

International Civil Society Conference

“After the Failure of Copenhagen: Ways to Sustainability and Low Carbon Economies in Europe and in China. Civil Society Perspectives”

**Gustav-Stresemann-Institut, Bonn, Germany,
June 28th to June 30th, 2010**

**Welcome and introduction to the conference
Klaus Heidel, Werkstatt Ökonomie e.V., Heidelberg, Germany**

June 28th, 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues!

Good afternoon! I'm very pleased to welcome you to our international civil society conference “After the Failure of Copenhagen: Ways to Sustainability and Low Carbon Economies in Europe and in China. Civil Society Perspectives” in Bonn. My name is Klaus Heidel and I'm working with the 1983 founded NGO Werkstatt Ökonomie based in Heidelberg. Together with Dr. Klaus Fritsche from Asia Foundation I'm coordinating the European civil society network “EU-China: Civil Society Forum”.

I'm very happy that we can welcome so many NGO colleagues from China because it is high time that the European civil society learns more about civil society discourses in China. It is high time for a mutual exchange. Therefore “EU-China: Civil Society Forum” aims at setting up an open network of European and Chinese civil society organisations which work for social justice, protection of the environment and human rights. Inter alia, the forum organises international meeting programmes and conferences.

On behalf of “EU-China: Civil Society Forum” the Asia Foundation (Essen) organised in close cooperation with Friends of Nature (China) the international workshop “Global Concerns - Global Cooperation? Common Concerns of Chinese and European Civil Society Organisations. International Workshop on Climate Change, Water and Food Safety” in Guangzhou and Hainan in June 2009.

Südwind Agentur (Vienna) was responsible for the international conference “Social Developments in China and Europe. An exchange of experiences and perspectives of Civil Society Organisations in China and Europe”, which was held in Vienna in September 2009.

And now the Heidelberg based Werkstatt Ökonomie is organising this conference on climate change issues. One might ask whether or not climate change is a well chosen topic for a European-Chinese civil society exchange. There are so many social and ecological challenges we have to deal with. There are so many civil society initiatives regarding climate change. There might be significant differences between European and Chinese perceptions of climate change.

Indeed the area of concern is wide. Nevertheless mitigation and adaptation of climate change are matters of urgency. I attended a global church conference on ecological and climate justice in Chiang Mai in Thailand last November. One church colleague from a Pacific island told us, that presently his church is preparing for the involuntary resettlement of his community because the island will disappear in the nearer future. And this resettlement is not just about moving people. It's about moving a cultural entity. It's about moving the cultural heritage. Probably it's about moving graveyards. Do we feel the dramatic urgency? One colleague from Bangladesh informed us that they have about ten years in order to move ten million people before their land will disappear in the sea. Do we feel the dramatic urgency? One leading British NGO estimates that we will have up to 500 million forced climate migrants by 2050 if it is not possible to stop climate change immediately.

Dear colleagues! If you will see a house on fire what will you do first? There might be a window in need of repair. There might be a door to be replaced. There might be dishes to wash. There might be many important tasks waiting for you in the house. But you can forget everything when it is not possible to get the fire under control – no, more: when it is not possible to extinguish the fire. I feel that our world might be on fire – or, at least, might be close to it. I feel that we live in a state of emergency.

Nevertheless there is no need for any kind of alarmism. The world has all knowledge, has all means, has all resources in order to prevent the climate catastrophe. We know what we should do. We know how we have to do what we have to do. We know who has to do what. Only the political will is missing. This is exactly the point, where China and the European Union come in because the EU and China can contribute a lot to mitigating climate change. Both the EU and China are leading global players. Together they can make a real difference. Together they can help the world to survive. There are some promising signs of hope which civil society organisations can and should strengthen. This is the joint European and Chinese civil society responsibility: to undertake whatever could be undertaken in order to promote European and Chinese activities for mitigating climate change, to promote ways to low carbon economies.

There is no alternative. We need low carbon economies. We need them immediately. But here we have to deal with a dilemma. On the one hand the current economic growth might probably not be sustainable. On the other hand, economic growth seems to be a prerequisite for social development and prosperity. This dilemma hinders the development of low carbon economies both in the European Union and in China though the political, economic and social structures differ in these parts of the world. In the European Union people might ask whether or not they can keep their living standard without economic growth. In China the question at stake is how to implement the right to development under low carbon requirements.

Against this background climate change issues are issues of climate justice, of ecological justice. To deal with the challenge of climate change in an eco-technical manner is a widespread misunderstanding. Both mitigation and adaptation of climate change have strong social and economic dimensions. And it can be said vice versa: sustainable and just development, the implementation of economic and social rights, social justice and the eradication of poverty require the mitigation of climate change. Climate change hits the poorest most. Again: no mitigation of climate change without climate justice – no climate justice without mitigating climate change.

In addition, it is very important to take into account that climate change issues as climate justice issues are full of conflicting interest and purposes. Economic and ecological interests are

contradictory in many areas. Are civil society organisations in Europe and in China ready to deal with potential *trade-offs and conflicts of interests* regarding low carbon policies?

The international civil society conference “After the Failure of Copenhagen: Ways to Sustainability and Low Carbon Economies in Europe and in China. Civil Society Perspectives” tries to find answers to these questions. The conference doesn’t dwell on looking back to the failure of Copenhagen. It looks for fresh civil society perspectives.

I am looking forward to fruitful discussions with you.

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