

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# AFTER UN CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT, URGENT ACTION NEEDED BY ALL STATES TO AVOID HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON MASSIVE SCALE

Following the UN Climate Action Summit, held in New York on 23 September, Amnesty International is appalled that the vast majority of countries - and especially those nations most responsible for the climate crisis including some of the wealthiest - continue to ignore their obligations under human rights law. Such failures are all the more shocking in light of the demands of both frontline communities disproportionately affected by the climate crisis and of youth from around the world who are taking the streets in record numbers – as well as launching lawsuits - to demand effective action to avoid climate breakdown.

It is time for the complacency to end. At the next Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25) in Chile in December 2019, and at COP26 (in the UK in late 2020) at the very latest, states must announce specific plans and pledges consistent with their obligation to protect human rights from the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

The litmus test for their action will be whether they institute specific plans with concrete targets and deadlines to for example electrify transport and decarbonise energy generation, remove fossil fuel subsidies, establish and enforce forest protection and afforestation, and whether these steps are carried out in a way that benefit the most disadvantaged groups in society and reduce, rather than increase inequality. If they fail to do so, they will condemn children and young people to suffer a raft of hugely damaging impacts for which they were not responsible, thereby committing the biggest inter-generational human rights violation in history.

Amnesty International believes that putting human rights at the core of climate policies represents the most effective way to achieve ambitious, sustainable and equitable actions to tackle the climate crisis. Together with hundreds of organisations that have signed onto the Declaration on Climate, Rights and Human Survival,<sup>1</sup> it remains committed to achieving the Declaration's joint vision for climate justice, including through advocacy and campaigning ahead of the next rounds of climate negotiations.

In line with the Declaration, young people and civil society organisations around the world – including Amnesty International - will continue to monitor progress and will use all available avenues to hold states to account.

## THE UN CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT: YET ANOTHER MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Convened by the UN Secretary General, the Summit was an attempt to encourage states to boost ambition in addressing the climate crisis, especially considering the inadequacy of previous pledges made under the Paris Agreement (the so called “Nationally determined contributions” – NDCs - i.e. national plans to reduce emissions) which would still lead to a catastrophic 3°C increase in average global temperatures by 2100. This was confirmed by the 2018 IPCC report which showed that 1.5°C is the absolute maximum that must be aimed for.

The UN Secretary General had called all leaders to come to the Summit to either announce new enhanced NDCs at the summit or concrete, realistic plans to improve their NDCs by the end of 2020, in line with reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over the next decade and to net zero emissions by 2050.

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<sup>1</sup> The Declaration was developed ahead of the Peoples' Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival, held in New York on 18-19 September, which Amnesty International co-organised. The text of the Declaration and the list of signatories is available at [www.climaterights4all.com](http://www.climaterights4all.com)

## INADEQUATE COMMITMENTS FAILING BOTH CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

World leaders have continued to react to the danger of climate breakdown like ostriches putting their heads in the sand hoping the danger will just go away. The pledges made may have brought some form of temporary political gain, but overall wholly inadequate to the scale of the challenge. Most appallingly, those nations most responsible for the climate crisis failed to deliver plans and pledges consistent with their legal obligations to protect human rights from the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Despite the UN Secretary General's call, no country announced at the summit the submission of a new enhanced NDC. It is shameful that the only country which has submitted a new more ambitious plan remains the Marshall Islands,<sup>2</sup> which is one of the countries most imminently threatened by the climate crisis.

While 70 countries indicated ahead of or at the Summit their intention to enhance their NDCs by 2020 (generally fixing 2030 as target year for emission reductions), only a minority of these are wealthier countries.<sup>3</sup> Overall the nations which made such pledges are only responsible for 8% of global emissions.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, concerning longer-term ambition, while 77 countries announced their intention to achieve net zero emissions by 2050,<sup>5</sup> the majority of these countries are developing countries which are most vulnerable to impacts of climate change, including the Marshall Islands which had already made this commitment in 2018.<sup>6</sup> In addition, such pledges remain hollow if not accompanied by clear plans detailing the changes needed to carry out a just, fair and inclusive transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy and sustainable industries and agriculture that protect the economic and social rights of impacted people already living in marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

## WEALTHIER AND HIGH EMITTING COUNTRIES SHIRK THEIR OBLIGATIONS

Many high emitting countries were not invited to take the floor at the summit, either due to their persistent dependency on coal, such as Japan, Australia and South Africa, or due to their criticism of the Paris Agreement, such as Brazil and Saudi Arabia, as well as the United States which intends to withdraw from the Agreement.<sup>7</sup> While China, India, and the European Union were given speaking slots, they all failed to announce any new science-based emission reduction targets which would have been compatible with the protection of human rights. Similarly, although Russia declared its intention to ratify the Paris Agreement, it had very little to offer in terms of more ambitious commitments.

