

# Open Letter on COP reform to All States that are Parties to the Convention

## Mr. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC Secretariat and UN Secretary-General António Guterres

November 15, 2024

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned, write today to reiterate and update the call for COP reform, which was first conveyed in our open letter (<https://www.clubofrome.org/cop-reform/>) to the UNFCCC Secretariat, dated February 23, 2023.

We recognise the important diplomatic milestones of the past 28 years of climate negotiations. A remarkable consensus has been achieved with over 195 countries having agreed to strive to hold global warming to 1.5°C. We also recognise the key role of the UNFCCC Secretariat in helping to bring all 195 countries along the steps necessary to establish the global policy framework, which is underpinned by the Paris Agreement and its subsequent COP decisions.

Beyond the Paris goals, countries have now agreed to phase out fossil fuels, end inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies, stop deforestation by 2030, operationalise carbon trading globally, and most have joined the Global Methane Pledge. Governments have pledged \$100 billion (<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/climate-finance-and-the-usd-100-billion-goal.html>) annually to the Green Climate Fund, and the Loss and Damage Fund is officially established.

Despite some of its flaws, and limited resources, the global policy framework is scientifically rigorous and economically sound and complete. But the framework alone is not enough to solve the problems.

Global emissions continue to increase (<https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2024>), carbon sinks are being degraded and we can no longer exclude the possibility of surpassing 2.9°C of warming by 2100. Our first encounter with 1.5°C was accompanied by unprecedented human impacts coupled with enormous climate costs (<https://www.ajg.com/gallagher/-/media/files/gallagher/gallagher/news-and-insights/2024/january/natural-catastrophe-and-climate-report-2023.pdf>) running into the hundreds of billions in 2023 (<https://www.ajg.com/gallagher/-/media/files/gallagher/gallagher/news-and-insights/2024/january/natural-catastrophe-and-climate-report-2023.pdf>). Science tells us that global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 7.5% annually (<https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2024>) to have any chance of staying within the 1.5°C threshold, a prerequisite for the stability of our planet and a livable future for much of humanity. In 2024, the task is unequivocal: global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 4 billion tonnes.

28 COPs have delivered us with the policy framework to achieve this. However, its current structure simply cannot deliver the change at exponential speed and scale, which is essential to ensure a safe climate landing for humanity. This is what compels our call for a fundamental overhaul of the COP. We need a shift from negotiation to implementation, enabling the COP to deliver on agreed commitments and ensure the urgent energy transition and phase-out of fossil energy.

We outline below our suggested measures for reform:

### **1. Improve the selection process for COP presidencies**

We need strict eligibility criteria (<https://www.iea.org/reports/the-oil-and-gas-industry-in-net-zero-transitions>) to exclude countries who do not support the phase out/transition away from fossil energy. Host countries must demonstrate their high level of ambition to uphold the goals of the Paris Agreement.

### **2. Streamline for speed and scale**

With the global policy map fully developed, COP must shift away from negotiations to the delivery of concrete action. COP meetings must be transformed into smaller, more frequent, solution-driven meetings where countries report on progress, are held accountable in line with the latest science, and discuss important solutions for finance, technology and equity. This work must be supplemented by the benchmarking of national progress using the UN Gap Reports. This approach will accelerate action and allow for timely adjustments based on emerging scientific findings and changing global circumstances.

### **3. Improve implementation and accountability**

The COP process must be strengthened with mechanisms to hold countries accountable for their climate targets and commitments. Whilst the Paris framework was intended to operate in “delivery mode”, it is not working because governments are not held to account to ensure that national action plans align with the latest scientific evidence. The Global Stocktake process is an important start but it must be strengthened with enhanced reporting and benchmarking, rigorous peer-review processes, independent scientific oversight and transparent tracking of pledges and action.

### **4. Ensure robust tracking of climate financing**

A growing proportion of climate financing pledges are now being disbursed as interest-bearing loans (<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/climate-change-loans/>), thereby exacerbating the debt burden for climate vulnerable nations. We need standardised definitions and criteria for what qualifies as climate finance, along with common reporting frameworks and tracking mechanisms to verify climate financing flows. All of these measures are critical for rebuilding trust and accountability and for mobilising the necessary resources.

### **5. Amplify the voice of authoritative science**

Whilst the climate COP does rely on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other related bodies, such as the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), it does not have its own permanent scientific advisory body that is formally part of the COP structure. We share growing concerns that climate COPs do not sufficiently integrate or action up the latest scientific evidence. The CBD COP has its own permanent scientific advisory body, which has provided a technical and scientific underpinning for the CBD. And the same could be replicated within the climate COP.

### **6. Recognise the interdependencies between poverty, inequality and planetary instability**

New research from the Earth Commission ([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(24\)00042-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(24)00042-1/fulltext)) and from

Earth4All ([https://res.cloudinary.com/dfyeeawiq/images/v1724930888/SDGs-for-All-Africa/SDGs-for-All-Africa.pdf?\\_i=AA](https://res.cloudinary.com/dfyeeawiq/images/v1724930888/SDGs-for-All-Africa/SDGs-for-All-Africa.pdf?_i=AA)) affirms the important linkages between ecological and social change processes. If the climate COP is to be more impactful, it must acknowledge that the current rate of nature loss (e.g. freshwater scarcity, land and soil degradation, pollination decline, ocean pollution) is affecting the stability of the planet. Moreover, planetary stability, now at grave risk, is impossible without decisive action on equality, justice and poverty alleviation. This is why we call for a Climate-Poverty Policy Envoy to ensure that these critical links are anchored in the negotiations and implementation actions, especially through dedicated spaces for vulnerable communities to advocate for these linkages.

## **7. Enhance equitable representation**

Despite the climate COP's new disclosure rules, a record number of 2,456 fossil fuel lobbyists (<https://corporateeurope.org/en/2023/12/record-number-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-granted-access-cop28-climate-talks>) were granted access at COP28, nearly four times more than COP27. The fact that there were far more fossil fuel lobbyists than official representatives from scientific institutions, Indigenous communities and vulnerable nations reflects a systemic imbalance in COP representation. Improving the management of corporate interests within COPs proceedings will require stronger transparency and disclosure rules and clear guidelines that require companies to demonstrate alignment between their climate commitments, business model and lobbying activities.

In closing, let us reiterate the important role the UNFCCC has played and will continue to play in ensuring ambition on climate change. There is no doubt that climate change is a global challenge and must be solved through multilateral negotiations alongside ambition at the National level through Nationally Determined Contributions. The Paris agreement and subsequent COP decisions have laid a robust foundation for the global policy framework on climate action. Now, we must work together with urgency and purpose, transforming the climate COP so that it can take strategic, action-oriented and accountable decisions to deliver the scale of ambition commensurate with the defining challenge of our time.

## **SIGNATORIES**

**Sandrine Dixson-Declève**, Executive Chair, Earth4All and Global Ambassador for the Club of Rome

**Prof. Dr. Johan Rockström**, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Action Research

**Ban Ki-moon**, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

**Mary Robinson**, Former President of Ireland

**Christiana Figueres**, Former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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(<https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/sth-european-manifestos-policymaking/>)

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From “greening” the present system to real transformation-transforming resource use for human wellbeing and planetary stability (<https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/earth4all-potochnik/>)

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