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Climate Deniers Spread Misinformation, Doubt

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The same people who, in the 90's, claimed, on behalf of tobacco companies that passive smoking isn't harmful are now being employed by oil companies to question climate change. As they spread their misinformation campaign in Bangalore today, their web of lies stands exposed.

Since 1980s every decade has been much warmer than the decade before. At the time, the 1980s was the hottest decade on record. Then at the end of the 1990s, it was the warmest decade on record. The 2000's broke records again and became the warmest decade and 2010 tied with 2005 as the warmest year since records began.

In the same decade, climate related disasters reported a dramatic ten-fold increase since 1950. Last year alone, we saw catastrophic flooding in Pakistan, wildfires and extreme temperatures in Russia, severe rain, floods and landslides in China and unprecedented flooding in Australia. Rainfall broke records in India too and flash floods left around 200 people dead in the sparsely populated Leh region.

In its 2007 reports, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had warned of precisely such disasters. Scientific understanding of climate systems has advanced rapidly since its release and hundreds of new reports and studies -- many of which are thorough scientific assessments as broad in their scope as the IPCC reports -- have shown that the worst predictions are coming true.

Yet despite the temperature records, the ever increasing climate disasters and a huge body of scientific evidence of climate change occurring and anticipated it is hard to believe that there are still people who claim that climate change isn't a threat and that it's actually good for us.

This will be argued at an event in Bangalore today organised by New Delhi based Liberty Institute in collaboration with Institution of Engineers, Karnataka state Centre (IEI-KSC) and Karnataka Environment Research Foundation (KERF).

The occasion is launch of the summary of a report titled "Climate Change Reconsidered" in Kannada language. Event organiser Liberty Institute has partnered with US based Heartland Institute for Indian distribution of the report published by the latter.

The pseudo-scientific report published in 2009 is severely critical of IPCC, which it claims has exaggerated climate impacts, and argues that variations in solar activity and not greenhouse gases is the true driver of climate change; that rising CO2 levels is a boon to the world's forests, farmers and ranchers; that global warming would increase ecosystem biodiversity; and that it would actually reduce the number of lives lost to extreme heat.

Such seemingly bizarre claims are actually part of the summary that will be released at the event. Who would make claims that go against the overwhelming scientific consensus and what do they gain out of it? The answer lies in the background of the authors and publisher of the report.

The study's two authors -- S. Fred Singer and Craig D. Idso -- have both done research for or are otherwise affiliated with think tanks funded by oil giant ExxonMobil (all figures since 1998): Frontiers of Freedom (\$1.27 million), George Marshall Institute (\$840,000), National Center for Policy Analysis (\$540,000), American Council on Science and Health (\$150,000), The Cato Institute (\$125,000), and The Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change (\$100,000).

Heartland Institute that brought out the report has received at least \$676,500 from Exxon-Mobil since 1998, the year Exxon launched a campaign to oppose the Kyoto Treaty, according to official documents of the two groups that have been compiled and reproduced by the website ExxonSecrets.org. Also, the institute's self-described Government Relations Adviser Walter F. Buchholtz has been a lobbyist for Exxon-Mobil, the Washington Post reported in 2004.

In her excellent book "Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming" Naomi Oreskes demonstrates how scientists such as Fred Singer aimed to sow seeds of public doubt on matters of settled science. Both Fred Singer and the Heartland Institute had previously questioned harmful effects of passive smoking in the 1990s with funding from tobacco major Philip Morris.

After the merger of Exxon and Mobil corporations in 1999, ExxonMobil became one of the biggest public companies in the world with 2010 revenues at over \$383 billion. ExxonMobil funds such individuals and organisations as they do not want greater public awareness and government legislation on climate change. If the government mandates higher fuel efficiency cars or electric cars, for example, the oil companies would be the first to lose.

The Bangalore event to release the report is accompanied by panel discussion that has panellists from Geological Survey of India, University of Agricultural Sciences, IIT Chennai, ISRO, IISc, and the Liberty Institute itself. When contacted many of them said they were unaware of the background of the organisers. Some have even retracted their participation. They said their names were published on event promotional material without their consent.

Prof. J Srinivasan at the Centre for Atmospheric & Oceanic Sciences, IISc who was a lead author with the last IPCC report and whose name is on the discussion panel list was most upfront when he said "It's a fraud. I don't know why Institution of Engineers is involved with such an event." He went on to add that the organisers put his name on the invite without his permission. "It's all fraud."

