

## Commonwealth Youth Statement on Climate Change

"Supporting Communities and Safeguarding the Most Vulnerable against the Effects of Climate Change."

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Climate change has no doubt taken its toll on all facets of the economy, leading to severe hunger with close to a tenth of the global population severely food insecure in 2020. This represents over 15 per cent more than in 2019. The countries mostly hit by the impact of climate change are found in Asia, Africa and small and vulnerable countries, which constitute more than half of the victims affected by this global crisis which calls for urgent action. It is on this premise that Commonwealth youth, led by the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN) makes this clarion call to all parties and Governments in the lead up to COP 26 and beyond, to resolve to act upon the ambitions and commitments made with a sense of urgency as we try to restore our earth and combat the global climate crisis.

The Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network is a network of over two thousand climate, sustainability, and environment youth leaders and youth-led organizations across Commonwealth states focused on climate adaptation and mitigation as well as sustainable development. The young people of the Commonwealth represent more than 60 per cent of the Commonwealth's total population, and have resolved to address climate change and other environmental issues, as well as advocate on climate change from a youth perspective, to ensure a more sustainable and resilient environment. Across the Commonwealth and the globe, young people are not immune to the existential threat posed by climate change. We are concerned by the ongoing detrimental impacts of climate change further compounded by the current crises of biodiversity loss, land degradation and the global COVID-19 pandemic that all threaten our common future. We are also concerned about the debilitating effects of climate inaction on vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled people.

Despite efforts made towards combating the global climate crisis, significant gaps exist. Recent findings according to the sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report reveals that heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and droughts are more severe and frequent and the most vulnerable groups who have had the least contribution to climate change have suffered the most from its impacts. We see these impacts in the increased intensity and frequency of hurricanes in the Caribbean, rising sea levels and marine heatwaves in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, desertification and more frequent droughts in Africa, and flash floods and extreme temperatures in Europe and Asia. Thus, resulting in real harm to lives and livelihoods.

We note the interconnected and wide sectoral challenges brought about by these adverse effects of climate change, with a real impact on our existence in the world through rising youth unemployment, worsening poverty, displacement, and inequity in developing countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDS). We acknowledge that the sixth IPCC assessment report further highlights the likelihood of temperatures exceeding 1.5°C above preindustrial levels as well as the findings of the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) nationally determined contributions (NDC) synthesis report showing that the current ambitions of countries are not on track to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement. These trajectories hinder our ability to deliver a common sustainable and prosperous future for all, particularly young people.

We note that by 2050, the global youth population is projected to increase by 62 per cent in the poorest and most vulnerable countries as indicated by the United Nation's (UN) Population, putting in jeopardy the future of this growing demographic group. With many challenges already being experienced by young people migrating to cities in search of opportunities, this raises risks of escalating poverty and inequality. The fate of our generation and that of our offspring lies in our hands as youths, and this is why we must all act now.



As young people from the Commonwealth, we demand an end to climate inaction. Our generation will have to deal with more frequent and severe climate impacts than ever, making us one of the groups most vulnerable to its impacts. Those of us in the Global South are already bearing the brunt of it. Our children will face disasters at a scale we have never seen before. As such, we recommend the following actions:

**1. Honour the rights of young people and future generations by prioritizing action on helping the most vulnerable people build resilience and adapt to climate change impacts**

With a growing global youth population, the challenges that young people currently face are expected to increase. These challenges include those directly related to climate migration, and economies severely impacted by climate which in turn affects job opportunities, employment and economic activity, among other things. Country leaders ought to collaborate with local and regional stakeholders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide adequate social protections for young people, the disabled and vulnerable communities as they face the negative impacts of climate change.

**2. Make a substantial commitment of climate finance to support youth, women, the elderly and most vulnerable to achieve green and resilient recovery and adapt to climate change impact**

Women and Elderly people should be assigned an organisational framework to deliver programmes and services, with the aid of allocated funding by the governments that contribute the most to climate change. We also fully support the call for the joint annual mobilisation of US\$100billion to drive and support climate action in developing countries. We encourage all member countries to raise ambition ahead of COP26 and deliver on these commitments outlined in their Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) ensuring young people are actively considered in delivery of climate action efforts.

