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Thoughts on the Government Approval Process for SPM.5.2 (International Cooperation) of the Summary for Policymakers of Working Group 3, Fifth Assessment Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Dear Rob,

Many thanks for your letter. You have raised relevant and important questions about approval procedures for the Summary for Policymakers (SPM). We, the three Co-Chairs of IPCC Working Group III (WG III), would like to thank you, first of all, for your tireless work and your excellent leadership in Chapter 13 “International Cooperation: Agreements and Instruments”, in the process of writing the summary documents and during the WGIII session in Berlin. We also thank you for voicing your concerns.

In response, we would like to begin with a few observations. In the IPCC, a carefully chosen and well-balanced set of distinguished authors, such as yourself, assess the developments in the scientific literature on climate change on a comprehensive, objective and transparent basis. The drafts undergo two rounds of in-depth external review, for which a response to every single comment is required. Authors synthesize what they consider to be the most important findings in the Technical Summary (TS) and SPM. Once finalized, governments approve the SPM line-by-line and accept the underlying full report. During the WGIII session in Berlin all governments approved the SPM and accepted the full report including the TS.

As you recall, during the session authors and governments’ representatives spent a lot of time in contact groups, going through specific parts of the SPM, discussing the underlying rationale and the applied methods. In the contact group discussing the SPM section on international cooperation in climate change mitigation it became clear that governments were unlikely to approve all of the findings presented, which led to the deletion of parts of the text. Procedurally, it is important to note that the approved text of the SPM has also been agreed upon by the authors. Therefore, the SPM is a scientifically credible and a useful document which represents the current consensus between governments, even if scientists would like to see a much broader consensus.

As you noted in your letter, the substance of the TS and the underlying chapters were not affected by these deletions. In these documents, the scientific community has communicated the key findings of their assessment to the member governments of the IPCC in a more comprehensive way. These parts of the report, which were accepted by governments, remain a critical reference point for policymakers and the scientific community.

Your questions and concerns feed into the immensely important debate about the future of the IPCC and the scope of the next assessment report. We urge you to participate actively in this process. The co-production of knowledge by scientists and policymakers, which includes the critical evaluation of policy performance, is key to addressing the climate change challenge. Our shared experience in Berlin should be used to shape the outline and scope of future assessments. These intense discussions clearly show that governments take scientific views very seriously.

We would again like to express our gratitude once more for your contribution to the on-going debate about the future of IPCC.

Sincerely,

A stylized signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, sweeping loop followed by a smaller, more defined loop.

Youba Sokona

A signature in blue ink, featuring a large, stylized 'R' followed by a series of loops and a long, sweeping tail.

Ramón Pichs

A signature in blue ink, with the name 'Ottmar' followed by 'Edenhofer' in a cursive script.

Ottmar Edenhofer