



To: Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, COP26 President and Ms Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

20 May 2021

Dear Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP and Ms Patricia Espinosa,

Open letter to UK Government and UNFCCC Bureau regarding access and participation at COP26

Ensure equal access for global South delegates and civil society observers

As 50 civil society organisations from 21 countries, we understand that the solutions to the climate crisis can only result from full access and participation. We note the announcement made on 14 May that COP26 is intended to take place in-person this November. This is a positive step, but only if it is possible for all to fully participate safely.

We are writing to share our growing concern about the impact of additional barriers to access and participation at COP26 arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and related economic recession.

Even in the best of times, access to and participation in UNFCCC spaces is far from equal, whether for negotiators or for civil society observers. Global inequalities play out in terms of whose delegation is biggest, best resourced and most able to cover multiple negotiations at the same time. Marginalised groups, Indigenous Peoples and women face particular barriers to participation.

We are increasingly concerned that these inequalities will be compounded by additional barriers to participation in COP26, in particular for global South participants, in anticipation of ongoing travel restrictions from Covid-19, unequal access to vaccines, and increased financial barriers due to the economic impacts of the pandemic. We are concerned that negotiators and civil society participants from global South countries currently in the midst of, or at risk of future Covid-19 outbreaks will not be in a position to attend an in-person summit and that it will prove impossible to ensure full and fair representation. If only a select few leaders and negotiators can attend, and if others are reduced to trying to participate online this will not be acceptable. Experiences of online UN spaces over the last year have shown significant access problems for global South delegations, including digital connectivity and time zone issues. In-person negotiations should only take place if it is safe for all parties to attend.

While recognising the very real challenges facing the UNFCCC Secretariat and UK Presidency in organising a Covid-19 safe summit for November 2021, a slimmed-down summit that restricts civil society participation, or limits to digital only, would compound existing problems with transparency and accountability, and would not be acceptable. If it is safe to have in-person negotiations they must be fully inclusive of global civil society.

Therefore, we call on the UK COP26 Presidency and the UNFCCC to ensure:

1. that COP26 goes ahead on terms of equal access for global South delegates and civil society observers; if it is not safe to hold a physical COP26 for all, then negotiations should be delayed again, not moved partially online. If it is safe to have a physical COP, it must be fully inclusive of all countries and all global

mobilise resist transform

civil society. Any further delay is no excuse for climate inaction. Urgency and ambition can be delivered now, and governments must act now, to avert catastrophic warming with worsening impacts;

2. to help ensure a safe, in-person COP26 is possible in November 2021, all global North governments, including the UK Government, must support the proposal at the World Trade Organisation to allow countries to waive patents on Covid-19 vaccines for the course of the pandemic, and redistribute surplus vaccines now to enable full global South government and civil society participation at COP26;

3. the UK Government, working with the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council, must enable safe civil society participation in events, protest and other activities outside the official UNFCCC spaces at the Glasgow summit, including a civil society organised convergence space, Peoples' Summit, and mass peaceful mobilisation;

4. the UK Government must provide a fund to support global South civil society observer participation at COP26, with particular attention given to ensuring participation of marginalised groups, Indigenous Peoples and women, given the many additional financial and access barriers that global South civil society organisations will face due to the Covid-19 crisis and related global recession.

Please do all you can to make COP26 an open and democratic space that is safe and inclusive for all.

Yours sincerely,

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Friends of the Earth Scotland
Friends of the Earth England, Wales & Northern Ireland**

International & Regional:

**ActionAid International
Asian Energy Network
Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development
Corporate Accountability
Corporate Europe Observatory
Friends of the Earth Europe
Indigenous Environmental Network
Migrant Forum Asia
Third World Network
Transnational Institute**

National:

**Bangladesh Krishok Federation
Climate Watch Thailand
Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network Bangladesh
Crofter Foundation Pakistan
Digo Bikas Institute Nepal
EJ/CJ - The Environmental Justice & Climate Justice Studies Hub, UC Santa Barbara (US)
EquityBd Bangladesh
Environics Trust India
Friends of the Earth Cyprus
Friends of the Earth Finland
Friends of the Earth Ireland
Friends of the Earth Japan
Friends of the Earth Spain
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Greens Movement of Georgia
groundwork South Africa
Growthwatch India
Himalaya Nithi Abhiyan India
Indian Social Action Forum
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Landworkers Alliance UK
Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands)
Mineral Inheritors Rights Association India
minesminerals&People India
Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation Malaysia
National Hawkers Federation of India
Oriang Philippines
Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee
Plataformas Boliviana frente al Cambio Climatico
Russian Social-Ecological Union
Sahabat Alam Malaysia
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