



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Major Emitters Failed People at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, Civil Society said.**

### **The Climate Action Network calls out rich major emitters that failed to commit to ambitious climate action at the UN Climate Action Summit**

**Monday 23 September 2019**

**New York-** The UN Climate Action Summit in New York opened with anger. “Nature is angry,” said Antonio Guterres. Youth activist Greta Thunberg told leaders “How dare you gamble with our future and continue talking about fairytales of eternal economic growth?”

Although keynote speakers reaffirmed that our house is on fire with impacts becoming more intense and frequent across the world, country speeches which ensued showed that governments are still fueling the fire. They continue to ignore the science and fail to present ambitious climate commitments. In the end, the urgency and the emergency did not transpire in leaders’ speeches.

The world did not hear many announcements on enhanced targets or phase out of polluting fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas. The world did not see rich countries bear their historic responsibility by committing finance to poorer countries that are struggling with impacts, loss, damage and displacement or those with the political will, but with no resources to mitigate climate change.

This is deeply irresponsible. As the youth said, governments are gambling with people’s safety and lives.

Based on the latest science, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres went to great lengths to prompt leaders to present concrete commitments that deliver transformative action over the next decade. Overall, his calls and the voices on the streets, which have been rising every Friday since last year, demanding climate ambition and action and culminating in 4 million people taking to the streets on the eve of the Summit, fell on deaf ears. This as yet another damning scientific report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change detailing the alarming impacts of climate change on the world’s oceans and the cryosphere is being released in Monaco.

Leaders are shamefully absconding their responsibility to solve climate change, leaving the problem to the youth. Failing to listen and respond to the emergency forces the youth to continue striking and sacrificing their childhood and education.

A few small island states and developing countries, as well as businesses, stepped up and committed to enhancing their targets based on science. Others, like Sweden, Denmark and Luxembourg pledged to double their contribution to the Green Climate Fund. These countries demonstrated much-needed leadership and underscored the feasibility of climate action and ambition. They showed that the energy transition is ongoing and irreversible. Soon enough, they will reap the benefits of their choices with more prosperous economies, healthier populations and re-election.

On the other hand, rich countries and large emitters failed to build on the historic opportunity provided by the UN chief to show they stand on the right side of history. Absentees like the US, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Brazil, which snubbed the Summit, have emerged as those that should be held most accountable for sealing our fate. History will judge them harshly and so will the next generations who will soon be marching to the ballot box.

The Summit drew a line in the sand between leaders who united behind the science and those ignoring it and the voice of the people on the streets - siding instead with the narrow interests of fossil fuel corporations.

Despite the alarm of climate change, fossil fuel producers are still allowed to brazenly continue business as usual and generate profits at the expense of people's lives and livelihoods. They get no push back by government, especially those with whom they hold close alliances. As a result, oil and gas chief executives see no problem with convening meetings on the sidelines of the Summit in New York, prompting activists to continue staging protests.

In light of general disappointment, civil society turns to the upcoming climate conference in Chile (COP25) and its Presidency to push countries to deliver an emergency package that includes ambitious commitments in climate finance - including for loss and damage, strong targets, and rules on trading emissions between countries.

The Chilean and subsequently the UK Presidency of COP26, must ensure that governments deliver the adequate response to the emergency and ambition that puts the world on a 1.5C degrees trajectory. COP26 is the deadline. But countries should not wait until 2020. They should start now by stopping coal and other fossil fuels, and investing in a just transition to renewable energy and climate resilience.

The pressure in the streets and by civil society will continue until inaction is converted to action and ambition. We will be watching.

## **QUOTES:**

### **Plans for a Carbon Neutral World**

**Jennifer Morgan, Executive Director for Greenpeace International, said:**

“This is a moment unlike anything we have ever seen before in the climate movement, and it's just the beginning.

Despite Greta's raw, unvarnished opening plea, and millions of people in the streets on Friday, world leaders did not deliver what was needed in New York.

It's time to address corporate power and the hold it has over politics, challenge the suffocating omnipresence of the fossil fuel industry and demand they take responsibility for the human rights impacts of the climate crisis.

