



Press release

IASS Sees Climate and Sustainability Goals at Risk

Statement on the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election

Potsdam, 11.11.2016. In a joint statement, the Scientific Directors of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, Mark Lawrence, Patrizia Nanz and Ortwin Renn expressed their concern that the election of Donald Trump as the next president of the United States will seriously endanger both international efforts to protect the climate and the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals:

"The term of office of the next US President spans a crucial period for efforts to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. The USA is one of the most important political actors and one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases. The electoral victory of Donald Trump and the hardliners within the Republican Party gives us reason to fear that the USA will no longer work towards realizing climate protection and sustainability goals, but rather hinder progress in these issues.

Major challenges for climate policy and climate research

This is especially true with respect to climate and energy policy. The passing of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and its ratification this year was a tremendous success for the international community. But actually reducing the risks posed by climate change will require broad cooperation at the international level. The participation of those nations which are responsible for a large percentage of greenhouse gas emissions, such as the USA and China, is particularly crucial. The United States has often been a very difficult partner in climate policy negotiations, but its support for the Paris Agreement gave rise to the hope that this had changed for the better. Now, however, the campaign platform of Donald Trump – who has described climate change as a Chinese hoax – makes it clear that climate policy will face immense challenges. The election outcome is likely to have substantial repercussions for US climate science efforts. The US is a global leader in climate science and this development represents a serious setback.

The international community therefore anticipates that it may have to continue to move forward without the support of the US government in order to keep the risks of climate change in check and promote the use of clean, carbon-free technologies. With a Republican majority in Congress, US energy policy under President Trump is nearly guaranteed to be a step backwards. His declared intention to pursue policies that will expand the fossil-based



energy sector stands in stark contrast to the transition to renewable energy pursued by many countries around the world. This energy transition is urgently needed in order to create a sustainable energy system and effectively limit the effects of climate change. In response, we must seek to play a greater role in public debate through our expertise and arguments. For the forces that made it possible for Donald Trump to be elected in the USA are increasingly exerting an influence on public opinion in Germany and the rest of Europe.

Participative processes revitalise democracy

Both Brexit and the outcome of the US election have shown that many citizens in both countries do not feel that their concerns are being addressed by their political representatives – and do not feel that they are understood by experts, the media, or scientists. It is essential that scientists take this development seriously. We must show that expert knowledge can contribute to the democratic process. To this end, the IASS supports and accompanies various participatory processes – for example, citizen participation in Germany's energy transition – that promise to contribute to the revitalization and legitimation of democracy. The emergence of a rift within our society is the single greatest threat to the transformation to sustainability. What is required is the creation of spaces for public dialogue – even and especially with those who deny the facts.

In these challenging times, science is called upon to orient itself around values that support the public good and bring them to the fore of debate. The IASS has committed itself to research that is in line with its vision of creating a just, environmentally responsible, and peaceful world. The Institute is committed to the values shared by societies in Europe and the United States: democracy, freedom, and respect for the dignity of all people regardless of their nationality, the colour of their skin, their religion, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. The researchers at the IASS will work harder than ever with their partners from politics and civil society to develop practical and relevant solutions for the transformation to a sustainable society."

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Funded by the ministries of research of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Brandenburg, the **Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS)** aims to identify and promote development pathways for a global transformation towards a sustainable society. The IASS employs a transdisciplinary approach that encourages dialogue to understand sustainability issues and generate potential solutions in cooperation with partners from the sciences, politics, the economy, and civil society. A strong network of national and international partners supports the work of the institute. Its central research topics include the energy transition, emerging technologies, climate change, air quality, systemic risks, governance and participation, and cultures of transformation.