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 In 100 Years – Starting Now.

A NEW LIFESTYLE

On January 30 this year, I was invited into Europa House in Copenhagen to meet Connie Hedegaard. She is a member of the UN High Level Panel on Sustainable Development which brought out its report on the same day. The report provides a foundation for the agenda of the sustainability Summit Rio +20, which will be held this summer. She stated that in 2030 the world will need 50% more food, 45% more energy and 30% more water. She stressed that there is not much time left until 2030. A child, born in 2012, will only just have come of age in 2030. The child will be 18 then. She also said that the population will grow from 7 billion today to 9 billion by 2040 - and that the middle-class alone, with its high consumption, will increase by more than 3 billion over the next 20 years.

At the same time, the International Climate Panel, the IPCC, tells us that global emissions of greenhouse gases must be halved by 2050 from their current levels. This is absolutely necessary, if we are to have even a slight chance of avoiding the Earth entering into a self-reinforcing spiral of global warming outside our control: if the permafrost areas in Siberia and Canada melt, they will release large amounts of methane which in itself will warm up the planet even more. If the North Pole melts, the surface of the sea will become dark and this will attract more of the sun's heat.

If the oceans get warmer, they may at some point, be unable to absorb CO₂, but begin to release it into the atmosphere - which will increase global warming. These climate changes may culminate with sea levels rising above 60 meters in combination with massive changes to global climate systems. To avoid this, the reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases must have commenced before 2020. Up until now, it has only increased. Even during the financial crisis.

Assuming that we are approximately 10 billion people by 2050, that we all have equal rights to emit greenhouse gases and that we follow the IPCC recommendations, then there is room for every human on the planet to emit 2 tons of CO₂ equivalents in 2050. Today, every Dane emits 19 tons measured on our consumption. Our diet alone emits 3 tons because we are one of the world's biggest consumers of meat.

Thus, we have just 40 years to reduce our global footprint by a factor of 10. This is a challenge. On the other hand, the challenges are linked: If we solve the climate crisis, then we will also have solved the energy crisis and the food crisis and, if we think about it carefully, we will be able to handle the water shortage at the same time.

The code word is sustainable development: to create a lifestyle that is, at once attractive to us as human beings and at the same time does not put too much of a strain on our fundamental basis of life. Personally, I believe that part of the answer is that we should use each other's labour much more than we do today. In return, we must reduce material consumption. There is something sick about a society where it is not viable to pay a man to repair your mobile phone if it breaks because it is cheaper to buy a new one.

This is not good enough. Big changes in our lifestyle are required. In return, we may end up with a lifestyle that is more attractive than the one we have today; where there is less stress and more time, more time for each other, for our children, for nature - and for ourselves. Humans have previously carried out major revolutions - now the time has come for a new major change. Denmark can lead the way - it is our own choice.