

COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY MINISTERS

Amnesty International is calling on the G20 Environment and Energy Ministers to adopt common plans to address the climate emergency including by ensuring a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic during their respective meetings on 16 and 27-28 September 2020. We need to build a better future for all.

ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

COVID-19 has not pushed the climate emergency away. Although some of the measures taken to limit spread of COVID-19 have temporarily reduced greenhouse gas emissions, these reductions are only temporary and have not improved states' ability to limit the increase of global average temperatures to 1.5°C.¹ G20 states are responsible for almost 80% of greenhouse gas emissions.² These governments have the duty to promote, protect and fulfil the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in order to ensure that humanity thrives as part of nature.

Given the size of their economies and their contribution to the climate crisis, G20 states must lead in adopting stimulus packages and recovery measures that facilitate the transition to a zero-carbon economy and resilient society. Their response to the pandemic risk exacerbating the climate crisis unless they start taking urgent and measurable steps towards environmental protection, including taking urgent measures to reduce fossil fuel dependency. At the same time, they must provide an adequate standard of living for all, including people on lower incomes, those working in the informal sector, and others who may be at risk and most affected both by the COVID-19 crisis and the transition to decarbonise the economy.

The decisions that G-20 governments take now will have huge implications for the future of humanity. We were already running out of time to tackle the climate crisis.

A 'JUST RECOVERY' THAT PUTS PEOPLE AND CLIMATE AT THE CENTRE

We note the G20's reiterated commitment to an "environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery", mentioned in point 29 of the Progress Report on the Action Plan on Supporting the Global Economy through the COVID-19 Pandemic, attached to the recent G20 Finance Ministers' communiqué.³ However, without concrete plans with clear timeframes to achieve such a recovery, this commitment risks remaining as mere words on paper.

We welcome the examples of specific initiatives in various G20 countries referred to in the Action Plan Progress Report such as "increases in consumer bonus and car scrapping subsidies aimed not only at helping the hard-hit automotive sector, but also at lowering pollution and promoting electric vehicles, incentivizing investment in e-mobility and renewable energies, supporting better insulation of buildings, and supporting investment in new technologies, such as hydrogen fuel." However, it is disappointing that the Progress Report does not reflect any clear commitment to a speedy phase out of fossil fuels throughout the G20 countries. Nor is there any reference to ensuring that the

¹ Atmospheric Co2 levels rise sharply despite Covid-19 lockdowns, The Guardian, 4 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/04/atmospheric-co2-levels-rise-sharply-despite-covid-19-lockdowns>

² UNEP, Emission Gap Report 2019, <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>

³ Communiqué, Virtual meeting of the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors, 18 July, 2020, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2020/2020-g20-finance-0718.html>

infrastructure development referred to in the communiqué and in the Progress Report will be environmentally sustainable and avoid fossil fuel infrastructure that would lock in further carbon emissions for decades.

SPEEDY PHASE OUT OF FOSSIL FUELS

Fossil fuels and all unsustainable business practices must become a relic of the past. We urge you to ensure that there is no unconditional bail-out to fossil fuel and aviation companies in pandemic response measures, and to exclude fossil fuel and aviation companies from support provided to businesses, unless they comply with strict conditions, as outlined below in the recommendations. The G20 must provide leadership by expanding its commitment to end inefficient fossil fuel subsidies to include all fossil fuel subsidies without exception, by ceasing further investments to expand fossil fuel exploration and production, by taxing the fossil fuel-derived profits of energy companies and by boosting investment in human rights-consistent renewable energy through targeted fiscal measures including subsidies.

GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

We also urge you to explicitly commit to ensuring that infrastructure development is subject to stringent carbon emission audits to ensure that they will be as green as possible and will not lead to investment in fossil fuel infrastructure. On the contrary, infrastructure development should serve the purpose of facilitating the transition to an equal and just decarbonised society, taking into special account the rights and needs of marginalised people and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

The above measures are particularly urgent, especially considering that recent data has revealed that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, G20 countries have already committed at least US\$151 billion to fossil fuels so far and only 20% of these commitments have green strings attached.⁴

The G20 countries' failure to take all feasible steps within their available capacity to reduce emissions in the shortest possible time frame is putting the lives and human rights of billions at risk, and could violate their human rights obligations.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those governments invited to the 2020 process as they implement and further develop policies to address the climate crisis, including through the G-20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

