

Heiligendamm can be a success, if Merkel ignores Bush

By Gerd Leipold, Greenpeace International Executive Director

National and international pressure ahead of the G8 summit, to maintain a hard line on the science of global warming, and what is needed to stop it, has forced the Bush Administration to blink. Their hasty announcement of “new climate initiative” days before the G8 shows that for the first time Bush has realized there is nowhere to hide on this issue anymore. The announcement is an attempt to create the impression of action and has been forced on them after it became public that they had voiced their “fundamental opposition” to a G8 text calling for global emissions to be halved by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels). The US administration called this the “German proposal”. But there is nothing German about those figures; it is simply the universal physics of the problem.

The Bush administration’s “new climate initiative”, in contrast ignores the stark scientific facts and the hard earned experience of the last 15 years: Voluntary measures do not work. The physics of the task we face is clear: global emissions must peak in the next 10 to 15 years and be cut drastically thereafter. For the politics, the G8 are responsible for over 80% of the climate change we witness today and still emit over 40% of all global emissions now. They are therefore morally bound to act first and act firmly. In order to achieve a global emission cut of 50%, the G8 must cut their emissions by at least 80-90 percent to 2050 (compared to 1990 levels). Anything less will be neither adequate nor fair and certainly not safe. Bush, instead, wants to start a new talk shop to possibly agree voluntary measures for major emitters. This is yet another in a long series of diversionary tactics. In 2001 when rejecting the Kyoto Protocol he said he would come up with a plan. He did not. In Montreal in 2005 his Administration gutted attempts to start full negotiations on the next steps internationally saying the time was not right and instead insisted on only a Dialogue. The Dialogue has gone nowhere and will go nowhere. If Bush is serious about this problem he should simply agree to the targets proposed for the G8 meeting – they are the right ones.

America’s federal government will likely return to the international negotiating table once Bush leaves the White House. To ensure that there is a worthwhile global agreement for the United States to join then, Merkel must now move forward without Bush.

By pursuing her present strategy to its logical conclusion, Merkel can still take many steps forward for the climate at Heiligendamm. If all seven G8 countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol declared their determination to cut their emissions by 30 per cent by 2020 and 80-90 per cent by 2050 this would be a major success. Kyoto-member countries can and must state clearly at Heiligendamm, that they will agree the required binding cuts under the Protocol

by 2009 at the latest. Bush, not having signed Kyoto and leaving office in 2008, should have no say on the matter anyway. At Gleneagles in 2005, G8 governments did document the isolation of the US by stating: "Those of us who have ratified the Kyoto Protocol welcome its entry into force and will work to make it a success". Sentences such as "Those of us who have ratified the Kyoto Protocol ..." should be numerous in the Heiligendamm outcome document. If they are, that is likely to signal success.

Merkel must show decisive leadership in Heiligendamm. She must commit Germany to unilateral emission cuts and must get Kyoto member states to show their determination to continue working through the United Nations, and agree the necessary cuts under the Kyoto Protocol by 2009 at the latest. She could, for example, commit Germany to cut its emissions by 40% by 2020 – no matter what other countries do. That would be leadership matching Merkel's own rhetoric. To be credible, it would require Merkel to oppose the massive new coal power plant building program advocated by Germany's energy giants.

Those are the yardsticks of success. What out-of-touch Bush says is just a diversion designed to delay true progress.