

## **Climate Politics and the Future**

**Lecture by Ambassador Bo Kjellén,  
Senior Research Fellow at the Stockholm Environment Institute**

**CEMUS, Uppsala, May 16, 2012, 10.15-12.00**

### **Synopsis**

The history of climate change politics is short: it was only in the 1980's that global warming appeared on the radar screen of (some) politicians and they began to heed the warnings of scientists; and it was only in 1991 that international negotiations started in the UN to search for a global response to a truly global problem. As one of the first generation of climate negotiators my aim with this lecture is to tell the story of these developments and to discuss the perspectives for the near and the more distant future.

I will begin with some comments on the early interface between science and politics, recalling in particular the role of the Swedish scientist Bert Bolin (1925-2007), who played an instrumental role in this process and became the first Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) between 1988 and 1997.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background I will discuss how the question of climate change became part of the preparations for the Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, as negotiations for the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) got under way in 1991, running in parallel with the Rio process. In this context I will insist on the close linkages between climate change and other aspects of human influence on global natural systems in the Anthropocene Era.

Then will follow reflections on the notion of *enabling conditions*, presenting the close relationship between national politics and international negotiations, and highlighting the different positions of the main actors in the climate negotiations over the period 1990-2010. I will underline that while there has been a number of changes, there is clear continuity, reflecting the importance of structural economic and political factors in defining the negotiating stance of different countries. This is not surprising, since action on climate change goes way beyond environmental policies: it is part of the evolution of societies.

I will briefly comment on the three phases of climate negotiations over the period 1990-2010:<sup>2</sup>

1. The Convention: 1990-1995
2. The Kyoto Protocol: 1995-2005

---

<sup>1</sup> A fascinating and detailed account of these developments is found in Bolin, B. *A History of the Science and Politics of Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See also Kjellén, B. *A New Diplomacy for Sustainable Development: the Challenge of Global Change*, Routledge, 2008.

### 3. The quest for a post-2012 regime: 2005-

The last phase is obviously still running, but the Cancún Conference in December 2010 in some respects closed a particular period, when it managed to formalise the Copenhagen Accord, thereby laying the basis for what I feel is a new approach to the fundamental issues raised by the emergence of countries like India, China and Brazil as major economic powers and at the same time major emitters of greenhouse gases. This obviously raises many questions with regard to geopolitics, and it creates a different atmosphere and a different perspective for the negotiations: the Cancún decisions in 2010 were important, and the Durban COP-17 in December 2011 gave a positive outcome; but the major stumbling blocks on the road to a new comprehensive, legally binding instrument remain, even if EU could agree to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. However, given the political situation in the United States and the reticence of in particular China and India to take on binding commitments at the present time it was satisfactory that all countries could agree on a process which would lead to an agreement by 2015 on the terms for a long-term climate regime starting in 2020. In fact, this is the kind of transitional agreement which I suggested in an article last year<sup>3</sup>, which could be supplemented by nationally defined targets, provided that they are measurable, reportable and verifiable.

One major reason for making such proposals is that a period of complete uncertainty would reduce the scope for major investments in new energy systems, new transport systems, new infrastructure and new buildings over the next five to fifteen years. And such investments are necessary if the objective of a very radical reduction of the use of fossil fuels by 2050 could be attainable. Against this background, the Swedish think-tank Global Utmaning recently presented ideas on investments at the Davos meeting, based on a paper issued in October 2010: “An International Climate Investment Community - breaking the deadlock”.

---

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see Kjellén B, Climate Conundrum: Could a Transitional Agreement offer a Way Out? , *Global Policy*, Vol 2 Issue 1, January 2011.