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Clear science demands prompt action on climate change say G8 science academies

The scientific evidence on climate change is now clear enough for the leaders of G8 to commit to take prompt action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, according to an unprecedented statement published today (Tuesday 7 June 2005) by the science academies of the G8 nations.

The statement is published by the Royal Society - the UK national academy of science - and the other G8 science academies of France, Russia, Germany, US, Japan, Italy and Canada, along with those of Brazil, China and India. It has been issued ahead of the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland.

The statement calls on the G8 nations to: "Identify cost-effective steps that can be taken now to contribute to substantial and long-term reductions in net global greenhouse gas emissions." And to, "recognize that delayed action will increase the risk of adverse environmental effects and will likely incur a greater cost."

Lord May of Oxford, President of the Royal Society said: "It is clear that world leaders, including the G8, can no longer use uncertainty about aspects of climate change as an excuse for not taking urgent action to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

"Significantly, along with the science academies of the G8 nations, this statement's signatories include Brazil, China and India who are among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the developing world. It is clear that developed countries must lead the way in cutting emissions, but developing countries must also contribute to the global effort to achieve overall cuts in emissions. The scientific evidence forcefully points to a need for a truly international effort. Make no mistake we have to act now. And the longer we procrastinate, the more difficult the task of tackling climate change becomes.

Lord May continued: "The current US policy on climate change is misguided. The Bush administration has consistently refused to accept the advice of the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The NAS concluded in 1992 that, 'Despite the great uncertainties, greenhouse warming is a potential threat sufficient to justify action now', by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. Getting the US onboard is critical because of the sheer amount of greenhouse gas emissions they are responsible for. For example, the Royal Society calculated that the 13 per cent rise in greenhouse gas emissions from the US between 1990 and 2002 is already bigger than the overall cut achieved if all the other parties to the Kyoto Protocol reach their targets. President Bush has an opportunity at Gleneagles to signal that his administration will no longer ignore the scientific evidence and act to cut emissions.

On the UK's efforts on climate change, Lord May said: "We welcome the fact that Tony Blair has made climate change a focus for its presidency of the G8 this year. But the UK government must do much more in terms of its own domestic policy if it is to turn its ambitions to be a world leader on climate change into a reality. While the UK has managed to reduce its emissions of carbon dioxide, most of the cuts have been almost accidental rather than the result of climate change policies. Indeed, its emissions actually increased by over 2 per cent in 2002 - 2003. Clearly the UK must take some tough political decisions about how it manages our ever-growing demand for energy at a time when it's vital that we cut our emissions of greenhouse gases.

"The G8 summit is an unprecedented moment in human history. Our leaders face a stark choice - act now to tackle climate change or let future generations face the price of their inaction. Never before have we faced such a global threat. And if we do not begin effective action now it will be much harder to stop the runaway train as it continues to gather momentum.

The statement also warns that changes in climate are happening now, that further changes are unavoidable and that, "nations must prepare for them." In particular it calls for the G8 countries to work with developing nations to enable them to develop their own innovative solutions to lessen and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

Lord May said: "We, the industrialized nations, have an obligation to help developing nations to develop their own solutions to the threats they face from climate change."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Royal Society is an independent academy promoting the natural and applied sciences. Founded in 1660, the Society has three roles, as the UK academy of science, as a learned Society, and as a funding agency. It responds to individual demand with selection by merit, not by field. The Society's objectives are to:
 - strengthen UK science by providing support to excellent individuals
 - fund excellent research to push back the frontiers of knowledge
 - attract and retain the best scientists
 - ensure the UK engages with the best science around the world
 - support science communication and education; and communicate and encourage dialogue with the public
 - provide the best independent advice nationally and internationally
 - promote scholarship and encourage research into the history of science

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