

27th of November 2009

Those who pollute most must commit themselves to greater reductions!

Architecture Sans Frontières – International (ASF-Int)* considers the forthcoming meeting on climate in Copenhagen to be of critical importance for achieving global environmental goals. A failure in Copenhagen means that the goal of maximum two centigrades increase of temperature until 2050 is likely not to be achieved, which in turn means that our Earth will experience more disasters such as hurricanes, desertification, deforestation, famine and melting glaciers, followed by more flooding as well as water shortage.

A guiding principle for decisions in Copenhagen should be that those who pollute most are those who must cut down their emissions most. The USA accounts for double the emissions per person compared to the average for the EU countries, which in turn emit about ten times more than China and 25 times as much as India (accumulated emissions, World Resource Institute). If the middle-income countries are to reduce their emissions, the over-consuming countries must reduce their emissions down to the fair environmental footprint levels. The North-South climate conflict must also be addressed through substantial aid to developing countries when introducing green technologies and planning for sustainable development of human settlements.

ASF-Int supports the target of maximum 350 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This goal is agreed upon by the UN's top climate scientists and is advocated by the global environmental movement. To reach this target it is necessary for the EU to reduce their emissions by 40 per cent until 2020. Its proposal of 20 per cent reductions until 2020 is far from sufficient. USA has to commit itself to even bigger reductions. Also Russia and Japan have to make far-reaching commitments.

It is possible to make such comprehensive reductions. In recent years knowledge about efficient measures have increased considerably. If there is a political will it is possible to involve all sectors of society in favour of sustainable development.

The built environment has a key role for reaching the climate goals

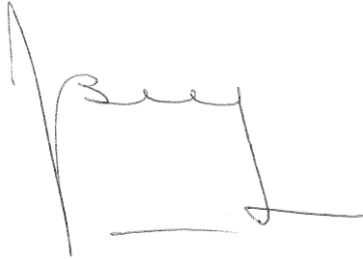
The built environment is a field where much can be done. In the industrialised countries buildings account for 30-40 per cent of total emissions. In order to reach global targets the use of resources in this sector must be reduced by 75 to 90 per cent before 2050. At the same time generation from renewable resources must increase with up to 80 per cent.

Recent research shows that it is possible to build with substantially less use of energy and non-renewable materials. Available knowledge is only scantily utilized in practice, however, because of the big gap between research and practice, because of lack of political will and because the construction sector tends to resist change.

Architects and planners have a key role for achieving the goals of sustainable development. ASF-Int wants these professional groups to be more proactive. We must improve our competence in environmental planning and design, and participate in the general debate about climate change. We must contribute actively to plan cities based on environmental-friendly collective transport, and design neighbourhoods that promote sustainable lifestyles, for instance by following the principle 'saving by sharing'. We must work for cities that are better integrated with local food production and which include green spaces and urban cultivation.

Nowadays there are functioning models for environmental assessment of buildings. These models take the full life-cycle of buildings into account and they serve as useful instruments when attempting to reduce negative environmental effects. Most of these models apply to both new and existing buildings. Environmental assessments ought to be mandatory parts of planning and design. Architects should be trained how to use them and work actively to implement them in practice.

On behalf of the Board of ASF-Int

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jordi Balari', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jordi Balari
Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dick Urban Vestbro', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dick Urban Vestbro
Secretary

* Architecture Sans Frontières – International is an independent non-government organization, which, among other things, works for *'fair and sustainable development initiatives'*, including *'the use of appropriate technologies, materials and labour'* as expressed in our platform, the Hasselt Charter, signed by 17 national and international organizations. See further: <http://www.asfint.org/#>