

The United States Will Abide by its Commitments

Interview on Climate Change

Ambassador Howard Gutman in La Libre of December 1, 2010

The image shows a newspaper clipping from 'La Libre' with the headline "Les Etats-Unis respecteront leurs engagements". The main text discusses the US commitment to climate change. A photo of Ambassador Howard Gutman is included, with a caption: "Howard B. Gutman, 'Il n'y aura pas de bénéfices pour notre planète si les Etats-Unis et l'Europe s'assoient à deux autour d'une table non fumante, pendant qu'autour d'eux on fume dans le reste du restaurant.'" Below the photo is a quote: "Il n'y aura pas de bénéfices pour notre planète si les Etats-Unis et l'Europe s'assoient à deux autour d'une table non fumante, pendant qu'autour d'eux on fume dans le reste du restaurant." To the right of the photo is another quote: "Le menu préféré des enfants au meilleur prix du marché".

A subheading reads that “the U.S. Ambassador defends his country’s positions on climate and points out that no agreement can be done without the emerging countries.

A prominent insert under the picture is a quote by the Ambassador saying that ‘there won’t be any benefit for our planet if the United States and Europe both sit at a non-smoking table in a restaurant while all the others in the restaurant smoke.’

A translation of the interview follows.

Q: From an American viewpoint, which progress can one realistically hope to see in Cancun?

‘I think that it is a question that is still very open, but it is important that we deal with it in the right way. In my mind, a major agreement must include the United States and Europe on the same page, but also developing countries in order to

obtain serious agreements on carbon gas emission reductions which must take place in a transparent manner. It is on this that a y progress on climate depends and we are working hard on it.’

Q: What do you expect from China?

‘Like in Copenhagen last year or in Cancun today or in South Africa next year, the United States is willing to sign a transparent formal legally binding climate agreement. Europe, as far as I know, is also asking for such an agreement. But on their side, the so-called developing nations have said before Copenhagen that they would not sign any legally binding agreement but that they first wanted to discuss financing and transfer of technologies, without saying a word about what they would do to cut their emissions. We are worried – and I know it is a strong word – and Europe should also be worried and say that it is time to have serious discussions on what we can do to reduce carbon gas emissions in a transparent manner.

‘Presently, Europe and the United States represent 45 percent of the world emissions. By 2030, we will represent 35 percent, and below 10 percent by 2050. This is why the problem that we face cannot be solved by the United States and Europe only. Our sole common hope is to bring other nations that will contribute between 65 and 90 percent of emissions to seriously commit themselves to cut emissions. The fundamental problem is you put China – which is the biggest emitter and whose emissions will be 60 percent higher than the United States in 2030 – on an equal footing with Chad, you will never have a climate agreement. Not make any sense to go that way. This is why we must work together to avoid this. We must work together to tell China and Brazil that they need to start talking about reductions and transparency, and we will; discuss about financing, transfer of technologies, forests, adaptation, and other issues.’

Q: Does it mean that if China is willing to sign this type of agreement, the United States is willing to follow?

‘Not to follow but to lead! Remember that after China said it did not want a legally binding agreement, we tried in Copenhagen to have an approach that would be at least morally binding, i.e. something that would commit us and would be transparent. And the one who fought until the very last day to obtain an agreement with China was my President. He was criticized because Europe was not present whereas he was in constant telephone contact with the Europeans who told him ‘all

what you can obtain, take it.’ In Copenhagen, developing countries committed themselves but they are now backtracking. They have now stated that this commitment concerned developed countries and that, for those that are called developing – which include Chad and China – it was not a morally binding agreement but a series of voluntary options which they could consider. And now they want that we discuss transfer of technologies and financing in Cancun. What a waste whereas our planet remains on the verge. Europe is right to be skeptical because we are the country that rejected Kyoto. But this is an old story. One should not remain focused on the past. Which is the country that now fights the most for transparency? It is us.’