This summit is a springboard for 2020, when all countries signed on to the Paris Agreement must pledge to increase the ambition in their nationally determined contribution. It was leaders that agreed to that, and leaders that commissioned the latest science for the IPCC. The difference is, now millions of people are watching to make sure they follow through. We will not stop, and we will keep going, until we see a sustainable 1.5 pathway and a just transition to a cleaner and fairer future for us all."

**Mohamed Adow, International Climate Lead, Christian Aid, said:**

"Despite this being called the Climate Action Summit, the concrete outcomes we saw here did not match up with the demands made by science and the schoolchildren who went on strike around the world on Friday.

"The UN Secretary General was right to call it but world leaders clearly failed to live up to the platform he gave them. The few actions that have been announced are far from world changing and that is what is required.

"As Greta Thunberg told them in her opening speech, how dare they.

"Time is running out for countries to drastically strengthen their commitments to reduce emissions and provide the needed finance for poor countries to adapt to the impacts of this climate crisis. Currently they are failing us."

**Harjeet Singh, ActionAid's Global Lead on Climate Change, said:**

"Young people have exposed the shameless lack of leadership from heads of state, who have looked the other way for decades, as the climate crisis has escalated and the planet burned.

"This Summit was supposed to be a turning point. But we have seen an exceptional lack of commitment from the biggest and richest polluting countries that continue to take trivial measures toward solving a life or death crisis.

"Rich countries need to take greater responsibility for the mess they have made.

"The UN Secretary General urged world leaders to rise to the challenge and take bold action to ensure a safe future. But the countries that have responded with the most concrete actions are the ones most vulnerable to climate impacts.

"At this late stage when the window of opportunity is shrinking, we need leaders to show courage, not cowardice."

**Lucile Dufour, International Policy Advisor, Climate Action Network France, said:**

"As many leaders arrived empty-handed at the UN Climate Action Summit, French President Macron announced his support to a 55 % emission reduction target by 2030 in the European Union and confirmed that France would double its pledge to the GCF with 80 % of the contribution in the form of grants. These international commitments are welcome, but President Macron forgot to mention the very inconvenient reality of national climate policies: in 2018, France exceeded its carbon budget by 4,5 % and still provides more than EUR 11bn in fossil fuel subsidies. Ambitious targets won't have any impact if they are not backed up with bold policies to reach them. France, as well as other developed countries, should be

reminded that true climate leadership means concrete and urgent actions at home, not shiny speeches in front of world leaders.”

**Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Leader of WWF’s Global Climate and Energy Practice, said:**

Secretary-General Gueterres was courageous in holding the bar high for the Summit. And some important transformational announcements were made, on long-term decarbonisation, and sectoral transformation in the finance, food and cooling sectors. These are exemplary commitments. However, if heavy emitters don’t come on board, the needle will not move.

The Summit has been critically important in forcing the world to become laser-focused on the climate crisis. Clearly though, we are yet to see the scale of change and commitment needed to address it. This is the message that must now travel to COP25 and COP26 by which time countries must deliver the ambition we need to ensure the Paris Agreement succeeds.

**Vanessa Perez-Cirera, Deputy Leader of WWF’s Global Climate and Energy Practice, said:**

Nature-based climate solutions emerged as one of the most promising strands of work moving forward from the Summit. We need to see 3% of climate investment going to nature-based climate solutions to rapidly scale and focus on the most vulnerable people and the ecosystems that sustain their livelihoods.

**Alden Meyer, Director of Strategy and Policy, Union of Concerned Scientists, said:**

“In her blunt and powerful speech at the Climate Action Summit this morning, Greta Thunberg laid down a clear line in the sand, separating those countries and leaders who are united behind the science from those who continue to place the profits of fossil fuel polluters above the safety of their citizens. Sadly, most leaders from the world’s largest emitting countries failed this litmus test, dodging their responsibility to step up action as is essential to address the climate emergency we now face.

