

**What Canada has done
and should be doing
at the United Nations**

edited by John E. Trent

**THE
UNITED NATIONS
AND CANADA**

Canada as Pariah in International Climate Politics

Christian Holz

The current (2014-15) biennium features crucial opportunities to advance international cooperation on addressing the global climate crisis. For September 2014, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invited world leaders to New York for a UN Climate Summit. Governments have also committed to agree on a new, long-lasting climate accord at the 2015 Conference of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris. Climate change is of course a global problem, since the effects of greenhouse gas pollution impact people everywhere, not just in the places where the emissions originate. As such, climate change can only be addressed effectively through international cooperation, which indicates an important role for the UN system. Despite seemingly contradictory rhetoric from the federal government, among others, Canada is a major contributor to global climate pollution, firmly placed in the top 10 of climate polluters regardless whether greenhouse gas emissions are expressed in total per country, per capita or cumulative historic terms.

Therefore Canada must be part of the solution and Canadians clearly understand that: a poll of the University of Montreal and Canada2020 found that the vast majority want the federal government to take the climate challenge more seriously including by joining international treaties. A staggering 76% of Canadians supported Canada joining an international climate agreement even if China and the U.S. are not yet part of it. However, Canada has a serious image and trust problem in international climate politics stemming from a long history of unfulfilled and abandoned commitments. This includes Canada's failure to meet the greenhouse gas reduction commitment made in 1997 under the Kyoto Protocol and its subsequent withdrawal from the Protocol (the only country in the world to do so). Furthermore, it is all but certain that the substantially weaker commitment made in 2009 in Copenhagen will also be missed, save for an immediate and thorough change in direction from Canada's federal government. Additionally, after a short period from 2010 to 2012 of contributing a genuinely fair share (\$400 million per year) to a global fund to assist the poorest countries in

reducing their own contributions to climate change and dealing with its impacts, Canada's climate finance contributions have shrunk to very low levels. This is particularly damaging since the 2010-2012 funding was intended to build trust for the next round of climate negotiations with the intention to scale up, rather than stop, this support after 2012. Coupled with the often obstructive strategies and tactics of Canada's deputations in the day-to-day of UN climate negotiations, these failures cause many governments and civil society organizations to see Canada as a cynical pariah within the UN climate system.

Given this backdrop, the most important contribution that a Canadian government could make to the success of climate policy-making within the UN system is to work in good faith toward restoring this damaged trust. First and foremost, this requires bringing its house in order domestically through good faith efforts toward meeting the greenhouse gas reduction target promised in Copenhagen. Canada should, for example, provide substantial government support to renewable energy and energy efficiency, and develop and implement policies and measures to drastically reduce emissions from Canada's leading sources: transportation, oil and gas, and buildings. It would also involve initiating a genuine and honest conversation in Canada about our inevitable transformation away from extracting and burning oil, coal and gas.

In addition to getting domestic climate action on track, Canada must re-build trust on the international stage. An obvious starting point is to restore international climate finance to 2010-2012 levels. But the current international discussions are also about each country's future emissions reductions target. Canada should propose a deep and ambitious target for itself, one that embraces (not denies) Canada's role as a major contributor to climate change and that this responsibility, coupled with a wealthy country's high level of capacity, justifies doing more than others and acting with urgency and vigour. The new climate accord to be struck in 2015 can only succeed in the long term if it enables and encourages the largest possible degree of international cooperation on climate change, which requires that the accord is based on trust, equity, transparency and accountability. These characteristics reflect traditional Canadian values and suggest that Canada could play an important role bringing about such an accord. But currently, Canada is not a credible ambassador for such values in international climate politics. By embracing a truly fair share – based on its responsibility and capacity to act – and by showing it is serious to meet that commitment and to help poorer countries to do the most they can (for example, by providing finance, green technology etc), Canada could restore damaged trust internationally and help create the long-lasting, equitable, and ambitious climate accord needed to avoid the worst of climate change.

Further Reading:

- IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change): Fifth Assessment Report. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5>
- World Resource Institute: Climate Analysis Indicator Tool (CAIT) 2.0 Climate Data Explorer. <http://cait2.wri.org/>
- Canadian Coalition for Climate Change and Development (C4D): Protecting Our Common Future: An Assessment of Canada's Fast-Start Climate Financing. <http://c4d.ca/publications/policy-briefs/protecting-our-common-future-report>
- UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN): Deep Decarbonization Pathways. <http://deepdecarbonization.org> (especially Country Chapter "Canada")

Dr. Christian Holz is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Ottawa's School of Political Studies. Prior to joining the University of Ottawa, he served as the Executive Director of Climate Action Network Canada, a network of nearly 100 organizations committed to working together to advance action on climate change at all levels of government in Canada. For the past decade he has also been involved with Climate Action Network International, engaging in various roles related to their advocacy work at the UN climate change negotiations. His main research interests are the role of equity and fairness as enablers of ambitious action in domestic and international climate policy and the role of civil society in international climate change politics.

This volume has been compiled and published as a project of the World Federalist Movement – Canada (www.worldfederalistscanada.org). The views and opinions expressed in each of the articles are the sole responsibility of the authors. It is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported License. To order additional printed copies, contact World Federalist Movement – Canada (613 232-0647, or by email: wfcnat@web.ca).