

Stephen Harper's weak stand on environment tarnishes Canada's international reputation

By Maria Minna, MP

Canada's reputation took quite a beating from the international community at the 2009 UN Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP15) in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December - and rightly so.

Canada was once a respected world leader in the fight against climate change. The previous Liberal government's 2005 Budget was heralded as the "greenest in Canadian history" by the Sierra Club.

The former Liberal government also ratified and implemented the Kyoto Protocol and brought in Project Green in 2005 which allocated more than \$10 billion to clean our air, land and water, preserve our natural environment and address climate change.

Because Stephen Harper has no commitment to dealing effectively with climate change, one of the first things he did on taking office in 2006 was to cancel Project Green. The Pembina Institute has declared that Project Green was more than six times more effective than anything the Conservative government has offered since that time.

I can remember speaking at a pro-Kyoto rally at Dundas Square in the bitter cold of November 2007 while Harper's henchmen were at an international conference in sunny Bali sabotaging the Kyoto Protocol and, in the process, turning Canada's environmental stance into an international joke.

What a low point that was in comparison to the high we felt in November 2005 when Canada hosted the world with the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP11) in Montreal. At this conference, the former Liberal government launched talks with all countries – including the United States, India and China – on making even deeper cuts to the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. It was a great moment for Canada, and the world.



Like a great many Canadians, I felt a surge of national pride when Liberal Environment Minister Stéphane Dion banged down the gavel at the end of a gruelling all-night session of bargaining and announced another step forward in the global effort to combat climate change.

Contrast that to the following year when the Harper Conservatives were in power and did everything that they could to deny climate change at the international conference and stop Kyoto in its tracks.

As a wealthy, developed country Canada has a responsibility to lead the world in cutting greenhouse gas emissions. And there is a lot more at stake than our international reputation. We have to consider the effect of global warming on our survival as a people. If we allow it to continue unchecked, we will simply not be able to live on this polluted planet.

Stephen Harper's "intensity-based" targets for controlling greenhouse gas emissions have been slammed by the international community as ineffective and will allow emissions to continue to rise. Once a world leader, Canada is now being named the "dirty old man" of the international community.

At the Copenhagen conference in December, the Conservative government pushed for weaker targets and was unwilling to take a leadership role. At each of the COP conferences since the Conservative government took office, Canada has been accused of trying to sabotage the talks. This is not the reputation we want in the international community. It is time for Canada to take a leadership role once again.

A new Liberal government will restore Canada's climate change leadership with a firm commitment to keep global warming within two degrees Celsius and create the green jobs of tomorrow through an unprecedented investment in clean energy, science and technology, and energy efficiency.

A Liberal government will fight for a firm international agreement to reduce emissions and contain global warming to within two degrees Celsius. We will set 1990 – not 2006 – as our base year and explore differentiated targets for developing countries.

We will also create a binding and verifiable cap-and-trade system – with hard caps leading to absolute reductions – that is fair to all regions and industries, and compatible with other systems for international carbon trading. Furthermore, a Liberal government will set an ambitious target of quadrupling our production of renewable energy by Canada's 150th birthday in 2017 and promote energy efficiency through new transit systems, high-speed rail, and "smart" electrical grids.

Our Liberal plan also includes the toughest vehicle emissions standards in North America as well as strategies to protect our air, water, forests, and Arctic.

It is time for Canada to become a respected world leader once again. This Conservative government is sullyng our good name and has left us with little or no Influence in the international community.

Stephen Harper keeps saying that we need to follow what the United States eventually decides to do. We are not followers. We have always been a nation of leaders. We cannot afford to wait for leadership from south of the border. Canadians need and deserve a national government that will act – NOW – in the best interest of today's children and future generations.