

Why the UK must submit an ambitious national climate plan (NDC) to the UN, and what this plan should contain

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Christian Aid calls on MPs to write to the Prime Minister (copied to the Business Secretary) asking him to submit an ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC that is in line with the Paris Agreement and climate science.

To set the world on a path to keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, it is critical that the UK NDC:

- Commits to an ambitious target for cutting emissions by 2030, solely through domestic action;
- Bases its target on the scientific evidence provided by the Committee on Climate Change;
- Includes clear commitments to support climate-vulnerable countries with climate finance, adaptation, capacity-building and technology transfer;
- Aligns with other multilateral processes of which the UK is a signatory such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).

What's the context?

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are national climate plans which every country signed up to the Paris Agreement should submit to the UN climate body (UNFCCC) by the end of 2020.

These should indicate how each country will contribute to keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees in line with the scientific recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The combined NDCs submitted in 2015 were not ambitious enough and set the world on course to warming of 3 degrees, which would be catastrophic for people and planet. Consequently, the signatories to the Paris Agreement agreed to submit more ambitious NDCs by the end of 2020.

In 2015, the UK's plans were incorporated into the European Union's NDC. Following Brexit, the UK needs to submit its own NDC. The UK NDC is critical for two reasons. As the sixth largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution, the UK has contributed disproportionately to the climate crisis and bears a moral responsibility to lead the world in ambitious action. Secondly, as the President of the COP26 UN climate talks in November 2021, the UK Government's national plan will set the bar for other countries.

In July 2019, Parliament passed legislation requiring the target of net zero emissions to be met by 2050. This target will not be met unless the bulk of emissions are cut by 2030. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a deep health and economic crisis in the UK and globally, making it even more important that the Government leads the world in accelerating the transition to net-zero. By focusing recovery policies on green jobs, infrastructure and protecting ecosystems, climate action must be at the heart of our economic recovery.

Impact of the climate crisis on the world's poorest communities – compounded by Covid-19

Christian Aid and our partners work in some of the world's poorest communities. On a daily basis, we witness the havoc that climate change is wreaking on the lives and livelihoods of millions.

Those who have had the least to do with causing this crisis are now living and dying with its consequences. By mid-September 2020, over 51 million people globally were recorded as having been directly affected by floods, droughts, or storms this year alone¹.

Countries are confronting multiple health, social and economic crises triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet for some of the most marginalised people in rural areas of the world's poorest countries - such as women subsistence farmers - the climate crisis remains the greatest single threat. Many of these communities rely on the land and on ecosystems for their income and food. And these ecosystems are invariably highly vulnerable to climate change.

When the world recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, we must not accelerate from one crisis into another. Business as usual could provide a temporary fix to the world economy but will perpetuate longstanding economic and social inequalities as well as environmental degradation. This will ultimately threaten people and planet. This is why the UK Government, as the host of COP 26, must lead the world to a sustainable, green and just recovery.

What should the UK Government's NDC do?

It is critical that the UK NDC:

- Commits to an ambitious target for cutting emissions by 2030 solely through domestic action - as advised by the Committee on Climate Change - without relying on any overseas carbon credits.
- Bases its emissions target on the science-based advice provided by the Committee on Climate Change. Some current research indicates that cuts of around 75% against 1990 levels by 2030 are feasible and realistic.
- Includes ambitious commitments to supporting climate-vulnerable countries with climate finance, adaptation, capacity-building and technology transfer. The NDC must not be confined to climate mitigation - i.e. emissions cuts - and climate-related disclosure. It must adhere to Article 3 of the Paris Agreement and address national contributions to climate adaptation - so that communities in the UK and overseas already adversely affected by climate change can adapt and build their resilience to future climate shocks; capacity-building in zero carbon technologies; and technology transfer to those who need it.
- Aligns with the multilateral processes that the UK is a signatory of, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).
- Contributes to a 2050 long-term strategy that takes the UK to net zero emissions, phases out the use of fossil fuels, focuses on energy efficiency and renewable energy, and protects and restores biodiverse ecosystems for the benefit of people and planet.

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¹ <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/09/Extreme-weather-events-and-COVID-19-V4.pdf>