

**Global warming**

**A** With the crisis we're experiencing today, is there any room on our government's agenda for the debate on climate change? Our guest today is Mark Stuart, who has been collaborating on a study of the United Nations efforts on climate change. Good morning Mark, could you briefly present these efforts?

**B** The United Nations has sponsored global talks on climate change over the past twenty years. Its purpose is to find means of reducing global warming and adapting to it. The topics dealt with include the urgent need to opt for cleaner energies. They also concern the role of richer nations in helping poorer ones directly affected by global warming - with rising water levels, drought and so on.

**A** So the debate on climate change is still on the agenda?

**B** Unfortunately, it's evident that the financial and economic crisis has now become the priority in most countries today. Environmental issues have been pushed into the background.

**A** Could we say that poorer nations are feeling the effects of global warming more than the industrialized nations?

**B** Poorer nations are indeed already suffering from the consequences of global warming. This can be seen in the severe flooding in Thailand, the droughts in southern Saharan Africa, and violent cyclones elsewhere. These phenomena are making it more difficult for certain populations to have access to food and drinkable water.

**A** Would it be correct to say that the debate is moving today? That it's less about how to reduce our impact on the climate and more focussed on how to adapt to climate change?

**B** When the Kyoto protocol was launched in 1997, the priority was the reduction of emissions by industrial nations, but developing superpowers such as India or China were not included. Some major countries, including Canada, Japan and Russia, said they would refuse to extend this protocol unless there were changes in what was required of developed and developing countries. They demanded some balance be introduced.

**A** Since then, there has been a conference in Cancun.

**B** The global talks that took place in Cancun led to what's now called the Cancun Agreement, aimed at setting up a fund to help poorer nations adapt to the dramatic effects of global warming. Limiting our influence on global warming should, however, remain a priority not only nationally but also for each individual person.

**A** Well that brings us to another question. What's the situation here in the UK and what are the environmental issues?

**B** The present situation in the UK is not a simple one. I think we can say that there are two different approaches. On the one hand there's an attempt to develop cleaner energies, and on the other, there's the will to please public opinion with a view to being re-elected.

**A** Has there been a real effort to develop cleaner energy sources?

**B** Despite all the financial turmoil, the private sector in the UK created more than nine thousand jobs and invested one point seven billion pounds in renewable energies in the first half of 2011. And in November 2011, David Cameron announced that there would be millions of pounds of new public funding for offshore wind energy to attract international investors.

**A** But are these the kind of measures that will attract voters?

**B** Not necessarily, which is how we can explain the statements of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He declared that the government would not be shutting down our steel mills, aluminium smelters and paper manufacturer in order to save the planet.

**A** But are such apparently contradictory statements compatible?

**B** No, and they're counterproductive. The fact that the Chancellor keeps playing politics with the environment risks putting off potential investors in renewable energies.

**A** But the ambiguity in the government's position can be understood, perhaps, in view of the enormous economic problems that we're experiencing. Should environmental issues be abandoned and left aside as long as the economic horizon is so uncertain?

**B** There is disagreement about today's priorities, but I'm convinced that climate change should remain high up on the agenda of any government. The richest countries are the main perpetrators of global warming and they have the means to anticipate the effects of climate change. It's the duty of these nations to mobilize funds to prevent the long-lasting humanitarian crises which climate change will cause in developing countries.

**Outline**

The global talks on climate change that the United Nations has been sponsoring for twenty years cover such topics as the urgent need to opt for cleaner energies, and the help richer nations should give poorer ones suffering from the consequences of global warming. However, as the financial and economic crisis has become the priority, environmental issues have been pushed into the background. The ambiguity of the UK government's position illustrates this: the prime minister announced millions of pounds of new public funding for offshore wind energy, while the Chancellor of the Exchequer declared that steel mills, aluminium smelters and paper manufacturer would not be shut down to save the planet.

**Questions**

1 Is it illogical to try to deal with the economic crisis and at the same time try to tackle climate change?

2 Can individual efforts have an impact if they are not coordinated Worldwide?

3 Should environmental issues be abandoned and left aside as long as the economic horizon is so uncertain?

4 Is it unrealistic to expect that an international agreement will be reached on measures to halt climate change?