“In sharp contrast, many vulnerable nations on the frontlines of climate change joined a growing number of state and local governments, business leaders, investors and others—both in the United States and around the world—by announcing transformational commitments to achieve net zero emissions by no later than 2050, shift investments from dirty to clean energy, get 100 percent of their energy from renewable sources and boost support for climate action by developing countries.

“While these announcements are welcome, their collective impact on global emissions falls well short of what is needed. The science is clear: staving off the worst impacts of climate change requires ALL countries to implement bold actions across all economic sectors to urgently reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases, including by immediately halting the construction of new coal plants and eliminating the hundreds of billions of dollars in annual subsidies for production and consumption of fossil fuels.

“History has demonstrated that such a transformation can happen quickly, if there is sufficient political will. It is long past time for so-called ‘world leaders’ to lead—or make room for those who will.”

**Rachel Cleetus, Policy Director in the Climate and Energy Program and Lead Economist, Union of Concerned Scientists, said:**

“More intense hurricanes and wildfires, rising seas, worsening drought, and record-breaking heat—every day the world’s youth wake up to more evidence that the climate crisis is already here and is having a disproportionate impact on those who have the least resources to cope. This week, led by the youth, more than 4 million people took to the streets to challenge the poor decisions being made by older generations that have left them angry and fearful of their future.

“In New York City today, we saw glimmers of ambition in the announcements made by vulnerable nations, states, cities, investors and businesses, including efforts to stop building new coal plants by 2020 and transition to renewable energy, ramp up energy efficiency, and conserve 30 percent of the Earth’s lands and oceans by 2030. Notably, the Climate Investment Platform will seek to directly mobilize \$1 trillion in clean energy investment by 2025 in 20 least developed countries. However, the true test will be whether these promises will be followed by swift action at the scale the world needs.

“Despite this ever-present crisis and the clear warning issued by world scientists in the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 Degrees, global warming emissions have risen for the second year in a row and nations still rely heavily on and even promote fossil fuels. The world’s largest emitters continue to act at odds with what the science shows is needed to avert even worse and more costly climate impacts, and many policymakers remain beholden to fossil fuel interests. It’s time for world leaders to heed the clarion call of those that will inherit this Earth when they are gone by taking urgent actions to rapidly transition towards a clean, renewable and climate-resilient future.”

**Sven Harmeling, Global Policy Lead on Climate Change and Resilience, CARE International, said:**

“The UN Secretary General’s call for countries to come bearing ambitious, new plans was largely ignored. While we welcome a handful of strong commitments delivered at the Summit, countries absent and repackaging old commitments as new did not go unnoticed.

Political leaders seem to think the protesters and public outcry is a phase that will run out of steam, but the climate crisis is only gaining pace, and public demands will too, until bold actions are taken.

To prevent a rise above 1.5C, we must put pressure on the biggest causers of the climate crisis. Decision-makers can no longer pass the torch to address the climate crisis. We cannot say next time, at the next meeting, leaders will do better. Flashy speeches will no longer be praised and leaders who fail their people are being held accountable.”

**Catherine Abreu, Executive Director, Climate Action Network Canada, said:**

Most leaders completely failed to meet the bar for ambitious climate action set by Greta Thunberg and Secretary General Guterres in New York today. What is more telling is that many of those who failed clearly thought they were bringing something worthwhile to the stage. This is the challenge we are faced with: more government and private sector leaders than ever are conscious of the need to respond to the demands for climate action coming from millions of young people and citizens around the world, but they, and the institutions behind them, have no experience mustering the level of conviction this challenge requires. They are used to rolling along with a status quo economy mired in fossil fuel addiction and status quo politics that kowtow to the interests of the fossil fuel industry.

Leadership is a muscle and when it comes to climate action, many world governments - particularly G20 governments - are wildly out of shape. Fortunately, many of the world’s most vulnerable nations, communities, and Indigenous peoples on the frontlines of climate change have a workout plan rich governments can use to get in shape fast, before it's too late.