Sharachchandra Lele, senior fellow at Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, said, "I was not consulted before they included my name on the list. I'm not a part of it and after reading about it, I would not want to be a part of it."

Prof. A Jayaraman, director at National Atmospheric Research Laboratory (NARL) when asked about the background of organisers said, "I was a member of the IPCC so there is no question disputing its credibility." He said the publisher of the report was exaggerating gaps in the IPCC for "filthy reasons." He would not be attending the event due to personal reasons.

Another panellist, Prof. R S Deshpande, director of the Institute for Social and Economic Change when asked whether he was aware of the facts surrounding the publisher and author of the report, said he was not and that he may not attend due to a busy schedule.

Barun Mitra, director of Delhi based Liberty Institute, the event organiser, said he was not aware why the names of scientists were put on the list without their consent adding that the list was being prepared and coordinated by Institution of Engineers. Mr Mitra admitted though that Liberty Institute has been working with Heartland Institute for the past several years on a number of issues. He said he has no idea who provides funding for the Heartland Institute.

The Heartland Institute has been thoroughly debunked by others in the West on several occasions. In April 2008 they published a spurious article titled "500 Scientists with Documented Doubts of Man-Made Global Warming Scares." When a website contacted some of the scientists, dozens responded in outrage denying that their research supports the article.

In June 2009, Heartland Institute carried full page ads in leading newspapers in the US targeted at lawmakers who were drafting American Clean Energy and Security Act at the time. The ads complained that climate deniers were shut out of the media and political process and accused scientific community of unethical behaviour.

Likewise, it isn't the first time that The Liberty Institute has partnered with big oil funded organisation to spread misinformation and outright lies about climate science in India. In April 2008, they partnered with UK based Civil Society Coalition on Climate Change to launch "Civil Society Report on Climate Change" in New Delhi which also criticised the IPCC and argued that climate change won't be so bad.

It argued that rather than cutting emissions, policies must promote economic growth and empower the poor so that they are able to solve today's problems and adapt to tomorrows. Not surprisingly, the Civil Society Coalition was formed by the International Policy Network (IPN), a well-known ExxonMobil backed organization based in London.

Unfortunately, rather than restrict the spread of such misinformation campaigns by climate deniers, the government actually encourages them. The April 2008 launch of "Civil Society Report on Climate Change" was presided over by none other than Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chairman of India's planning commission.

Even Jairam Ramesh, India's union minister for Environment and Forests has accorded legitimacy to climate deniers. In a letter to the European committee reviewing IPCC procedures in March 2010, Ramesh suggested that the panel's draft report should be sent to all known "climate sceptics" during the review process.

Such support for climate deniers by the government is not only unfortunate but also questions the legitimacy of their claims that they are serious about tackling climate change. For the government to seriously address climate change it must first accept the scientific consensus behind it.

About Climate Revolution

Climate Revolution Initiative is a public awareness campaign that seeks to transform the social and political climate on climate change in India. It uses Right to Information (RTI) act and media disclosures as key tools to bring about shift in public consciousness about the threat of climate change and about government's unsustainable developmental pathway. Climate Revolution Initiative is led by Manu Sharma, an activist and renewable energy expert. RTI disclosures made by Climate Revolution including scanned replies from various govt. authorities are available at www.climaterevolution.net/rti

Additional information

NASA Research Finds 2010 Tied for Warmest Year on Record
<http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/2010-warmest-year.html>

NOAA: Past Decade Warmest on Record According to Scientists in 48 Countries
http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/20100728_stateofthecclimate.html

Study shows dramatic rise in natural disasters over past decade
<http://english.sina.com/technology/p/2010/0128/302222.html>

Group Promoting Climate Skepticism Is Extensively Linked to Exxon
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/12/03/group-promoting-climate-s_n_378629.html

FACTSHEET: HEARTLAND INSTITUTE
<http://www.exxonsecrets.org/html/orgfactsheet.php?id=41>

Three Full-Page Whoppers from the Heartland Institute (Part One)
<http://www.desmogblog.com/three-full-page-whoppers-heartland-institute-part-one>

DeSmogBlog uncovers Heartland lies
<http://www.grist.org/article/skeptics-lie-news-at-11>

CLIMATE DENIERS MOVE INTO TOWN – AND MONTEK DOES A MBEKI
<http://groups.google.com/group/green-india/msg/4af9407f92c5bb50>