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PARIS AND THE CLIMATE CHANGE REVOLUTION

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Can humanity slow down climate change fast enough to prevent centuries of suffering? The stories of three climate change revolution leaders—two individuals and one institution—suggest the answer could be “yes”. In 1992, many of us converged upon the UN “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro in anticipation of a big, audacious, global solution to climate change. After two weeks of negotiations, inspiring side events, and dazzling light-shows on the rock face of Sugarloaf Mountain, I left Rio an optimist. After all, the UN had approved the Framework Convention on Climate Change! Now, nearly a quarter century later, I’m a bit less sanguine about what the UN process will deliver. Getting from the Framework Convention to a global treaty that reduces carbon pollution fast enough to avoid the worst suffering from climate change has been elusive thus far. And let’s be clear: we will not get that treaty in the Paris climate summit later this year. Something else will be on display in Paris that deserves far more attention, however. A quiet revolution in climate change solutions is underway and it could help plug major gaps in the UN process. This revolution has its roots in a fundamental change that has taken place since Rio. People around the world believe that climate change is no longer a risk in the far off future. Rather, it is a real problem today that cannot wait for the perfect UN global climate treaty. One of the most powerful leaders of this revolution is Governor Jerry Brown of California. His initiatives to combat climate change are giving new meaning to the phrase “California effect”—the positive influence on trading partners and national governments that occurs when a state leads the way on policy innovation. He will announce at the Paris climate summit, together with several other Governors, the Under 2 MOU that presents commitments from 46 (and climbing) states and provinces around the world to lower emissions to 2t CO_2 per capita or by at least 80% through 2050. He has also forged partnerships with China, Mexico and Peru to accelerate climate change policy innovation. In Norway, Bjarne Rask Thomsen is leading a different kind of climate change revolution. As the CEO of Denofa, Norway’s biggest importer of soybeans, he has mobilized support across this nation’s food and animal feed industries, with critical support from Norwegian Minister of the Climate and Environment Tine Sundtoft, around a commitment to partner with the government and farmers of the main source of this soy—the Brazilian Amazon state of Mato Grosso—to help slow deforestation. This is particularly significant because Mato Grosso, an agricultural giant, has already slowed deforestation so much that it is now a global leader in climate change mitigation, an achievement that could easily be lost if its success is not recognized by markets and investors, and deforestation increases again. What is particularly striking to me is the speed with which the Norwegian process came about. I first discussed this possible industry commitment with Bjarne only one year ago. In Jakarta late last July, I watched as Earth Innovation Institute’s Indonesian sister organization INOBU, in their role as regional

coordinator of the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF), skillfully supported six provincial governments as they finalized their plan to reduce their deforestation rates 80% by 2020. The next day, the strategy was endorsed by the national government's Ministry of Environment and Forestry. This "bottom-up" planning and leadership is particularly significant given the scale of Indonesian's deforestation as a source of CO2 emissions, and the slow progress there in slowing deforestation. The GCF provinces and states include one fourth of the world's tropical forests and have committed to the 2020 80% reduction target through the Rio Branco Declaration. These are just three leaders among hundreds around the world—political, indigenous, corporate, financial, spiritual, agricultural, scientific, activist—who are driving this revolution forward. We desperately need a strong UN treaty and ambitious national commitments to slow greenhouse gas emissions as an outcome of the Paris summit. Let us not underestimate, however, the global significance of the revolution in innovative climate change solutions whose success will be needed to avoid centuries of suffering from an angry climate.