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Why we wouldn't have a climate problem, if we sent our children to the climate change conference

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Bonn, 26 November 2014. For many of us, the wait for Christmas begins on the first Sunday of advent – from Monday the international climate protection community will be looking full of hope to Lima where 195 countries will be meeting for the 20th time for the UN Climate Change Summit where they might give themselves the most beautiful gift of all. This year the delegations will again be attempting to negotiate a fair climate pact as a successor agreement for the Kyoto Protocol which already expired in 2012 and has only been half-heartedly extended until 2020. And it can only be assumed that they will probably fail again - just as they have in the last five years. We would be better off sending our children to sort it out.

The efforts to negotiate a fair agreement are doomed to fail from the outset. There can be no fair climate pact. Nevertheless, the crux of the matter will ultimately be the question of fairness of any such agreement. How will the burdens be shared? Do the industrialised countries that for decades have not really cared much for climate protection and that have experienced rapid growth in the 20th Century, not have some kind of historic responsibility? Is it therefore not only fair that today's emerging countries can demand that they enjoy the same behaviour and type of economic activity? But where does that then leave the developing countries? What happens to the small island states, their very existence threatened by climate change? It will all boil down again to the delegations trying to combat climate change with a perfectly thought-out synchronised choreography. Collective action is super. But we are threatening to end up dancing around on the spot because of all the synchronisation and of being swept away by the tide of climate change – which is what the World Bank warned us about only last week.

Yet the solution would be so simple. If all the countries involved were to simply send delegations of children to Peru this year, all it would take would be for someone to shout out; “who can save the most CO₂ the quickest?” and meeting the 2 degree target would be one of the easiest exercises known to mankind. Amongst kids of kindergarten age, the motivation of “who will be first?” works perfectly. Always! No matter how disagreeable the task in hand might be. A contest is also the only meaningful manner of overcoming this problem politically. The reason: There is not any just negotiable solution in

the battle against climate change because injustice is its inherent quality. The changing climate conditions know no considerations of justice. All too often it is the poorest and the weakest that are hit hardest by its consequences.

This is particularly true for the poor population in many developing countries. But here in Germany too, it is often the most vulnerable members of society that are affected most by the increasingly frequent storms. Backflow protection for sewage pipes or the complete reconstruction of basements with impermeable materials are not cheap; also, not all households are able to afford insurance against torrential rain. The most volatile thing about climate change is that each and every hesitation makes the situation even more unjust – not only for those most affected today but for all future generations. We will all have to listen to our children and grandchildren when they ask why we have wasted so much time with completely nonsensical discussions. Instead of waiting for joint action, each country should take a good look at itself first and ask itself what is the maximum effort it can afford in the fight against climate change. Once this has been defined, the delegations should go one ambitious step further – completely regardless of what the others will agree to. Furthermore it would be fair and just, if we – the wealthy industrialised countries – completely independent of this – were to approach the developing and emerging countries and out of respect (for their efforts) were to offer them our support in helping them to develop into green societies. This would not even be altruistic, because our Interior Ministers are currently discussing on an almost daily basis how to fairly control floods of refugees. For the millions of potential climate refugees, the most desirable outcome would ultimately be that they were able to live with dignity in their own homes.

More than 2,000 years ago, a child was born for Christians that they refer to as the Saviour of the world. I would like to hope that the adults of today will again be able to look upon the children full of awe, learn from them and turn the upcoming climate change negotiations into a contest. Wouldn't it be great if we were quickest to cut down the most on CO₂? I would like to hope that participating countries will set off for the climate protection conference with the drive to win in the very same way my daughter enthusiastically dashes off when I ask who can clear up the most building bricks.