

Interview with Connie Hedegaard, Danish Minister for Climate and Energy and host of COP15

“It is important that we finally take action”

From 7 to 18 December the UN Climate Change Conference aims to finalise a new global agreement on climate protection. *DB Mobil* spoke to conference host Connie Hedegaard about necessary measures and the opportunities for positive action on climate change.

Ms Hedegaard, in December you will host the 15th UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. What does the conference aim to achieve?

It was decided in 2007 that an international framework agreement on climate protection would be established in Copenhagen, a truly global agreement. The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Protection ends in 2012 and we know from experience that, after a comprehensive political agreement is reached, it can take years to negotiate the details. The deadline for the new agreement is therefore December 2009.

The financing of effective measures poses a problem. The rich countries have to help the poorer countries here...

Poor countries are already suffering the consequences of climate change. We live in the richer countries and if, for example, our crop yields suddenly change, if there are heavier rains than usual or other similar situations we can usually deal with that. However, developing countries are much more vulnerable – for them it can signify a catastrophe. In order to adapt better to climate change they need technology, they need knowledge and that costs money. The highly developed countries, which are the main cause of the climate issue, should take the largest responsibility.

Climate protection requires 100 billion Euros every year. Where should this money come from?

It is important that there are several sources of funds. In times of economic crisis it is not easy to access funds from state budgets. But that is also only a portion – most of the funds will come from the CO₂ market. We will have an international price for CO₂ emissions and then emission allowances can be sold. Via revenues from this trading or by auctioning emission allowances, a large quantity of money enters the system. Here in Denmark we also suggested including a contribution from ship fuel in the CO₂ emissions systems. Sea transport as a global form of transport has not been included so far. If this were successful it would be a great incentive to be more energy efficient in this field and it would generate funds that could be used to offset some of the sectors future greenhouse gas emissions and through a fund also support adaptation activities in developing countries.

So it is not necessary to constantly attract funding?

The great advantage of such a financing mechanism is that it is not necessary to ask the countries' finance ministers for money each year. The funds are constantly generated, which makes it much more credible for developing countries. They have seen too many times how promises made at financial conferences are subsequently not kept. That is why it was clear that we had to develop a more intelligent funding system.

Who will distribute the money and who is to check what it is spent on?

In addition to the UN the donors will most probably get involved; the World Bank could also play a role here. It is however very important that developing countries do not have the feeling that donor countries are deciding on the implementation of funding. Of course no one will want to provide any funding before it has been confirmed that it really has an effect. In conference jargon they say: It has to be measurable, verifiable and documentable.

What does that mean in practical terms?

If, for example, a country invests in a strategy for increased sustainability, it is clearly doing something in its own interest. We therefore have to know exactly what is being done and what the plans would look like without support. That means we want to know what they can additionally achieve with the paid funds. It is extremely important that both actions and financing can be verified.

What options are available to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions?

The fact is that we already have most of the technology we need to halve global emissions by the middle of the century. One of the most effective approaches is increasing energy efficiency. Much can be achieved even with small measures. And we can expand the field of renewable energy sources much more – wind, water, sun, and biomass. There is huge potential there.

So we do not have to wait for the great breakthrough...

No, we do not have to invent something new – we can start straight away. And we need to greatly improve the transfer of existing expertise and available technology to developing countries. From 2030, 2040 we will then need new technology. I believe that working more closely together internationally in the development of new technology, for example concerning smart grids, i.e. intelligent electricity networks, or in the integration of renewable energy in our electricity systems should form part of the Copenhagen agreements. We have a great deal of knowledge available to us but we have to become much better at sharing and implementing it.

What can an individual do?

As individuals we can do a great deal easily – we can insulate our houses, buy low consumption cars and become more aware of our energy use. We can behave in a more environmentally friendly way by using busses and low emission railways much more often. All these things would send a clear message to manufacturers and service providers that we want products and systems which are much more energy efficient.

Are there still opportunities to influence climate change?

Yes, I believe we do have an opportunity. But I also know that time is against us and that is why it is so important that we finally act now. The longer we delay our actions, the more far-reaching the consequences become and the more expensive everything becomes. However, the sooner we act, the better.

Interview: Kay Dohnke, DB Mobil