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News release

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Downer stumbles on climate facts

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has echoed the Bush Administration view that the Kyoto Protocol is 'unfair' because it does not include commitments from developing countries, claiming that emissions from developing countries will soon exceed those of developed countries.

Mr Downer needs to be reminded that Australians have the highest per capita emissions in the world. While each Australian is responsible for 27 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, each Indian is responsible for less than one tonne and each Chinese for less than 3 tonnes.

Moreover, while Australia's emissions continue to rise in the absence of any effective policies, China's emissions are falling.

"If Mr Downer listened to CSIRO climate scientists rather than fossil industry lobbyists he would understand that climate change is caused by the total increased concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere", said Australia Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

"Rich countries are responsible for around 80% of increased concentrations of greenhouse gases and it will be 50 years before developing countries catch up."

"There is something obscene about a well-heeled minister in a rich country suggesting that the poor of the world are getting off scot-free, especially when impoverished people will suffer most from the effects of climate change caused by rich countries burning fossil fuels."

"Just which school of morals was Mr Downer raised in?"

Dr Hamilton said that it is universally accepted in the international community that developing countries will need to begin cutting their emissions, but only after rich countries have led the way. This is based on common principles of justice since rich countries have caused the problem, have much higher per capita emissions and are in a better financial position to do so.

These beliefs are set out in both the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1995 Berlin Mandate, both of which the Australian Government has formally endorsed. They are also set out in the Kyoto Protocol which Environment Minister Robert Hill signed with much fanfare in March 1998.

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