**Jake Schmidt, Managing Director, International Program, Natural Resources Defense Council, said:**

“With climate damages and global temperatures escalating, world leaders failed to show they fully understand the crisis and that they stand with young people around the world demanding stronger climate action right now. Their words must be followed by deeds. This moment demands much greater ambition in the fight to avert a full-blown climate catastrophe.”

**Andrew Steer, President & CEO, World Resources Institute, said:**

“While countries were expected to come to the Summit to announce that they would enhance their climate ambition, most of the major economies fell woefully short. Their lack of ambition stands in sharp contrast with the growing demand for action around the world. Many businesses and investors are ramping up their efforts, which should increase momentum. Similarly, smaller nations, especially the most vulnerable countries, are pushing ahead. But we need far greater national leadership on climate action– and we need it now. The Summit must be a springboard for action not the end of the road.

“The Summit did produce inspiring signs of progress, especially with the emergence of dynamic partnerships and coalitions. In many cases, the private sector and subnational actors are moving faster than national governments. For example, 87 businesses have signed onto to ambitious 1.5 degree C targets across their operations and value chains. More than 100 cities committed to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. The Gates Foundation, the World Bank and several governments announced \$790 million to enhance resilience of over 300 million small-holder farmers. More than 130 banks, with \$47 trillion in assets, signed onto new climate principles. Fifteen governments and 10 companies committed to accelerate energy efficiency by 3% per year, and others have joined a new initiative to support of zero-carbon buildings. Other commitments ranged from expanding natural solutions and protecting the ocean to investors incorporating climate-risks into their portfolios.

“Last week, we saw the largest climate demonstrations in history, with young people leading the way. This is the generation who will face the brunt of climate change. All leaders need to step up their ambition. We can still get ahead of the climate crisis, but we need world leaders to act now.”

**Christoph Bals, Policy Director, Germanwatch, said:**

"This summit is a special moment in the big struggle to implement a new global social contract based on Paris, human rights, and Sustainable Development Goals. GretaThunberg and Fridays for Future are fighting hard for youth future generations.”

**Olga Boiko, Regional Coordinator of the CAN Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, said:**

“NGOs in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region welcome the decision of the Russian government to ratify the Paris Agreement. Russia already feels the negative consequences on itself. Recent fires in Siberia, the drying up of rivers and the melting of permafrost are not only an environmental disaster, but also an economic disaster. We hope that Russia will begin to develop energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, and most importantly, it will cease to produce and export fossil fuels to other countries. It’s time for Russia to get off the oil needle and stop holding others on it.”

**Arshak Makichyan, Eco-activist, Representative of the International Environmental Movement Fridays for Future in Russia, said:**

“We have long been waiting for the moment when Russia ratifies the Paris agreements, finally this moment has come, but what next? An environmental crisis is taking place in Russia now and we do not see any real action on the part of the government. And plans to build infrastructure for oil production in the Arctic scare me. Is Russia really going to switch to renewable energy sources or does ratification of the Paris Agreements mean nothing and everything will remain as it was? We urgently need to declare a climate emergency and stop hiding the truth about the climate crisis in the media.”

**Jennifer Tollmann, Policy Advisor for Climate Diplomacy, Risk and Security, E3G - Third Generation Environmentalism, said:**

“This summit has shown that major emitters-particularly the EU and China- still believe delay is politically and diplomatically sustainable. That the backlash from high-carbon interests will be more dangerous than the backlash from the people on the streets. With COP26 on the horizon as the first Paris Agreement litmus test and impacts across the world already significantly worse than expected – their window to gamble with their citizens safety is closing.”

“Europe and its largest member state Germany delivered deeply underwhelming contributions to the UN Climate Action Summit. Flying in the face of mounting climate impacts, even in Europe, and the vocal support of their own citizens and youth activists. With Chancellor Merkel taking on the EU presidency in 2020, she will need to make good on rumours of outreach in support of a joint EU-China ambition announcement. As well as moving the foot from the brake to the accelerator of the European drive for ambition in 2030.”