Equally disappointingly, most carbon-polluting states failed to announce clear pathways to break their dependency from fossil fuels and transition towards renewable energy generated in full compliance with human rights standards. While 32 countries, 24 states/regions and 35 businesses responded positively to the UN Secretary General's call to stop building new coal plants by 2020,<sup>8</sup> some of the countries with the largest coal

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<sup>2</sup> World Resource Institute, *4 Leaders—And Far Too Many Laggards—At the UN Climate Action Summit*, 25 September 2019, <https://www.wri.org/blog/2019/09/4-leaders-and-far-too-many-laggards-un-climate-action-summit>

<sup>3</sup> More specifically, 59 States announced their intention to submit enhanced NDCs by 2020. Wealthier or middle-income countries which made such announcements include Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, and Switzerland. Another 11 European countries announced that they have started internal processes to boost ambition by 2020. The full list of countries is available at <https://prensa.presidencia.cl/comunicado.aspx?id=102021>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.wri.org/blog/2019/09/4-leaders-and-far-too-many-laggards-un-climate-action-summit>

<sup>5</sup> The same pledge was also made by 10 regions, 102 cities, 93 businesses and 12 investors. See the full list here: <https://prensa.presidencia.cl/comunicado.aspx?id=102021>

<sup>6</sup> Wealthier and middle-income countries which made pledges to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 include Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The full list here: <https://prensa.presidencia.cl/comunicado.aspx?id=102021>

<sup>7</sup> Financial Times, *Leading countries blocked from speaking at UN Climate Summit*, 18 September 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/1902158a-d994-11e9-8f9b-77216ebef1f7>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://poweringpastcoal.org/news/PPCA-news/new-alliance-members-un-climate-action-summit>. Germany and Slovakia became the latest

expansion plans,<sup>9</sup> such as India, China and Turkey, failed to set out any phase-out plans.<sup>10</sup> In addition, no country announced concrete plans to cut back on fossil fuel subsidies.

The number and quality of the pledges by wealthier countries at the UN Climate Action Summit show not only a lack of leadership, but also a blatant violation of their human rights obligations. All countries must extensively reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in line with the imperative to keep the temperature rise as low as possible and no higher than 1.5°C degrees, as current levels of global heating are already resulting in dramatic impacts on human rights such as the right to life, health, food, water and standard of living. However, wealthier countries - especially those most responsible for the climate crisis due to their past and current emissions - have the duty to act at a faster pace given both their greater capacity and greater contribution to the climate crisis. They must halve emissions well before 2030 and reach net zero emissions as quickly as possible after 2030 and well before 2050.

## **MORE FUNDING AND SUPPORT NEEDED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS-CONSISTENT CLIMATE INITIATIVES**

Wealthier countries must also substantially increase funding and support for human rights-consistent climate initiatives, including technology transfer, in less wealthy countries that would not be able to effectively mitigate and adapt to climate change themselves. This is also required to help remedy the human rights impacts felt in poorer countries as a result of loss and damage caused by the climate crisis for which wealthier, historically high emitting countries are responsible. It is encouraging that a number of wealthier countries<sup>11</sup> announced substantive –in some cases doubled<sup>12</sup> - contributions to the Green Climate Fund which provides funds to climate mitigation and adaptation programs in developing countries. However, the funds raised, totalling around \$7.5 billion, continue to be far below the target set at UN climate negotiations of mobilising \$100 billion of public and private funds per year by 2020, which is itself estimated to be only a fraction of what is needed to keep global average temperatures within 1.5°C.<sup>13</sup>

## **PROMISING INITIATIVES MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY STRONG POLITICAL WILL**

The preparatory work for the summit led to the creation of thematic coalitions between governments, the private sector, civil society, local authorities and international governmental organizations with the aim to put forward and advance concrete initiatives to boost climate action. Many of the initiatives are promising. However, without strong political will from world leaders, and especially from those countries most responsible for the climate crisis, such initiatives will not be sufficient to deliver the rapid and far-reaching changes of unprecedented scale in our economic, social and political systems required to substantially reduce emissions and protect the human rights of all – including of future generations - from the disastrous effects of climate breakdown.

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countries to join the Powering Past Coal Coalition

<sup>9</sup> For a list of countries which have committed to new coal power plants, see: <https://www.ft.com/content/1902158a-d994-11e9-8f9b-77216ebef17>

<sup>10</sup> The leaders of India and Turkey mentioned at the summit plans to increase the development of renewable energy, while China boosted its afforestation interventions.

<sup>11</sup> See the list of contributors here: <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-climate-action-summit-prompts-new-financial-commitments-to-gcf/>

<sup>12</sup> These include Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and UK. See <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/09/23/un-climate-action-summit-live/>

<sup>13</sup> World Resource Institute, *Getting to \$100 billion: climate finance scenarios and projections to 2020*, May 2015, page 5.

