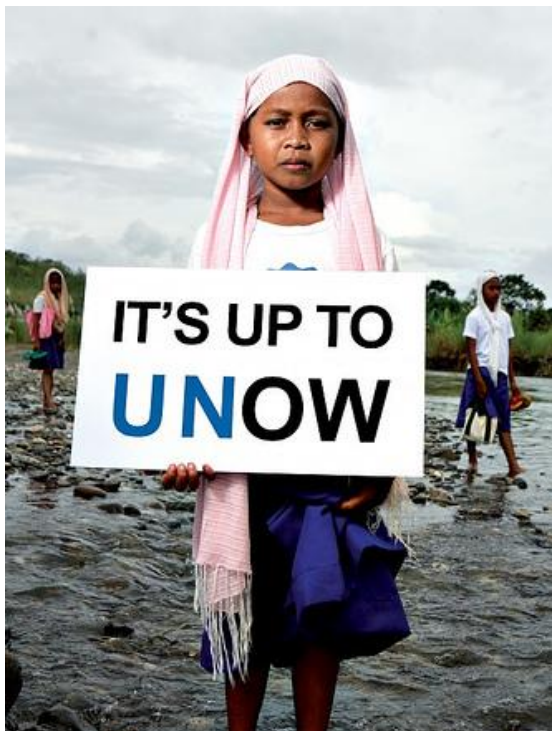


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**Are there realistic ways to  
improve the UNFCCC?  
An interview with Aubrey Meyer**

Author: Takashi Sagara

# Interview with Aubrey Meyer

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## Are there realistic ways to improve the UNFCCC? - An interview with Aubrey Meyer

Author: Takashi Sagara

Although strong action is required for global climate change, negotiations have moved slowly under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The outputs of the Kyoto Protocol and the resultant UNFCCC approach have so far not been able to bring significant effects on climate change policy. Yet, it is not only the resistance of individual countries to curb their emissions, the characteristics of the UNFCCC system and negotiations process have been criticised to create obstacles to advancing the climate change agenda.

One of the critics of the current UNFCCC approach and its Kyoto Protocol is, Mr. Aubrey Meyer, Director of the Global Commons Institute, a London-based think-tank, that focuses on the global solution to climate change, and most widely known as the Father of 'Contraction and Convergence' (C&C) principle. The basic tenets of the Contraction and Convergence principle are as follows:

*"The first step in C&C, 'Contraction', is based on agreeing a safe target concentration level and the determination of global annual emissions levels into which should take the atmosphere to that target... Having defined a global budget, the second step, 'convergence' defines allocations to each country. C&C assumes that each country is assigned annual allowances which vary, per capita, linearly, starting from actual levels in 2000 and converging to a common level of per capita emissions in a target year... The C&C package is expected to be completed with an emissions-trading mechanism and with a governance framework including penalties for non-compliance."*<sup>1</sup>

Aubrey Meyer argues that negotiations in the UNFCCC can be characterized as the politics of international 'blame' and that the UNFCCC approach reflects countries' own interests or their own group interests. Consequently, the UNFCCC negotiations have moved away from their original objective of stabilising greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere based on the principles of precaution and equity. He proposes that the 'C&C' principle provides a realistic way to improve the UNFCCC approach and negotiations process in a post-Kyoto system, as it can overcome their deficiencies and enable the UNFCCC to return to its original objective and principles.

I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Meyer and ask him about his 'C&C' principle as well as his thoughts on the UNFCCC approach and the current climate change negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> To better understand Contraction and Convergence, read more about it here:  
<http://www.tangentfilms.com/C&C29sept.pdf>.



# Interview with Aubrey Meyer

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## An Interview with Mr. Aubrey Meyer

### How do you evaluate the current UNFCCC negotiations?

*The UNFCCC itself, i.e. the UN Climate Convention, agreed in 1992 and ratified in 1995, is a sound structure for negotiations. Its objective is stable atmospheric GHG concentrations, which is to be achieved on the principles of 'precaution' and 'equity'.*

*However, the negotiating process, that has emerged around the UNFCCC since that time, has become somewhat separated from the objective and these principles. The results that have been generated so far, e.g. the Kyoto Protocol [1997 - to cover the 'budget-period' 2009-2012], framed an inadequate response and this was the result of two things: first lingering doubts at that stage about the serious reality -indeed enormity- of the climate change challenge; and second, the politics of international blame.*

*The process at this time [2009] leading up to COP15 and the negotiations for the 'successor' to the Kyoto Protocol is now in a mind-set where the enormity of the problem is much better understood and it is also understood that we are twelve years deeper into the wrong trends vice versa the objective of the UNFCCC. However the politics of blame is still a dominant feature of this process and this is still hindering progress.*

*In a nutshell, we continue to cause this problem faster than we act to avoid it. If this continues we will all pay a heavy price in terms of the socio-economic 'damages' of climate change.*

### Could you suggest realistic ways to improve the characteristics of the UNFCCC negotiations to overcome the “lingering doubts” and the “politics of international blame”?

