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## A Climate Emergency Plan

### Contribution to GTI Forum [The Climate Movement: What's Next?](#)

Anders Wijkman

I sincerely hope we can draw the right conclusions from this extremely rich discussion, agree on a way forward, and together help create the meta-movement many have been calling for.

#### **What is the Climate Movement's State of Play?**

The Club of Rome launched its [Climate Emergency Plan](#) last October. The two main objectives were to change the tone of the debate and to make crystal clear the kinds of actions needed to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting warming to "well below 2° degrees." We were utterly frustrated by the lack of urgency in the debate. The term "emergency" was rarely used, and most mitigation policies thus far were incremental in nature—when what is urgently needed is a thorough transformation of all major sectors in society. It is no exaggeration to state that climate mitigation has hardly begun. For example, my own country, Sweden, portrayed by many as a leader on climate change, has reduced territorial emissions by roughly 20% since 1990, but total emissions—including carbon embedded in imports, international aviation, and shipping—have in fact slightly increased.

The debate did change after the launch of the IPCC 1.5° degree [report](#). Before this report, concepts like "existential threat" and "emergency" were rare. Now, youth protests all over the world—inspired by the amazing Greta Thunberg—and the activities organized by Extinction Rebellion have changed things in a profound way. Several parliaments, among them the UK, have declared climate emergencies, but we should not fool ourselves—the scandalous political leadership in countries like the US, Brazil, and Russia clearly show that the battle is far from over. Divisions among European member states will also make it difficult for the EU to take a strong

lead in the necessary transformation, although the strong performance by the Greens in the recent elections to the European Parliament may change things for the better.

While the tone of the debate has changed, people in general—here I include most policymakers—do not fully understand the difference between “incrementalism” (the weak mitigation policies so far pursued) and “transformation” (the deeper mitigation we desperately need). The protests among the youth are commendable, but I hope they begin to develop calls for action by governments and the private sector that are as concrete as possible.

The Climate Emergency Plan summarizes the most important actions needed:

(1) Halt fossil fuel expansion and fossil fuel subsidies no later than 2020. Oil and gas majors continue to invest heavily in new oil and gas exploration with support from major banks. Investments in new oil, gas, and coal were more than three times larger in 2017 than investments in renewables. We need to coordinate campaigns to hold both oil majors and global banks accountable for the damage inflicted.

(2) Ramp up investments in support of renewables in low-income countries. This action point is closely linked to limiting investments in fossil fuel exploration. A “budget approach” that allocates per capita emission rights within a global emissions budget would be a most effective policy tool. In parallel, pressure must be put on governments to meet their obligations to the Green Fund—we are far away from the \$100 billion committed in Paris—and to make greater use of development aid money. Bringing access to modern energy carriers to poor people should be a top priority within development cooperation. Aid money could leverage significant private investments in renewables if organized properly.

(3) Introduce realistic pricing and taxation to reflect the true cost of fossil use and embedded carbon. Carbon taxes and/or carbon fees are badly needed. Returning tax revenues to households—through so-called carbon dividends—is probably the best way for a carbon tax to be implemented in many countries. There are several campaigns ongoing, including a citizens’ petition within the EU, that should be promoted.

(4) Replace GDP growth as the main objective for societal progress. This kind of reform is, of course, badly needed—and linked to the much larger discussion about the urgent need to rethink economics.

(5) Improve refrigerant management urgently. Poorly managed refrigerant systems, including refrigerant leakage, cause substantial GHG emissions that could be quite easily addressed.

(6) Make use of exponential technology development to address GHG emissions. We need to pursue ways to align technology disruption with emissions reduction, especially in sectors where mitigation has been difficult.

