hopefully before everyone else gets the idea...

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[mainstreamliars](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:04PM

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[ColinMay](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:06PM

You say '...the world finds itself at the mercy of American domestic politics'...

I beg to differ.

If everyone else signs up for the deal then we can count that as a significant achievement.

The countries agreeing to strong measures can then erect import barriers from high tariffs to any country which refuses to make the required sacrifice.

China now has the dubious honour of being the largest emitter, and their levels will only rise, and therefore must sign on.

You fudge the issue of the BRIC countries emissions, a sop to the newspapers which have signed on to your editorial. Which means this is the kind of deal we can expect in the coming week.

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[Sim1](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:06PM

Doesn't seem that spelling it out is working, some people have made it clear that *even if* sea levels rise and their homes are deluged, they'll never think to look to their own actions for explanations, hence it's solar cycles (wrong), its water vapour not CO₂ (wrong), its Milankovich cycles (wrong again).

Anything will do as an explanation as long as it doesn't involve taking personal responsibility.

Well done to the 40 or 50 thousand smurfs in London yesterday too.

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Blythy

6 Dec 2009, 7:07PM

The Daily star has gone a bit pretentious on its logo.

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BigTime

6 Dec 2009, 7:08PM

The most important thing to know about Copenhagen is that every journalist and every politician will be representing big business. No one will be representing us.

The biggest lobbying group at Copenhagen will be the International Emissions Trading Association which was created to promote carbon trading more than ten years ago.

That's why every corporate newspaper and TV station has been telling us that the science is settled since that time.

Its members include :-

BP, Conoco Philips, Shell, E.ON AG (coal power stations owner), EDF (one of the largest participants in the global coal market), Gazprom (Russian oil and gas), Goldman Sachs, Barclays, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley..

<http://www.ieta.org/ieta/www/pages/index.php?IdSiteTree=1249>

Their aim

the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and ultimately climate protection;

the establishment of effective market-based trading systems for greenhouse gas emissions by businesses that are demonstrably fair, open, efficient, accountable and consistent across national boundaries; and maintaining societal equity and environmental integrity while establishing these systems.

<http://www.ieta.org/ieta/www/pages/index.php?IdSiteTree=1248>

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bettysenior

6 Dec 2009, 7:08PM

...The dangers have been becoming apparent for a generation...

The dangers have actually been around for TWO generations, not one, but no one acted until now.

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[bobdoney](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:08PM

Climate change has been caused over centuries, has consequences that will endure for all time and our prospects of taming it will be determined in the next 14 days.

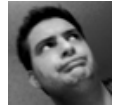
No pressure then. And if we get it wrong billions will suffer unnecessarily because of misplaced resources.

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[SamWidges](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:09PM

Co-ordinated PR - by instruments of the very few. It might well be the "right thing" (we don't know) and while the sentiment is ostensibly constructive the masses don't respond well to this sort of cliquy effort.

I'd have thought the Guardian team learnt its lesson having got its fingers burnt in 2004 when it encouraged its readers to write to random Americans pleading with them to depose George Bush at the election. The hubris garnered Bush more votes by some pundits' reckoning.

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[mainstreamliars](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:09PM

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**Phased**

6 Dec 2009, 7:10PM

We put our complete faith in scientists on a day to day basis - we believe that the microwaves won't escape from the oven and fry our brains, we believe that the laws of physics - as interpreted by scientists and engineers - will keep the plane in the air. It really is time to put our faith in the climate scientists, too. We accept the science when it suits us and we have to accept it when it doesn't.

[Recommend?](#) (281)[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#) |[Link](#)**smellthecoffee**

6 Dec 2009, 7:11PM

Celtiberico

Now I know where I'm going on my next holiday.

[Recommend?](#) (6)[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#) |[Link](#)**tonystoke**

6 Dec 2009, 7:11PM

the smallest increase we can prudently expect to follow inaction ? would parch continents, turning farmland into desert. Half of all species could become extinct, untold millions of people would be displaced, whole nations drowned by the sea.

`To hell with all that, what about my fuel bills?'

As Bluecloud said, great to finally see some united action

[Recommend?](#) (23)[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#) |[Link](#)**mainstreamliars**

6 Dec 2009, 7:12PM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.

**Greystuff**

6 Dec 2009, 7:12PM

In scientific journals the question is no longer whether humans are to blame, but how little time we have got left to limit the damage. Yet so far the world's response has been feeble and half-hearted... We call on the representatives of the 192 countries gathered in Copenhagen not to hesitate, not to fall into dispute, not to blame each other but to seize opportunity from the greatest modern failure of politics.

Quite. Less mud slinging, more action, please.

[Recommend?](#) (70)

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**MMeister**

6 Dec 2009, 7:13PM

Even now the world finds itself at the mercy of American domestic politics, for the president cannot fully commit to the action required until the US Congress has done so. Its sad how everything pivots on the whims of a few oil industry cronies in government thousands of miles away. Make no mistake this is literally boils down to the interests of the world v interests of the fossil fuel industry...and as the astroturfing operation has proven (well, who would bother breaking into a scientists office?) they could win because they're more unified than everyone else.