*The lingering doubts about the serious reality of the climate change challenge are diminishing quite fast now. So I am less worried about this aspect of the process than I was fifteen years ago. However, with regard to overcoming the politics of blame, proportionate understanding of 'the rates of change' and what to do about this is still poor. This needs to improve markedly, if improvement of the UNFCCC negotiation process is to become structured in a more purposeful manner.*

*In a situation where for twenty years emissions targets for a few countries only have been irrationally picked out of hat, with rising dangers and damages the C&C rationale has to be preferable to that. The revenue distribution consequent of C&C help finance the alleviation of the existing poverty, address the serious reality of the climate change challenge in a rational manner, and take the international politics of climate change beyond 'blame', and into a period of truth and reconciliation for all in the post-Kyoto period.*

### Would you think the current UNFCCC approach to climate change has also separated from the original objective and principles of the UNFCCC?

*Yes, it has become more separated.*



# Interview with Aubrey Meyer

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## What in your opinion is the main problem in the current UNFCCC approach?

*The main problem of the present approach is that parties [countries] are still negotiating what they perceive are their own interests or their own group interests. We all know that we must come together into a unified reckoning, but there seems to be an inability to come to order within the limits that now constrain us all.*

*Whatever the varied intentions that lie behind the existing approach may be, the history of the last fifteen years shows that the sum of all this activity creates and heralds a global total future emissions output that exceeds by far the requirements of meeting the objective of the UNFCCC.*

*The expected US 'leadership' this year has not materialized and its emissions continue upwards and so the unresolved quarrel with China and India continues as well; and China gets away with 'leadership-claims' arguing that its emissions must continue to rise, but at least slower than its GDP for some decades, for 'development purposes'. All this happens in the full knowledge of the participants, regardless of the effect on the global budget and that the opportunity to prevent dangerous rates of climate change taking hold is slipping away.*

*After all this time and with time running out, one might say 'why bother'? Indeed there are those who already say that.*

*However, while resolutions at the Global Humanitarian 'Climate-Justice' Forum in June this year are on the edge of that, they did resolve that COP15 must create a C&C-based deal because a bad deal would be worse than no deal. Quite strong stuff! I am with them.*

## How would you think the current UNFCCC approach to climate change should be improved?

*The UNFCCC approach must become based on the unifying C&C principle of truth and reconciliation.*

## Would you think that the community of countries in the UNFCCC should immediately recall both the original object of the stabilization of atmospheric GHG concentrations and the principles of precaution and equity in the UNFCCC and then adopt the C&C principle because the principle is based on these?

*Absolutely yes.*

## Finally, would you consider that the adoption of the C&C principle is a realistic way to improve both the UNFCCC negotiation characteristics and the UNFCCC approach to climate change in a post-Kyoto and why would you think so?

*The test of 'realism' has to change from what is politically possible [realpolitik] to what is environmentally sustainable. As things stand what is politically possible is environmentally unsustainable; present trends are leading to conditions in which it will become progressively more and more impossible for humanity to cope with the impacts of climate change. C&C -the right principle and*



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*the right rates- is realistic because it offers all the parties to the UNFCCC process a way to organize to avoid these impacts. It is one-for-all and all-for-one : no-one is saved till all are saved.*

## Summary

The interview with Aubrey Meyer sought to find both realistic ways to improve the UNFCCC negotiation characteristics and realistic alternatives to the UNFCCC approach to climate change. According to Mr. Meyer, the realistic way for the improvement of the UNFCCC negotiation characteristics is to adopt the C&C principle in order to take negotiations beyond politics of blame; and the realistic alternative to the current UNFCCC approach is to base the UNFCCC approach on the unifying C&C principle of truth and reconciliation. In the current UNFCCC approach, countries are still negotiating what they perceive are their own interests or their own group interests.

Of particular importance, Mr. Meyer calls for 'the return of both, the UNFCCC negotiation characteristics and the UNFCCC approach, to its original objective of stabilising GHG concentrations in the atmosphere and the principle of precaution and equity'. He strongly insists on the adoption of the 'C&C' principle, as it is based on the original objective and principles of the UNFCCC. Thus, according to Aubrey Meyer, in order to answer the question of how a post-Kyoto UNFCCC system should look one need not search outside of the UNFCCC but within the UNFCCC system itself.

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## About Climatico

Climatico is a network of researchers and experts providing independent analysis of climate change policy. We cover national and international policy and negotiations focusing on policy developments in the G20 countries.

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