**3. Commit to making low carbon and climate resilient development decisions inclusive, by including youth and other vulnerable people in policymaking and increasing finance for youth-led climate action.**

Further, we note the already disproportionate impact of climate change on young people, women, marginalised people, and disabled groups. There is a crucial need to facilitate their active participation in decision-making towards establishing more sustainable and resilient mitigation and adaptation strategies against climate change. Youth inclusion in climate policy and decision making must be scaled up, along with increased support towards additional finance for youth-led climate action. Appreciating the work of Commonwealth member countries in advancing the inclusion of young people in the design and implementation of climate policies and programmes towards meeting the Paris Agreement targets, we ask that this be scaled up, calling for support towards additional and predictable finance for youth-led climate action.

**4. Engage in building the capacity of youth to enhance youth-led green enterprises and collaborate with young people as key partners in mitigation, adaptation and recovery efforts**

In line with Article 11 of the Paris Agreement, we call for increased emphasis on enhancing the capacity of young people as partners in mitigation and adaptation efforts, provision of technical support necessary to enhance access to funding to scale up youth-led climate action initiatives, leveraging our innovative, creative, and entrepreneurial spirit. Youth empowerment can help countries forge a sustainable post-pandemic recovery by investing in climate resilience, disaster preparedness and green recovery initiatives that build back better. We further observe the role youth-led green and blue entrepreneurship can serve in achieving sustainable development goals and call for increased support as a mechanism to accelerate recovery efforts.

**5. Commit to ocean protection as an integral part of climate mitigation and adaptation through the inclusion of youth and local/indigenous communities in developing sustainable blue economies.**

Sustainable tourism, regulated fisheries, and ocean protection can create valuable economic opportunities for local communities, and young people. To realise the full potential of the blue economy, inclusive decision-making is necessary. Therefore, there is the need to support ocean conservation initiatives, public education, and skills development (through training and mentorship) to create suitable and sustainable employment opportunities for the present and future generations.

**6. Commit to an inclusive and equitable transformation of the global energy sector that encourages participation by youth and women in policymaking and creates access to opportunities in the clean energy value chain.**

According to the United Nations Development Programme, renewable energy can create more than 42 million jobs by 2050. Youth and women represent a huge untapped potential for the green energy transition. Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires all hands-on deck.

**7. The Commonwealth and other organisations globally should utilise their convening power and partnerships at COP26 to call for ambitious climate adaptation and resilience commitments and action from world leaders which incorporates the needs of youth.**

In this context, we acknowledge the efforts of the Commonwealth and in particular, the Commonwealth Youth Programme as it continues to support and empower young people through the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN), as a platform to effectively advocate and facilitate action to address climate change. We observe the mechanisms and initiatives within the Commonwealth Secretariat which drive technical and financial support for climate action such as the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH), the Commonwealth Blue Charter, Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Portal, and proposed Commonwealth Living Lands Charter which will incorporate youth perspectives and engagement in its cross-cutting themes and strategies including nature-based solutions and climate-resilient development. We further encourage the Commonwealth and other organisations to utilise their convening power and partnerships at COP26 to call for ambitious climate commitments and action from world leaders which incorporates the needs of young people.

Given the above, we call for greater inclusion of young people as key stakeholders in driving local, national, regional, and global climate action in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, Land Degradation Neutrality targets, post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Sustainable Development Agenda. We acknowledge the Commonwealth's commitment towards a common future and call for the clear mainstreaming of youth in all areas of programming, enabling their meaningful participation in climate policy development and implementation. We also call for the inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups at the policy-making table.

Climate action begins with human behaviour and lifestyle change. As young people, we are at the heart of the processes involved in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and request governments, institutions and companies globally to act now to ensure a sustainable future for all.

For the sake of our generation, and the generations to follow, we urge leaders to consider the above recommendations and actions.