PUT PEOPLE AND CLIMATE AT THE CENTRE OF ECONOMIC STIMULUS MEASURES FOR A JUST RECOVERY

In line with the G20's commitment to support an environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery consistent with Agenda 2030⁶:

- Ensure that any economic stimulus packages for the formal or informal sector, including those that cover private corporations, include a requirement to prioritise support for workers over corporate profit:
 - Any assistance to fossil fuel energy companies should be targeted at workers and the protection of their rights, and the maintenance of current services, rather than for new exploration and development;
 - Condition any such assistance with time bound commitments to phase out fossil fuels in line with the latest scientific advice;
 - Target any assistance to aviation companies at protection of workers' livelihoods and make it conditional on time-bound commitments to reduce emissions in absolute terms without relying on offsets, including by reducing the number of flights within a defined period.
- Invest in sectors that support a just transition to a zero-carbon economy and resilient society, creating green and decent jobs and opportunities:
 - Develop concrete policies and programmes to support workers and communities dependent on the fossil fuel industry and other sectors affected by the transition to access decent jobs and opportunities that are environmentally sustainable;

⁴ G20 Analysis, www.energypolicytracker.org/region/g20/, data correct as of 29 July 2020.

⁵ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Committee releases statement on climate change and the Covenant*, 8 October 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23691&LangID=E>

⁶ G20 Action Plan – Supporting the Global Economy Through the COVID-19 Pandemic; 15 April 2020, [https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20_FMCBG_Communique%C3%A9_EN%20\(2\).pdf](https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20_FMCBG_Communique%C3%A9_EN%20(2).pdf)

- Ensure women, the most marginalized and those most impacted by the climate crisis have equal access to jobs and opportunities in the emerging zero-carbon sectors.
- In line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s findings that net zero emissions must be achieved by 2050 in order to limit global heating to 1.5°C, end the use of all fossil fuels, take measures to reduce energy demand and shift to human rights-consistent renewable energy as quickly as possible:
 - Refrain from unconditionally bailing out fossil fuel energy and aviation companies, as this would entrench fossil fuel dependency;
 - End all, not just inefficient, fossil fuel subsidies, with wealthier countries, such as the G7, China and Russia, ending them by the end of 2020 and the others as soon as possible and well before 2025;
 - Redeploy the resources freed by the end of fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy that respect human rights throughout the entire supply chain and measures enabling a just transition from a carbon economy, including social protection;
 - Adopt legislation requiring all energy producers within their jurisdiction to phase out all fossil fuels as soon as possible and no later than 2050 with an immediate phase out of the dirtiest forms of fossil fuels, in particular coal, peat, fracking and tar sands);
 - Impose taxes on profits of energy companies derived from fossil fuels rather than consumers;
 - Prohibit, in law and practice, further investments to expand fossil fuel exploration, extraction and production including the development of new infrastructure and stop financing fossil fuel projects in other countries;
 - Adopt and implement laws obliging companies to respect human rights and conduct human rights and environmental due diligence on their global operations, value chains and business relationships and establishing civil and criminal liability for damage.
- Ensure transparency over recovery plans and facilitate diverse and public participation in shaping and influencing the recovery and the transition towards a zero-carbon economy, paying particular attention to the needs and voices of the most marginalized, those most impacted by the effects of the pandemic and the climate crisis.
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses in relation to climate, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled to carry out their important work.
- Increase international cooperation and assistance, and support developing countries’ move towards zero-carbon economies at the speed we need, while protecting people at risk of or affected by climate impacts.
- Recognise and protect the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment by enacting national legislation, adopting policies as well as reflecting this right in relevant G20 declarations and plans; further support the global recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including the adoption of a resolution on this at the UN Human Rights Council.

The climate crisis is also a human rights emergency, as is the COVID-19 pandemic. This year has shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the pandemic emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights, but also the risk that ill-considered short-term responses can jeopardise this pivotal opportunity to create a “new normal” that puts people and the planet at the centre of policy making. As we move from emergency to recovery, this is an opportunity that the G20 in its global leadership role must seize in order to ensure human survival and for all to live in dignity and able to enjoy the full spectrum of their human rights.