Q: After the recent mid-term election, the chances of seeing an Energy-Climate law voted in Congress seem even more remote. Is it buried for good? What can the United States put on the table to convince other countries?

‘Your question is based on misunderstandings. We agreed to a reduction of 17 percent by 2020 compared with our 2005 levels and to reach similar goals as the Europeans by 2050. Neither of these two objectives requires legislation. All this can be accomplished via regulation. When we negotiated in Copenhagen, the hypothesis was that there would be no legislation and we wanted to commit ourselves to what we could achieve via regulation. And we are on the right track, we can meet each of our obligations. The midterm elections do not change anything to this. We are the country that has invested the most in green energy, more than anyone else on the planet. We will reach the objectives we have committed ourselves to and our capacity to do so is documented, explained, verifiable, and transparent. Just like Europe has a documented and transparent proposal. We can be confident, it is the same thing.’

Q: Yet, a law is an important symbol....

‘A symbol? No, no. First, we should not look at symbols but at results. If you look at the measures we have taken, we have symbols but also results.’

Q: Whereas many American scientists are among the best climate change experts, skepticism about the reality of climate change remains deeply-rooted in the United States. How can this paradox be explained?

‘Again, I think that your question is based on inaccurate facts. There are scientists who believe (in climate change) and who doubt everywhere. I would bet with you

that their repartition in the world is more or less equitable. I can show you many skeptics in Europe. It is just media that sometimes focus on skeptics. What is the percentage of climate scientists who are skeptical? Who can be the most prominent voice on global warming? Al Gore. If you focus on AL Gore, our country has the leadership on this issue.'

Q: Doesn't the lack of American leadership in climate negotiations reflect a more general loss of influence at the world level?

'Alone, we cannot control climate change. That is why the right way for the United States and Europe to act is to consider that the biggest world emitter must be part and that we must work together. But if you ask me whether the United States can dictate to China how to reach that objective, I will answer you that we cannot.'

Q: Do you have specific information on the plan that China is about to present?

'I believe that they are dynamic in areas where there is an economic return. They have invested a lot. We must use this dynamism which might be beneficial on the economic field and be optimistic that we can control climate through innovation. This might be beneficial on the economic and environmental field.'

Q: Many developing countries refer to the concept of climate justice. As a former lawyer, what is your opinion on this?

'Clearly, a climate agreement must be fair. And if Chad, for instance, cannot make emission reductions, we will help it in the same way we contribute development aid. But we cannot do the same for China or Brazil. Countries that have a strong economy cannot say that it is a matter of social justice on the pretext that they would be weak countries. I have no problem with the concept of climate justice, but I have a problem with its use as an excuse not to act.'

Q: Generally speaking, the U.S. relies a lot on technological progress to reduce its emissions but it does not always seem willing to call into question its way of life. Does the 'American way of life' remain non-negotiable?

'Today, it is Barack Obama who negotiates. We have changed our norms, reoriented our investments on climate and work harder on this issue than anywhere else in the world.'

In a prominent sidebar under the heading “On Various Fronts,” *La Libre* writes: “Howard Gutman constantly repeated that, according to him, the United States has clearly begun its green revolution, implementing a series of measures against climate change but also more broadly in order to protect the environment.

“He for instance underlined the \$80 billion invested in renewable energies, tougher norms for electrical appliances and for cars and truck emission and also the improvement of buildings’ energy efficiency. The federal Government has shown the way by reducing its emissions by 28 percent by 2020. An inventory of the most polluting sources in the country will be made for the first time ever, which will make it possible to verify in a transparent manner the efforts that have been made. The emphasis is also being put on integrating climate science in school programs.

“At the same time, various measures were also taken in favor of oceans, of protecting and restoring ecosystems – Everglades, Gulf of Mexico – and on reducing the impact of open sky coal mines in the Appalachians region.

“Howard Gutman pointed out that President Obama’s objective is to build an economy based on clean energies, which would make it possible to both address global warming, reduce the country’s energy dependency, create millions of new jobs, and lay the foundation for long term economic security.”