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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by The Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Regression of the Climate Agenda Poses Future Risks

Climate change has arrived, and every continent has experienced some of its disastrous and painful consequences already. Despite this appalling circumstance, we have witnessed a global regression from climate pledges. While much of this is due to unforeseen circumstances, our global community will be imperiled if this development is allowed to persist. Adaptation to climate change is a vital necessity for most countries and an existential necessity for many. The Next Century Foundation urges all parties to renew their expressed obligations to confront the challenges posed by climate change forthwith and to muster both the gritty leadership and whatever financial and technical resources are necessary to give future generations at least a glimmer of hope that they will inherit a world as beautiful and bountiful as the one of their forebears.

Recommendations:

Rising Sea Levels:

Carbon emissions are ‘locked-in’ our oceans which predetermines a rise in sea levels regardless of any net-zero achievements. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts a minimum 1.3 metre rise in sea levels by 2100. Deviation from climate pledges will magnify this figure.

600 million people inhabit coastal regions lower than 10 metres above sea level. Over half of the planet's megacities are located along coastlines. Flood-proofing infrastructure like elevated homes, dikes, and seawalls are imperative. Japan's super-levees are exemplary structures to combat coastal flooding. Nations should update building codes and zoning to account for sea-level rise. Construction in at-risk areas must be prohibited. The eventual relocation of major cities in delta regions is not off the table.

Offshore Wind Investments:

Countries must prioritise substantial investments in offshore wind energy to lessen reliance on fossil fuels.

Short-Haul Flights:

Aircraft are enormous polluters, the largest proportion of emissions being created during take-off and landing. France has prohibited domestic flights for journeys that take less than 2.5 hours by train. Other nations should follow suit, however more drastic action is required. We recommend a ban on domestic short-haul flights covering distances of less than 300 miles. Such a measure will encourage the utilisation of more sustainable modes of transportation.

Additionally, a taxation system for frequent fliers could be introduced, where the tax amount is determined by the proximity of the final destination. This could incentivize individuals to opt for alternative travel by train or bus. These combined actions will play a crucial role in fostering a more environmentally-conscious travel culture.

Halt Hydrocarbon Exploration:

We recommend the cessation of further exploration and extraction of hydrocarbon reserves. This step will have far-reaching positive impacts on future generations.

Import Tax:

We advise a mandatory climate tax, based on carbon footprint, on imports from major global warming contributors. The nations with the largest carbon footprints are China, with 10,065 million tons of CO₂ released per year in 2022; the United States of America, 5,416 million tons; India, 2,654 million; the Russian Federation, 1,711 million; Japan, 1,162 million; Germany, 759 million. However the top carbon footprints per capita in major nations come from: Australia, 16.8 tons per capita per year; the United States of America, 16.1; Canada, 16.1; the Russian Federation, 12.1; the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 9.5; Norway, 9.4; Japan, 9.4; Belgium, 9.2; Germany, 9.1. The figures from other developed nations, though still high, are generally more modest, e.g. the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 5.6; France, 5.0.

Reevaluate Major Environmental Projects:

Countries must prioritise major environmental projects which harness alternative sources of energy, such as the Bristol Channel's Severn Barrage tidal project, potentially generating 10% of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's electricity needs. Revisiting and enhancing such projects ensures a cleaner and more resilient energy future for all.

Affordable Eco-Friendly Transportation:

Countries should provide subsidies for hybrid car production, ensuring their affordability comparable to diesel or petrol counterparts. By making hybrid cars financially accessible, nations can accelerate the adoption of cleaner vehicles, contributing significantly to the global effort to combat climate change.

Elderly Mobility:

Countries should introduce complimentary nationwide bus and train travel passes for the elderly, discouraging reliance on personal vehicles. This initiative will promote public transportation use, alleviate traffic congestion, and reduce carbon emissions. By offering convenient and cost-effective alternatives, nations can enhance the quality of life for older citizens while contributing to cleaner air and more sustainable urban environments.

Free Insulation of the Homes of the Elderly:

We recommend developed nations implement a program of free home insulation for the elderly. This initiative will reduce energy demand, enhance energy efficiency, and lower utility costs.