(7) Ensure greater material efficiency and circularity. Climate mitigation efforts have prioritized the transformation of energy systems. But the production of basic materials—like steel, cement, aluminum, and plastics—make up almost 20% of global carbon emissions. And demand for such materials is increasing rapidly. Roughly half of the urban infrastructure that will be needed in 2050 has not been built yet, but if it happens with conventional materials and technologies, we can forget about the Paris goals. The materials budget alone would exhaust the available carbon budget for the “well below the 2° degree target.” We need to move from a linear to a circular production model. This requires far more than tinkering with waste management legislation, e.g., to enhance recycling rates. Most of what is collected today has limited value. A circular economy requires products designed for circularity, and business models transformed from selling more stuff to offering high-quality services.

(8) Accelerate regenerative land use policies. Protect and maintain healthy forests. Multiply investments in REDD+ projects (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of forests plus enhancement of forest carbon stocks). Regenerate degraded lands. Support conservation/regenerative agriculture with incentives for farmers to build carbon in the soils.

(9) Give priority to education and health services to promote reproductive health and rights, including family planning programs. Scale up commitments to achieve the ambitions set by Family Planning 2020, such as enabling 120 million more women and girls to use contraceptives by 2020.

(10) Provide a just transition in all affected communities. The much-needed transformation will have winners as well as losers. Governments as well as companies must establish funding as well as retraining programs for displaced workers and communities.

Since we are in an emergency—global emissions would have to be halved till 2030 and then halved again—the kind of actions listed above must be pursued vigorously.

### **“System Change, Not Climate Change”?**

Humanity is facing systemic collapse on many fronts, including threats to the philosophical underpinnings of modern society such as democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and science. Decades of exponential growth in both population and consumption is hitting the limits of the Earth’s biosphere. Biodiversity loss and the rapid decline of major ecosystems constitute an existential threat to mankind comparable with global warming.

The inability of our existing economic and finance systems to provide real quality of life and ensure decent standards of living across the globe has created social breaking points. The dominant neoclassical economic model was designed in an empty world, when the global population was around 2 billion people and the bounty of natural resources seemed endless. Today, we live in a full world of almost 8 billion people. Conventional economic growth is no longer sustainable, despite desperate efforts to keep it afloat with massive financial interventions such as “quantitative easing.” The prevailing mantra that all economic growth is good defies reality. There is an urgent need for new economic thinking and new indicators that value quality as well as quantity in our economic metrics.

Having been active in politics for parts of my life, most recently in European politics, I do see neither the courage nor the curiosity among center-right or center-left political parties to chart a new course, to develop a new narrative for mankind. Green parties, while pushing for bold environmental policies, do not give sufficient priority to social objectives. None of the political parties seem to be clear about the huge changes that exponential technologies, in particular artificial intelligence, will trigger. Such technologies offer opportunities but also serious risks.

Moreover, leading economists do not seem to understand the challenges ahead with regard to global warming and biodiversity loss, the trust deficit developing in society due to the increasing disparities in income and wealth, and job insecurity. The field of economics needs somewhat of a revolution to transform conventional growth policies into a model where Planetary Boundaries are respected and where social objectives are met.

Climate change requires swift action and the collective implementation of a comprehensive emergency action plan, such as the one outlined above. Parallel to that we need to address the wider issue of sustainability, including shifting values, reorganizing science and education away from today's silos, and changing the economic model. While the issues at stake are difficult and complex, I am hopeful that we will be able in the near future to move both agendas forward. Failure is not an option. I believe the recent mobilization of young people all over the world brings hope. Let us find ways to strategize together for building a better future.

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## About the Author



Anders Wijkman is the former co-president of the Club of Rome and is currently the chairman of the Swedish Association of Recycling Industries and a member of the Board of the Swedish Development Authority. In 2015, he was appointed chair of the Swedish Cross-Party Committee on Environmental Objectives. He has served as a Member of the European Parliament, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Policy Director of UNDP, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross, and Director General of the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries. He is a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, the World Future Council and the International Resource Panel and an honorary doctor at Linköping University. His recent books include *Bankrupting Nature: Denying Our Planetary Boundaries*, with co-author Johan Rockström, and *Come On!*, a report from the Club of Rome.

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