

Oxfam Australia Media Release

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Labor's 'cop out' climate change policy spells another disaster for world's poor

Ms Gillard is yet to pass two critical tests:

- Seriously reducing Australia's emissions;
- Providing sufficient support to help people in developing countries at the frontline of the climate change crisis.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard's announcements on climate change this morning further cement Australia's position as an international laggard on climate change action and condemn the world's poorest to continuing climate crises.

Oxfam Australia Executive Director Andrew Hewett said he feared the Prime Minister's decision to create a 'citizen's assembly' and Climate Change Commission would delay meaningful and urgent action even further.

"Oxfam acknowledges the Prime Minister's statement that the price of inaction is too high a price for our country to pay, and one that our country will be unable to afford," Mr Hewett said. "But it's disappointing her rhetoric is not matched by her plan of action.

"Ms Gillard said her government must show leadership, but what she has presented is a cop-out. By establishing a citizen's assembly to re-visit the climate change debate, the Government is avoiding strong action, not leading.

"There is also a deafening silence on the responsibility of Australia – as one of the world's highest per capita polluters – to help people on the frontline of climate change, who have the least resources to cope."

Mr Hewett said the Government's investments in renewable technology were welcome, but nowhere near enough to reduce Australia's emissions consistent with a global pathway that would keep global temperature as far below a 2 degrees Celsius rise as possible, which the science said was necessary to avoid dangerous climate change.

Australia needs to reduce its emissions by at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020; the current commitment is only a 5 per cent reduction below 2000 levels by 2020.

"The Prime Minister says the science tells us that we need to limit the growth of carbon pollution in our atmosphere to 450 parts per million (carbon dioxide in the atmosphere) if we are going to have a chance of limiting global temperature growth to two degrees or less," Mr Hewett said.

"In fact, this is way above what we know is needed to reduce dangerous climate change. Consistent with a 3 degree temperature rise, this would mean severe decline in agricultural yields, with up to 600 million more people at risk of hunger, over half of them in Africa and Western Asia."

He said the Government also needed to do its fair share by increasing finance pledged to help developing countries adapt to the devastating impacts of climate change and develop along low carbon pathways.

"Climate change is the central poverty issue of our time. As a leading international agency working with poor people around the world, Oxfam is seeing the world's most vulnerable facing greater droughts, floods, hunger and disease, despite being least responsible for causing climate change."

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