



Hope for the world

A Revolution For Climate Change

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It is over 25 years ago that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up by the world's nations and I became chairman of the scientific committee. We got together experts from as many of the world's nations as possible and wrote our first report in 1990. Representatives of about 100 countries agreed the summary of this report at a meeting with simultaneous translation into 6 languages. Some wanted to make the report stronger, others (especially those from oil states and others with vested interests) tried hard to weaken it. My job was to make it as honest and accurate as possible.

At that time there was no doubt that greenhouse gases (especially carbon dioxide) were entering the atmosphere but considerable uncertainty regarding the size of their influence on the atmosphere's average temperature. I continued to be involved through the next 2 reports until 2001. A few Christians met with me during these meetings to pray especially for me and that truth might prevail. During the very tough and long debates I felt much that I was not on my own but that God was giving me the strength and guidance I needed.

Since then the reality of serious damage to the climate due to the much increased carbon emissions has become much more certain, as reflected in the next two IPCC reports, the last in 2013. However, powerful voices have continued to cast doubt on the scientific reports right up to the present.

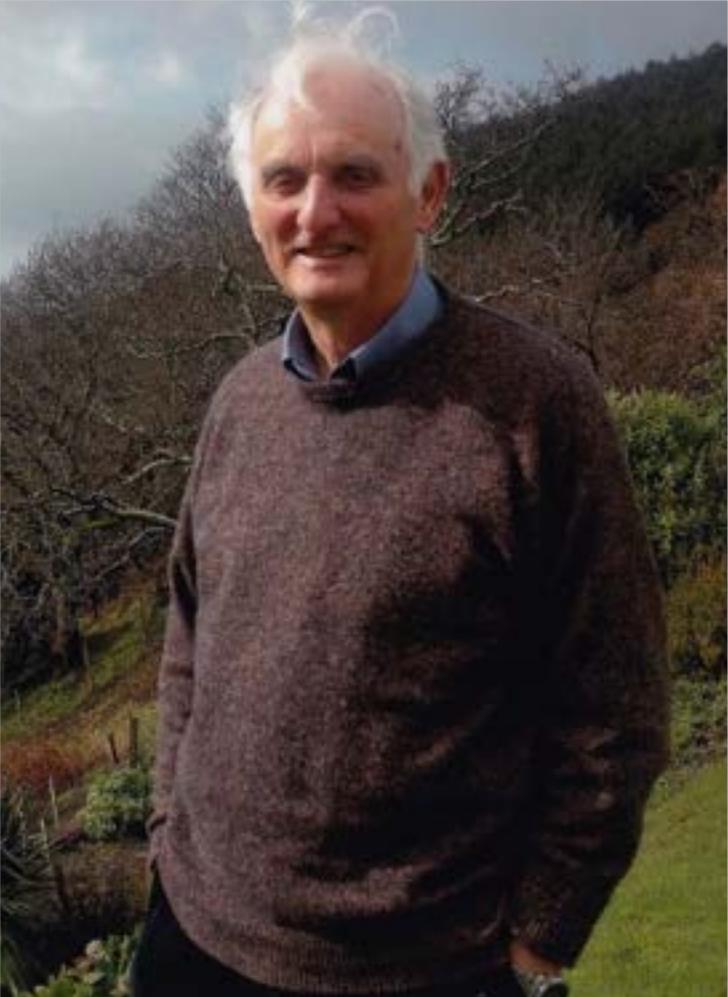
In the light of the international debates during this 25 year period, the agreement reached in Paris at December's United Nations Convention on Climate Change was of major global significance right up to its thrilling finish. Once ratified by most of the 195 governments involved, the agreement commits the nations to reducing the maximum temperature rise to less than 2 degrees C - aiming at 1.5 deg C - from preindustrial levels. The rise is already about 1 degree C and increasing fast, so it is an extremely challenging target: tougher than many of us dared hope for!

advent.arocha.org.uk (John Houghton - 21st December)

Even if these tough targets are achieved, more frequent damaging extremes of climate will occur - heat waves, floods, storms and droughts - arising from increased energy in the atmosphere's circulation caused by the rise in global temperature. Many of these will create large numbers of 'climate' refugees. Further it is not just the atmosphere that is being warmed and affected. The oceans will also warm and sea levels will rise. By 2100 the rise in global sea levels of between half to one meter will drive millions of the world's poorest people from their homelands. Further, climate change will continue for decades even if emissions of carbon dioxide stopped tomorrow, because the oceans warm only slowly. The urgency for action NOW cannot be over emphasized.

To meet the tough targets, renewable energies - especially solar, wind, biomass, hydroelectric, tidal and nuclear - must be developed for safe and economic use as quickly as possible. Also developed countries, whose wealth has largely come from cheap fossil fuel energy, must provide much essential help to developing countries to keep their emissions down by providing resources for renewable energies and increased energy efficiency.

As Christians we have God-given responsibility to be his stewards on earth (Gen 2 v15). I believe the Paris agreement to be an exciting answer to prayer - but my excitement must not end here! We need to pass on to future generations a world in the best possible condition, not a world damaged by our greed. We need to pray for strength to persuade our churches, politicians, industries and ourselves to work hard towards these tough but essential targets.



Sir John Houghton CBE FRS is President of the John Ray Initiative. He was chairman of Scientific Assessment for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



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