Aid Redirection:

Countries should redirect a substantial portion or the entirety of aid funds towards financing the restoration and preservation of rainforests. By doing so, nations can address global environmental challenges while simultaneously supporting local indigenous peoples.

We call for international interventions to halt the clearing of forests for agricultural expansion, plantations, and illegal mining, exemplified by cases like the Papuan and Amazon Forests. Stringent regulations, enforcement mechanisms, and support for sustainable alternatives are needed to safeguard these critical natural resources.

Securing funds for climate-change initiatives poses a challenge for developing nations. The majority of foreign aid from developed nations should address climate change, prioritising sustainable initiatives and adaptation efforts. Exceptions should only apply for critical military crises and urgent humanitarian aid.

Fashion Industry Regulation:

Countries must enact stringent regulations on the clothing industry and fast fashion brands, given their responsibility for emitting some 10% of global emissions, surpassing aviation and shipping. Implementing comprehensive restrictions will drive the shift towards sustainable practices, emphasising responsible sourcing, reduced waste, and decreased carbon footprint. By addressing the environmental impact of fast fashion, nations can make a contribution to global sustainability efforts while fostering more responsible consumption patterns.

A Recommendation Specific to Germany:

Germany's Energiewende initiative set the goal of discontinuing coal-based electricity production by the end of 2038.

However, last year the German parliament passed a new energy law. A crucial component of this law is the Replacement Power Plant Provision Act. Under this act, a substantial portion of coal-fired power plants, totaling 8.2 GW, is permitted to be put on standby within a supply reserve facility. These plants include both hard coal (6.3 GW) and lignite (1.9 GW) power stations.

The intention behind this provision is to enhance energy security. However, the decision to keep a significant capacity of coal-fired power plants on standby, especially lignite plants, undermines progress made under the Energiewende initiative.

Germany is not immune to the impact of climate change, as evidenced by temperature disparities between urban and rural areas, where city temperatures can surge up to 10 degrees Celsius higher. Even in more slowly warming rural regions, minor temperature increases could produce disastrous consequences. Precipitation patterns are shifting, with an 11% increase since 1881, leading to wetter winters and drier summers.

A Recommendation Specific to the Kingdom of the Netherlands:

In compliance with the 2019 climate act, the Kingdom of the Netherlands implemented restrictions on the use of coal for energy production. Nevertheless, a notable deviation from this commitment emerged, allowing these coal-fired power plants to operate at maximum power output until the close of 2023. This adjustment was necessitated by energy scarcity concerns, prompting a departure from the previous limitation of 35% capacity utilisation in effect from January 2022.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands should set an example. There has been a global temperature increase of 0.8 degrees Celsius since 1900, but a far higher rise of 1.7 degrees in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The country has witnessed a decline in rainfall coupled with an escalation in intensity, heightening flood risk in urban areas. 29% of the Kingdom of the Netherlands faces a significant risk of river flooding, while 55% of the nation stands vulnerable to the possibility of submergence underwater at some point in the future.

A Recommendation Specific to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland committed to a series of ambitious climate goals in 2008 under the Climate Change Act. However, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has lost its position as a leader in climate action after taking contentious steps away from its climate targets.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has approved the opening of the first coal mine in 30 years which is estimated to produce 400,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions a year. The British government has since confirmed that new oil and gas licences will be granted in the interest of energy security.

Meanwhile, energy efficiency targets in residential homes have been “eased up” due to purported high costs. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should reconsider this action.

Importance of Commitments to the Climate Agenda

Abandoning climate action for short-term goals seals the fate of future generations.

Global temperature increases could be halted at 1.8°C should all current climate pledges be implemented.

Furthermore, the climate crisis will lead to a wider migration problem. The UNHCR estimates there will be an astounding 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050. Well-established climate policies can prevent and soften this migration crisis.

The pursuit of short-term goals that bypass long-term climate commitments endangers the livelihoods of millions across the globe.

Clear, assertive, and non-negotiable steps must be taken to prevent climate disaster.
