



## ENVIRONMENT

### Climate Scepticism©

by Valentine Rinner

On September 14<sup>th</sup>, during a business conference, ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy surprised his audience by strongly endorsing a climate sceptic position. According to AFP he stated that, "the climate has been changing for four billion years, if the Sahara has become a desert it isn't because of industry. You need to be as arrogant as men are to believe we have changed the climate." Mr Sarkozy has been discounting the human impact on climate change lately, but up until now he has never been as explicit.

Since then criticism from many politicians has been flooding the media, even within his own Republican party. Some journalists also saw a similarity to US candidate Donald Trump's position on the matter. There seems to be general agreement that Mr Sarkozy's declaration is part of his strategy to win back far-right voters for next year's elections.

Exactly six years ago, on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2009, in-office Sarkozy was giving the opposite speech. He stated: "Without corrective action on our part, current warming threatens to accelerate between 1.8 and 4 degrees by 2100, with a risk of sea levels rising a further 18 to 59 cm. It's time to act. [...] Since my election, I have always wanted our country to be in the forefront of the effort to take up what I know to be ineluctable environmental challenges."

Now enough of contradictions and politics. Let's have a deeper look into the matter. Can we still be climate sceptic in 2016? The answer is no.

Climate change has undeniably always been part of our planet's evolution. However, the scientific community agrees that today's circumstances differ both in terms of the extent and the speed of the changes. Some experts, backed by Nobel prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, have gone as far as declaring a new geological era, the Anthropocene. According to them, humanity is having such a large and rapid impact on our planet that we will irreversibly affect it right down to the geology of our planet, they say that we left the twelve thousand year-old Holocene era - the one that made human life possible - around the 1950s. What does that mean for us? Can we still be optimistic or is our species doomed to extinction?

Unfortunately it is difficult to make a reasonable bet on what the effect of those massive changes will be in the far future. However we do know a fair bit about what is ahead of us in the next decades. We know that our environmental challenges are first

and foremost social. Local and global climatic changes affect vulnerable populations more than anyone else, i.e. those who can afford less risk prevention. Today there are about twenty million climate refugees every year and the figure keeps increasing. This is far more than war refugees. By 2050 those estimates are expected to rise to 250 million each year.

Some people - far enough from the risk - choose to ignore those concerns. Others develop what we could call an "eco-phobia": a fear or dismissal of ecological problems and the natural world. But there are an increasing number of people who see those issues as an opportunity to search for viable alternatives, to collaborate, to innovate, to create employment.

Congolese engineer Maha Lee Cassy, has decided to be part of those individuals who tackle the climate change consequences. A year ago, he created 'SOS My Climate': a mobile participatory platform that gives a space to those affected by climate change to speak out and tell their stories.

Cassy's story itself has recently been published in the "Solutions and co" media initiative, a French project that collaborates with media around the world to promote climate change related innovations instead of merely focusing on disasters. You should go and check some of them out online. And next time the climate change topic comes up during a friendly chat - before getting into its politics - share a story of an innovative project that inspires you!