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Sceptical green urges smart billions to fight warming

By AFP

Bjoern Lomborg, the bad boy of the climate debate who has rejected for years "alarmist" prophecies from environmentalists, stresses in a new book the need to invest billions to fight global warming.

In "Smart Solutions to Climate Change," Lomborg lashes out at current policies to curb greenhouse gas emissions but also highlights the need to spend 100 billion dollars a year on intelligent research and green technologies.

By spending billions in a smart way, the world could essentially resolve the climate change problem by the end of this century, insists Lomborg, who edited the new book containing proposals from 28 economists - including three Nobel laureates - gathered ahead of last year's climate summit in Copenhagen.

This may seem like an about-turn by the self-proclaimed sceptical environmentalist who had earlier said reducing greenhouse gas emissions should not be a priority as long as there are problems like poverty and famine.

But the 45-year-old Dane, with his mop of blond hair and boyish grin, insists he has not shifted positions.

"I am saying what I have always said: that the climate is a real and important, man-made problem, but that we are handling it badly," he told AFP.

Lomborg insists he has never been opposed to fighting climate change, but only to narrowly focused, inefficient projects aimed at lowering carbon dioxide emissions.

So why the sudden increased emphasis on the need for investment?

"Now that the international community has decided to invest massive amounts of money in the fight against climate change - much more than in the past. I have to take a position in this new situation," he says.

"The international community has decided to spend huge amounts to fight global warming, but with very little hope of actually cooling down the planet," he charges, pointing out that "this is why I suggest using the money in a smarter way to protect the environment."

The author of the 2001 book "The Sceptical Environmentalist," who has figured on Time Magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people, maintains he is still a sceptic "towards current solutions aimed at reducing CO2 emissions, and sceptical of those who exaggerate the threat and create a wind of panic."

The preferred "green" policies of today's world leaders, he laments, are like "slashing a sword in the water."

The European Union for instance "dedicates 250 billion dollars (209 billion euros) each year" towards cutting its member states' CO2 output by 20 percent over the next decade.

The result however, Lombor estimates, will only be "a temperature reduction of 0.05 degrees (Celsius) by the end of the century."

Another example of misused funds, according to the Dane, can be found in Germany, which "has invested enormous amounts in solar energy - some 75 billion dollars - which is more than any other country."

This, he says, "will slow global warming by a mere seven hours by the end of the 20th century."

"It would be more prudent to spend these funds on development of more powerful solar panels that are less expensive to use than fossil fuels," he insists.

Research and development are pet themes for Lomborg, who is also set to present a new documentary at the Toronto Film Festival this month: "Cool It."

The film, he says, is a kind of sequel to Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth," involving a lot of travel around the globe to meet people working on new, innovative green energy projects.

Instead of just focusing on reducing emissions, the world should "invest in research and development of green technologies aimed at making them less expensive and accessible to all, and thereby replace (polluting) fossil fuels," he says.

The answer to the planet's woes, Lomborg insists, is to find creative and efficient solutions, like a proposal supported by most of the economists in his new book for a carbon tax that "corresponds to the damages (the gas) causes to the climate: five euros per tonne of CO2."

Doing so, he claims, "would be enough to raise 250 billion dollars around the world to finance research and development of new technologies, and to solve the world's other problems like famine, poverty and third world diseases."

In any case, Lomborg points out that the problem of climate change cannot be "solved until the big CO2 emitting countries, headed by the United States, China and India, transition from oil and coal to renewable energy."

"And this will not happen until we have developed much more efficient solutions at the disposal of everyone because they are less expensive," he says.

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