

*Not to be published before 19<sup>th</sup> November 11 am CET (Brussels and Berlin time)*

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

9 November 2020

Dear Prime Minister Johnson,

### **Letter on the occasion of the postponed COP 26**

We are religious leaders of the Catholic religious order, the Jesuits. We represent not only Jesuits in Britain, but also Jesuits in Africa and Jesuit mission and development organisations working widely across Africa, Asia and Latin America. We are committed to following Pope Francis's teaching as set out in *Laudato Si* (May 2015) and to promoting an "ecological conversion".

We are writing with regard to the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) was originally due to be held in Glasgow from 9-19 November 2020. It was postponed on account of the on-going COVID-19 global pandemic which is again resurgent across much of the globe. We are concerned that the absence of this conference in 2020 will lure governments into diverting attention and resources away from climate change and towards the immediate needs of addressing the on-going pandemic.

While COVID-19 remains a clear and present danger to the health and security of the world's people, climate change is no less of a pressing crisis. We are mindful of Pope Francis's admonition in his 2015 encyclical on Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato Si'*, "Everything is connected." Indeed, climate change is exacerbating the social, economic, and environmental harms that COVID-19 has unleashed, and our on-going response to the pandemic cannot ignore it. Though mindful of the unique challenge of the pandemic, we emphasise the equal urgency of on-going international action to address climate change.

With this in mind we are called to write two separate letters voicing our concerns: The first is directed to you as host of COP 26, offering our thoughts on the immediate steps that you can take to ensure that climate change remains on the global agenda in the coming year, and the second to the leaders of the African Union and European Union calling for increased collaboration and commitment between our respective continents.

Regarding the global consequences arising from postponing COP 26, you, being the host in 2021, will maintain a major influence over the course of the next year in making sure that the world's attention remains focused on climate change. In fact, this additional year before the Conference provides you with a unique opportunity among world leaders to be *the* advocate for sustained action on climate change. We encourage you to exercise that role as global advocate for climate change as follows:

**1. Set an ambitious global agenda for next year's conference and push national governments to be equally bold in their climate change policies.**

- a) The United Kingdom should take the lead in this regard, taking specific note of the proposals of the UK Climate [Coalition](#). In particular, as COP 26 President, the UK must announce this year a high-ambition UK NDC that is a fair share of the global effort needed to limit the temperature rise to 1.5°C. It should be achieved through domestic action without the use of international credits.
- b) It is critical for the success of our global efforts to combat climate change that the United States be a key participant in this process. As Prime Minister, you are uniquely poised to use your influence in the spirit of the US-UK Special Relationship to encourage Washington to re-engage with the Paris Agreement Framework.
- c) Urgency is also needed for the finalisation and approval of the Paris Rulebook, particularly Article 6 addressing carbon trading. Timeframes must be agreed for the submission of national climate plans that highlight Nationally Determined Contributions that are consistent with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Negotiations around a common transparency framework must also be revived.

## **2. Recommitment to a national climate ambition by governments and international organisations.**

- a) In the context of climate negotiations, ambition refers to countries' collective will, through domestic and international initiatives, to cut their greenhouse gas emissions to the extent necessary to meet the 1.5°C goal. This comes from a higher commitment to climate finance, leadership, and diplomacy on the part of all governments. The UK, the European Union, and other major economies can, and must, take a stronger leadership role. For example, only 14 countries have submitted a 2020 NDC, representing 3.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Greater pledges and reassurances that developed countries can mobilise funding commitments are needed.
- b) A clearer role of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Committee on Capacity Building is needed to help countries turn these commitments into reality. Further, a strengthening of the implementation mechanisms of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM) is needed to help ensure vulnerable countries receive support.

## **3. Press for the inclusion of action on climate change into COVID-19 relief packages and social protection programmes.**

- a) COVID-19 has once again reminded us that the risks we face today increasingly have no respect for borders. While the pandemic is the “trans-border risk” at the top of the global agenda at the moment, climate change and ecological degradation remain a clear and present danger to all of us. In the coming year, as host of COP 26, you can be a vocal advocate for the environment, reminding world political and economic leaders that any and all COVID-19 relief packages must take account of climate change and include action to combat it. As Pope Francis reminds us, “Everything is connected,” and there are no purely social, environmental or economic crises that we face. Effectively combating COVID-19 and planning for the world that comes after the pandemic requires that climate change continues to have the attention of global policymakers.

## **4. Emphasise the nexus between human rights and climate change.**

- a) There is a nexus between climate change, ecological disasters, and human rights abuses. Human rights need to be explicitly acknowledged as a basis for climate action. Some progress in this regard was made at COP 25 in terms of the five-year Gender Action Plan that now includes language on human rights-based approaches. However, these have not been given the attention that they deserve and should be on the agenda for COP 26. Further engagement and collaboration with national and international human rights organisations in different countries that highlight community reporting, as in the case of climate change, is called for.

#### **5. Remind the leaders and peoples of the Global North that the burdens of climate change fall disproportionately on the shoulders of the world's poor and marginalised.**

- a) Together with Pope Francis, we want to remind you that it is the poorest and most vulnerable people who bear the brunt of climate change even though they have contributed least to this crisis. There are significant justice issues at stake here and it is the duty of those countries whose development has contributed most to climate change to take the lead in marshalling the resources to combat it. This calls for the sharing of technology and resources across borders because the goal of climate action is not simply to make life more comfortable in Europe or North America, but across the world. Again, responsible action on climate recognises that poverty reduction is part and parcel of caring for our common home.

#### **6. Leading by example: the UK can be a trend-setter.**

- a) We are reminded of the fact that implementing the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals were estimated to cost several trillion US Dollars annually even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Consideration of who will finance these measures should take into account the responsibility of the largest polluters, past and present, according to the Principle of Ability to Pay and the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility.
- b) Last but not least: nothing inspires like a good example. Here we call for an **honest appraisal** of those areas since the last COP where the UK has made advances in combating climate change, as well as those areas where it could do better. For example, fully de-carbonising our power system as quickly as possible is vital for achieving the UK's climate targets across a range of sectors; guarantee that an additional 20GW of offshore wind will be contracted through a regular pipeline of auctions over the next 4 years, in order to get on track to meeting its 40GW by 2030 target; the UK government must build a zero carbon transport system fit for the 21st century and announce the phase out of new fossil fuel cars and vans by 2030.
- c) We commend the COP 26 Private Finance Agenda launched in February 2020 by the Bank of England. Its goal to help private finance support the global economy transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions, and its objective that every professional financial decision will need to take climate change into account, are genuine steps in the right direction. The UK can actively encourage similar initiatives by other major economic powers.


We call on you, Prime Minister, as host of COP 26 to make certain that climate change remains on the top of the world's agenda even if COVID-19 has caused us to postpone the conference to 2021. The pandemic has exacerbated the problems we face and made the challenges of yesterday that much more difficult to address tomorrow. Climate change desperately needs a strong advocate over the coming year. As host of COP 26, we believe that you are uniquely suited to be that advocate.

Finally, we would like to publish this letter on 19th November, the day when COP 26 was due to close, and would be happy if we could include your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Damian Howard SJ', written in a cursive style.

Damian Howard, SJ  
*British Provincial*

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'Orobator', written in a cursive style.

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ  
*President*  
Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Janin', written in a cursive style.

Franck Janin, SJ  
*President*  
Xavier Network