

Securing the Well-Being of Future Generations

By **BERTIE AHERN**

PRESENTLY, the human race is standing at a critical juncture in history, as we risk creating a world that is no longer compatible with human civilization. Evidence is mounting that we need to significantly scale down carbon emissions before climate change reaches the point of no return. If we carry on with our current trajectory, we are projected to reach a three- to four-degree Celsius rise by 2100, and a three- to 10-degree Celsius rise by 2200. To put it plainly, our planet is sick, and we all need to work together to ensure the well-being of future generations.

The InterAction Council, an organization of former heads of state and government that promotes global security as part of its mandate, recently launched the “Manifesto to Secure a Healthy Planet for All – A Call for Emergency Action.” This initiative builds upon collaborative action to advance the Dublin Charter for One Health, a product of the InterAction Council’s plenary session in 2017, with an overall aim to secure a healthy planet.

The manifesto has been developed in response to increasing evidence and a general understanding of the severity of our global climate and environmental crisis. Now more than ever, we need courageous leadership who will make crucial decisions and take action to secure a healthy planet for all, including the very existence of human civilization.

Much can be learned and applied from the philosophy and perspectives of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) with regards to re-framing how the health of humans is intimately connected to the health of our planet, and ultimately, how to create a healthy planet as a basis for healthy humans. The manifesto summarizes key international evidence and also has been inspired by the parallels of human and planetary health as pre-

sented in high-level presentations from TCM practitioners at our plenary sessions.

From a TCM perspective, in many respects human systems can be seen as a microcosm of the Earth’s living biosphere. Although there are significant differences in the scale and functions of some of these systems, in terms of appreciating the seriousness of the Earth’s failing ecosystem, it is helpful to consider the analogies of the planet’s health with that of human systems. If we were to consider our planet as a patient, we would be seriously concerned about its health and would quickly diagnose the “Patient Planet” as critically ill. A rapid assessment of the planet’s health would reveal that it has an escalating fever, difficulty in breathing, a faltering circulation with metabolic acidosis and a toxic status, failing liver and kidney functions, pale and blotchy skin indicating signs of shock, and a rapidly declining mental state.

From the perspective of the planet’s doctor, we would immediately send the “Patient Planet” straight to critical care for emergency resuscitation and stabilization. This should involve a rapid reduction of carbon emissions over the next decade, including actively sequestering carbon to lower key drivers of increasing temperatures. Stabilization of ocean temperatures and acidity may also be required.

The UN recently declared that we have to reduce global carbon emissions by 45 percent by 2030 over the level of 2010, in order to keep within the limits of global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius, with a target of zero emissions by 2050. This will require urgent and large-scale action with an estimated annual investment of 2.5 percent of global GDP to rapidly reduce carbon emissions, including carbon capture.

We can draw upon the successes of China’s ability to improve human health and education, advance development outcomes, and rapidly transform the economic well-being of nearly 20 percent of the world’s



A tramcar runs along the extended Tram Line 1 in Suzhou, a city in China's eastern province of Jiangsu on August 18, 2018. Suzhou high-tech zone has become a national bellwether in tramcar operation.

population. Building upon China's ambitious goals in its climate change policies and work plans, we can set an example to the world of how to coordinate responses and harness the necessary capacity to address the climate crisis at scale and speed. Ultimately, China is and will be pivotal to our global response in being able to address the climate crisis and successfully secure a healthy planet for all.

In order to be successful, climate and environmental emergency response committees will be required to: stabilize risks from tipping points, rapidly reduce carbon emissions, protect ourselves and our planet from the increasing impacts of the climate and environmental crisis, and strengthen recovery processes and community resilience. We can all learn from the successes of China in advancing the development of scaling up green and smart cities within the framework of building ecological civilizations.

In addition to this, we can also build upon past experiences of successfully managing emergency situations and draw upon existing tools like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Collaborative efforts are required to scale up emergency action that include strengthening coherence and coordination to harness resources and capacity across the global community, while mainstreaming responses to the climate and environmental crisis through established delivery mechanisms.

We need to express our commitment and demon-

strate our responsibility by becoming “guardians to secure a healthy planet for all” – a concept that reflects the Chinese concepts of the inter-relationship between the health of humans and their environment.

China can play a key global leadership role as a guardian for the planet's health, for example, by increasing the efficiency of innovative responses to carbon capture, creating low-cost renewable energy, and mainstreaming recovery processes. Moreover, China's ability to coordinate and rapidly transform societies can be applied to building community resilience and creating sustainable flourishing civilizations across China, throughout the Belt and Road, and in the many other countries that China is investing in.

Together, by rapidly responding to our climate emergency, we can take the decisive actions that are essential at this critical time. I am especially encouraged by the boldness and energy of our younger generations, as well as the commitment expressed by the many supportive and professional organizations endorsing the manifesto. In particular, I welcome the important role that China has in matching ambition with the size of this existential challenge, in order to transform and create a flourishing future in this world that we all share together. ■

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