**Alejandro Aleman, Climate Change Officer, Centro Humboldt, Nicaragua and CAN Latin America Coordinator, said:**

“We heard speeches from 10 countries from Latin America. Some were definitely more encouraging than others. Hearing about the carbon neutrality and the moratorium of fossil fuels are good as headlines but we need sustain actions for a resilient future more than tabloids. There was a vast recognition from leaders about the richness of the region: we have the sources to keep wellbeing in our own territories; glaciers, forest, badland, corals and we are rich in renewable energy sources. So, what is missing them? An accountable system, will, transparency, and a clear understanding that by protecting nature you are also ensuring human rights, nowadays disregarded in many countries from LAC. And, as Greta Thunberg rightly pointed out, we have to be brave and abandon paradigms that were hidden under the absolute truth’s clothes and we must take the risk of looking at our people, our culture and build our own wellbeing. We won't accept otherwise.”

**Iain Keith, Avaaz Campaign Director, said:**

“Climate courage is on the rise. Millions of kids bravely walking out of school, a UN that challenges its members, and indigenous people’s fighting fires in the Amazon. Everyone in the world wants action on climate change NOW. But it takes courage to take the first step down a new path, and leaders of major polluters need to find it, or be pushed by 15 years olds.”

**Sanjay Vashist, Director, Climate Action Network South Asia:**

“Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s announcement today to increase India’s renewable energy target from 175 GW by 2022 to 450 GW post-2022 indicates India’s political will to accept the challenge from the UN for more ambitious targets to curb greenhouse gas emissions. But to turn words into action, India will need both financial and technological support from developed countries to speed up its intake of

renewable energy currently in the range of 70 to 80 GW. India also can and must demonstrate climate leadership to assist other south Asian countries in their bid to increase their renewable energy targets.”

### **Climate Finance**

**Sven Harmeling, Global Policy Lead on Climate Change and Resilience, CARE International, said:**

“There will be no climate justice without greater financial support from developed countries to countries most impacted by the climate crisis. CARE welcomes those who have made a range of new pledges to the Green Climate Fund, particularly Sweden. Yet, some major donors, such as Japan and Australia, still have not stepped up. We are disappointed by the complete lack of attention to innovative public finance sources, such as levies on the aviation sector and fossil fuel exploration. Such sources are necessary to raise truly additional money in the order of tens of billions of USD to support poor communities facing climate impacts.”

**Liane Schalatek, Associate Director, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Washington, DC, and CSO Active Observer for Developed Countries for the Green Climate Fund (GCF), said:**

“Developed countries collectively failed to show that with the climate crisis growing so must their solidarity with developing countries, especially SIDS and LDCs, and their moral commitment to right a polluting wrong by providing adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources. While we welcome the additional commitments to the replenishment of the Green Climate Fund, as well as new pledges for the LDCF and the Adaptation Fund, few developed countries, with the exception of Sweden or Luxembourg, have provided the kind of ambitious funding support on a per capita basis that would match rich countries’ expectation for developing countries to upgrade their NDCs in 2020. More generous public grant financing support, and especially increased financing for adaptation is needed to take responsibility and provide climate justice.”

**Brandon Wu, Director of Policy and Campaigns, ActionAid USA, said:**

“We welcome the doubling of pledges to the Green Climate Fund from some European countries, though many of the wealthy countries have been conspicuously silent. Yet we echo Greta Thunberg, who said that nothing would be announced today on the right scale to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees.

“Indeed, the finance that rich countries are putting on the table is nowhere near what is actually needed. Looking at the numbers, the inescapable conclusion is that rich country governments do not take this crisis seriously.”

**Eddy Pérez, International Policy Analyst, Climate Action Network Canada, said:**

The Secretary-General asked leaders to come to the UN Climate Action Summit with concrete plans for a climate-neutral future by 2050. This transition has a cost, particularly when major emitters are still giving up to 5.2 trillion to the oil industry. Vulnerable countries already bear the brunt of the climate crisis. Asking them to also cover all costs for this transition represents a major injustice. We welcome pledges from countries doubling their contribution to the Green Climate Fund and look forward to future contributions from Japan, Australia and other nations at the upcoming pledging conference in France. We also welcome the announcement from the UN-backed asset owner alliance to drive portfolio companies to carbon neutrality by 2050. But we are concerned that finance for adaptation continues to be almost ignored by rich leaders, while adaptation needs are increasing rapidly. Rich, industrialized economies,



particularly those absent today, must fulfil their obligation and help vulnerable countries accelerate their transition towards a more just, equitable and climate-neutral world.

