

# The time is now

*The failure to deal with the world's climate crisis*

HUDSON FOX

---

In recent years, the world has heard an increase of calls for greater attention to the climate crisis. From Greta Thunberg's public displays of support for the climate movement at international summits to widely-acclaimed environmental conservation efforts, the world's citizens have been trying to get the attention of politicians.

But they refuse to take the necessary action. Even when confronted with severe consequences in their own countries, they remain complacent.

"Scientific evidence for warming of the climate system is unequivocal," said the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a United Nations-commissioned panel aimed at advancing knowledge about climate change.

According to a 2021 IPCC report, all hope of preventing the intensification of the climate crisis over the next 30 years has vanished due to worldwide inaction over this past decade. IPCC co-author Tamsin Edwards, a climate scientist at King's College London, acknowledged that some aspects of climate change would not be reversible for hundreds to thousands of years.

According to Forbes, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres characterized the IPCC report as a "code red for

humanity." Former Sec. of State John Kerry, the special presidential climate envoy for U.S. President Joe Biden, noted that the report "underscores the overwhelming urgency of this moment."


With all these leaders and political figures reaching a consensus, it would be reasonable to expect significant, coordinated action. So why has so little been done?

The answer isn't a simple one. Global trade and increased economic interconnectedness complicate the issue of climate change tremendously. In many industrialized democracies, internal political pressure results in the enactment of laws that curb domestic emissions. However, many developing countries — and other rapidly growing economies, specifically China and India — put an emphasis on economic progress and refuse to impose aggressive restrictions on pollution despite the need to rein in global emissions.

For major corporations based in these developed countries, stringent regulations can present a problem, especially if the business relies upon the emission of greenhouse gases as a critical part of their production process. In many cases, these companies evade the regulations by outsourcing their production to less encumbered, developing countries.

According to a study by Yue Maggie Zhou for the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, the share





of goods by U.S. manufacturing firms produced in low-wage countries rose from 7% in 1992 to 23% in 2009. At the same time, toxic air emissions from manufacturing industries in the United States fell by more than 50%. As one would expect, the sectors that experienced the most significant increase in imports from low-wage countries — including printing, apparel and textile, furniture, rubber, and plastics — also underwent some of the largest drops in air pollution in the United States.

Without consistent restrictions on pollution worldwide (or some mechanism to make up for differences), production will continue to migrate towards countries where the climate laws are less stringent. As a result, the cost of production is lower.

Because of this, it is difficult to assign responsibility for the climate problem. In an attempt to absolve their guilt, the developed world powers often tend to blame poorer, fast-growing, developing countries for the acceleration of the climate crisis.

But calls for accountability from the developed countries have become more vocal in the past few years. At the United Nations Opening Assembly Debate on Sept. 21, President Andrzej Duda of Poland noted the hypocrisy of the situation and called upon wealthy nations to accept their role in managing the climate crisis.

“Do we, the rich North, pass the test of solidarity, or do we merely cater to our own statistics by relocating production to the poorer countries of the South where least environment-friendly technologies are applied, and then those countries are blamed for contaminating the planet?” Duda said.

Given this context, the U.S. can play a critical role on

the world stage. Commitments to clean energy — via tax credits that make clean energy cheaper — is an essential first step toward achieving President Biden’s stated goal: to cut by half the U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared with 2005 levels.

Investment in clean energy also benefits the U.S. economy by keeping our country at the forefront of the economic growth engine and helping maintain our leadership position on the world stage.

Regardless of what steps the U.S. takes, the crisis is global and must be attacked globally. Without a plan for emission reductions worldwide, the progress in our backyard will not be enough to save this world. To that end, the U.S. and other industrialized countries can assert their roles as global leaders by funding clean energy efforts in developing countries that help promote a worldwide effort to combat climate change.

For the youth of the world, we will live in the environment these leaders create. Not only do these leaders, whom we have placed our trust in to help build a better tomorrow, have a responsibility to protect the future, but they also are morally obligated to listen to young voices.

“The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say — we will never forgive you,” Thunberg said.

We must focus on what can be done to save the planet we call Earth, and those in power need to act now.

If world leaders do not listen to the call for change and take the necessary actions, they will face the inescapable reality of contributing to the greatest disaster humanity has ever known.