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Speaking of global warming: Q&A with Dr. Svein Tveitdal

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UNEARTH News recently interviewed the former Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Dr. Svein Tveitdal. Tveitdal currently serves as Environmental Ambassador to the City of Arendal, Norway and is the Director of [Klima2020](#).

Interview by Yvonne Bokhour.

We began our interview with Dr. Tveitdal by asking him to name the most urgent question facing environmental policymakers at 2012's Rio+20. He believes that in order to keep the increase in global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius in comparison with pre-industrial levels, developed countries must reduce emissions by 25-40 percent before 2020 in comparison with 1990 levels. [Editor's note: 2009's international [Copenhagen Accord](#) recognized "the scientific view that an increase in global temperature below 2 degrees is required to stave off the worst effects of climate change."] The doctor says, "If they don't agree on this there is no other way to reach the two degree target. Due to the current business-as-usual development and the time squeeze the target should be set close to 40 percent."

UNEARTH News: Can you please explain the crux of the global warming controversy for our readers? What do we know for sure? Where is there consensus?

Tveitdal: The scientific consensus on what is happening with the climate and what is needed to avoid a climate catastrophe is overwhelming (97-98%). The problem is that the gap between what science is recommending and what policy makers are implementing is still widening.

UNEARTH News: What needs to be verified? Where is there disagreement?

Tveitdal: People are often driven by values and not facts in their view of global warming. They try to find arguments that support their position. This is efficiently used by lobbyists who want to influence opinion, through giving the impression that there is a real scientific debate and that global warming is not a reality. This lobbying is to a large extent supported by industries with a short-term interest in no limitations in fissile energy production. The result is that almost half of the population in the rich countries do not believe in human made climate change. Policy makers are also influenced by the same lobbying. The result is weak and insufficient policy making.

UNEARTH News: What progress has been made in international climate change policy?

Tveitdal: Much too little. The [Kyoto agreement](#) was a good start, but never ratified by the US. The Copenhagen meeting was a climate catastrophe. Some hope from Durban that China, India as well as the US are willing to agree on limiting emissions from 2020. Unfortunately this will make it



Dr. Svein Tveitdal

practically too late (too expensive) to limit global warming to two degree C.

UNEARTH News: What outcomes can we expect from Rio? Will agreements emerge? Will we see policy changes or enhancements?

Tveitdal: Nothing significant. Nothing concrete on policy. When I was a UN director I attended most of these meetings. I learned to know them as the "arena of the powerless." Most of those attending would like to make progress but were not in a position to make it happen. The fact that 50,000 people are gathering to discuss might have a long-term positive impact on opinion/policy.

UNEARTH News: What are the implications if policymakers fail to act?

Tveitdal: For the first time in modern history we are handing over the world to the next generation in worse condition than before. Each new year without climate action is increasing the likelihood for a severe climate crises and the price for avoiding it increase rapidly. The period from now to 2020 is absolutely crucial.



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