**Nathaniel Keohane, Senior Vice President for Climate, Environmental Defense Fund, said:**

“Millions of students and young people around the world took to the streets on Friday to demand climate action. But while there were promising steps taken in areas like shipping and nature-based solutions, on the whole the Summit failed to deliver the increased ambition we need to see from countries. With the signs of a hotter planet becoming ever more apparent, it’s long past time that leaders in Washington, D.C., and capitals around the world took action. In the United States, that means legislation in Congress that puts us on a path to a 100% clean economy -- producing no more climate pollution than we can remove by 2050 at the latest.”

### **Unlocking the Potential of Nature in Climate Action**

**Teresa Anderson, Climate Policy Coordinator, ActionAid International, said:**

"That statement by dairy giant Danone was an eye-opener. When even the big food corporations admit that their approach to farming is killing the planet, then you know the jig is up for big industrial agriculture. This admission comes when their destructive practices are finally in the climate spotlight. But they should have shown this honesty decades ago.

“When they have been part of the problem for so long, they now want to be part of the solution. The question is, can we really trust them to get their house in order quickly enough? Instead of looking to the same damaging corporations for solutions, governments must set policies to ensure a profound change in the way food is produced.

“We need policy makers to be courageous. They need to stand up to powerful agribusiness corporations, and make sure that food systems work with nature instead of destroying it.”

**Genevieve Jiva, Coordinator, Pacific Islands Climate Action Network, said:**

Throughout the UNSG Climate Action Summit, the Marshall Islands, Fiji and Palau showed the ambitious and continued leadership of Pacific large ocean states.

Through the High Ambition Coalition statement “Uniting Behind the Science to Step Up Ambition by 2020”, the Marshall Islands called for all countries to sign the statement and commit to stronger ambition and action.

Fiji showed that they are leading by example, highlighting specific actions including a revised NDC, issuing a Green Bond, relocating vulnerable communities and committing to achieve 100% renewable by 2030.

Palau emphasized the importance of partnerships and that we can all be part of the solution. We look forward to seeing this in action when Palau hosts the Our Oceans Conference in 2020.

In the lead up to the Climate Summit, the UN held a Youth Summit which was attended by a number of Pacific Youth representatives, climate warriors who brought the voices of their communities to the international arena. Young leaders are calling on all of us to work together to address the climate crisis.

Save the Pacific, save the world.

### **Towards a Resilient Future**

**Sriram Madhusoodanan, Corporate Accountability, said:**

Billed as a moment to reboot ambition on climate action, the most abiding outcome of the U.N. Secretary-General's climate summit is that it has provided yet another greenwashing opportunity for industries that are fueling and exacerbating the climate crisis and the Global North countries failing to live up to their obligations. Let's not kid ourselves: If we are to rise to the challenge of this historical moment, then governments must embrace the solutions led by communities on the global frontlines and reject the profiteering agenda of the fossil fuel industry and other polluting industries that have enriched themselves while fueling the climate crisis.

Youth have pointed out something that global movements for climate justice have been saying for decades -- governments that are part of the UN climate policymaking process-- particularly those most historically responsible-- have been more concerned about "money" than about the lives of people impacted by the crisis today. Friday's strike and Sunday and Monday's protests demanding an end to fossil fuel industry interference exposed just how deep the divide is between what people want and what actions politicians are willing to take.

Enough press conferences and corporate sideshows. It's time to kick Big Polluters and make them pay for real solutions.

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### ***About CAN***

*Climate Action Network (CAN) is a global network of over 1,300 NGOs in more than 120 countries working to promote government and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels. More information on [www.climatenetwork.org](http://www.climatenetwork.org)*