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Copenhagen climate summit
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Western lifestyle unsustainable, says climate expert Rajendra Pachauri

Ahead of the Copenhagen summit, leading scientist and IPCC chair Rajendra Pachauri warns of radical changes and regulation if global disaster is to be avoided

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Rajendra Pachauri accepts the Nobel prize on behalf of the IPCC in 2007. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Hotel guests should have their electricity monitored; hefty aviation taxes should be introduced to deter people from flying; and iced water in restaurants should be curtailed, the world's leading climate scientist has told the *Observer*.

Rajendra Pachauri, the chair of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), warned that western society must undergo a radical value shift if the worst effects of [climate change](#) were to be avoided. A new value system of "sustainable consumption" was now urgently required, he said.

"Today we have reached the point where consumption and people's desire to consume has grown out of proportion," said Pachauri. "The reality is that our lifestyles are unsustainable."

Among the proposals highlighted by Pachauri were the suggestion that hotel guests should be made responsible for their [energy](#) use. "I don't see why you couldn't have a meter in the room to register your energy consumption from air-conditioning or heating and you should be charged for that," he said. "By bringing about changes of this kind, you could really ensure that people start becoming accountable for their actions."

Pachauri also proposed that governments use taxes on aviation to provide heavy subsidies for other forms of transport. "We should make sure there is a huge difference between the cost of flying and taking the train," he said. Despite the fact that there is often little benefit in time and convenience in short-haul flights, he said people were still making the "irrational" choice to fly. Taxation should be used to discourage them.

He dismissed suggestions that the actions he was advocating were insignificant next to the decisions that would be made at the [UN's climate summit which opens in](#)

Copenhagen in seven days' time. "In a democracy, governments will ultimately respond to what the people want," he said. "If the people have a strong desire which can be demonstrated through their actions, as well as their vote at the time of elections, you can bring about a major shift in policy."

Pachauri caused controversy last year by advocating, in an interview with the *Observer*, that people should eat less meat because of the levels of carbon emissions associated with rearing livestock. He is scheduled to deliver a keynote speech at the opening session of the Copenhagen summit.

He said the opening bids from China and the US on emissions – announced last week – had given hope that a deal could be reached in Copenhagen, even if some details would have to be filled in later. "I think it provides momentum to the whole negotiations," he said.

Pachauri was speaking to the *Observer* before a public discussion at the Wellcome Collection in Euston with the philosopher AC Grayling yesterday. It will be broadcast by the BBC World Service on Wednesday.

He said that he also believed car use would have to be "curbed": "I think we can certainly use pricing to regulate the use of private vehicles." He added he was a supporter of former London mayor Ken Livingstone's plan to increase the congestion charge to £25 for the most polluting vehicles. The proposal was dropped by Boris Johnson and the charge currently stands at £8. Pachauri also denounced the practice in some restaurants of providing iced water to customers who had not ordered it. "It is just an enormous amount of waste that we don't even think about," he said.

Ultimately, Pachauri said the value shift that was needed would take a generation to take hold. "I think the section of society that will make it happen is essentially young people. I think they will be far more sensitive than adults, who have been corrupted by the ways we have been following for years now."

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