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**pondleek**

6 Dec 2009, 7:14PM

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**Waterdazzle**

6 Dec 2009, 7:14PM

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**mainstreamliars**

6 Dec 2009, 7:16PM

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Cluebat

6 Dec 2009, 7:16PM

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mainstreamliars

6 Dec 2009, 7:17PM

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stormypetrel

6 Dec 2009, 7:18PM

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paulhs

6 Dec 2009, 7:18PM

Smellthecoffee:

it is the second part of this quote gives a clue -

The transformation will be costly, but many times less than the bill for bailing out global finance ? and far less costly than the consequences of doing nothing.

Doin nothing is costly for business too. Big businesses care about getting insurence. Also some care about the opportunities afforded by change, new technologies etc. Some climate change mitigation models suggest it might not be too painful (the equivalent of a cost of between 1-4% of GDP). One (the E3MG model used by the IPCC) even suggests that there will be a net benefit to GDP as the new practices enable many new opportunities. This makes the rich think about going green!!

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GriffGolightly

6 Dec 2009, 7:21PM

There's the issue, and then there's the concerted action of the newspapers.

As for the climate change issue, I think human actions are causing climate change; and am not terribly interested in the whole debate - hats off to those who seek to engage with the deniers. I'm afraid I don't have the time or energy. The science will show soon enough. Just like it did in the end with the flat earth, the sun revolves around the earth,

etc, etc.

But the concerted action of the newspapers does interest me slightly more. Must've been like herding cats, I'd have thought. I'm glad in this global village of ours we can speak across the language barrier. I've always thought one of the big difficulties we in the UK face is the fact that we're so crap with languages, and this reinforces both an unfortunate superiority complex, and tendency towards xenophobia. This is a tiny step in the right direction.

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tomper2

6 Dec 2009, 7:22PM

I suspect this will be as effective as the Guardian editorial demanding that Brown be replaced as Labour leader.

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mochila

6 Dec 2009, 7:22PM

1. As a matter of interest, are there any Australian newspapers on the list?

I would welcome it, but can't imagine it, not from what I've seen in the way of coverage down under.

2. Are these papers going to refuse running ads by petro-chemical companies, car manufacturers, mainstream energy companies etc.?

It's probably not feasible to forego the revenue, I imagine.

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pondleek

6 Dec 2009, 7:23PM

MMeister -- Make no mistake this is literally boils down to the interests of the world v interests of the fossil fuel industry --

Difficult to know what the interests of the world are - probably best served by reducing

the human population by 90%. OTOH the oil industry probably would be best served by restricting production to force up prices.

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[AfternoonDelight](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:23PM

Weather of mass destruction is imminent!

The science is not sexed up!

War must be declared on CO2 to save us all!

Whole new markets could die!

We must act now! We must act now!

I'm getting Déjà vu.

[Recommend?](#) (143)

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[MikeyOil](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:24PM

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[mochila](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:26PM

Sorry, I should've checked the list. Of course, Australian papers are absent.

[Recommend?](#) (34)

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[sartorius](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:27PM

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[dorlomin](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:28PM

applauds loudly

[Recommend?](#) (28)

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[Bluecloud](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:28PM

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[stevehill](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

Tomorrow 56 newspapers in 45 countries take the unprecedented step of speaking with one voice through a common editorial.

Hmmm. And how many would have published it if you'd been honest and mentioned the fact that population control is an essential element of any solution? And in which Catholic countries?

Cop out. 2/10.

[Recommend?](#) (199)

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[PizzaRe](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

Good news for humanity, a bad day for cynics.

[Recommend?](#) (39)

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[salparadyse](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

Climate change has been caused over centuries, has consequences that will endure for all time and our prospects of taming it will be determined in the next 14 days.

has consequences that will endure for all time?

No one can say that. That's alarmist nonsense.

[Recommend?](#) (139)

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[ngave](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

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[mochila](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

@Mikey Oil

If you buy the 2.7, it's more likely to be trashed by well meaning environmentalists taking the protection of the planet into their own hands. Keep that in mind. If you can't imagine that happening, check out what's happening in Berlin.

[Recommend?](#) (5)

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[SantosLHalpar](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

@bigtime

All scientists are owned by government/big business.

I'm not. Therefore your entire argument is wrong.

Seriously, we have to do something about climate change now.

[Recommend?](#) (93)

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[stormypetrel](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:29PM

climate change will ravage our planet

Our planet will do just fine. It's been "ravaged" before, by meteors, ice ages, being shrouded for years by the dust of volcanos (no one knows how many generations of people, animals and plants died), not to mention the Big Bang, and it is still here. It will probably be a nicer planet without us, "only man is vile".

[Recommend?](#) (68)

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[sadoldfart](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:31PM

Please remember how many people you have failed to convince. (Yes I know you consider they are thick, selfish, in the pay of oil companies etc etc but this is a democracy).

Unless you engage properly with recent issues (as George Monbiot is starting to do with great courage) and treat the unconvinced with greater respect, this editorial will have about as much effect as your stunt a few years' back to influence US voting patterns.

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[ngave](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:31PM

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[Bluecloud](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:31PM

I would not believe it even if 560 newspapers published a common editorial.

Seems you wouldn't believe anyone no matter what they said.

It comes from having a closed mindset.

How many doctors would it take for you to accept you have a disease?

Clue: Doctors are trained in a scientific discipline.

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[BigTime](#)

6 Dec 2009, 7:32PM

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