

Voluntary Submission to the COP26 – Anglican Consultative Council – November 2021



“Climate Change is the greatest challenge that we and future generations face. When we look at Jesus, we see one who instinctively stood alongside the most vulnerable in society. It is absolutely clear that following Jesus must include standing alongside those that are on the frontline of this unfolding catastrophe”.

- President of the Anglican Consultative Council and spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby

Introduction: The Anglican Communion and the Climate Emergency

The Anglican Consultative Council facilitates the co-operative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion¹ – the world’s third largest Christian communion--and helps to co-ordinate common action. The Anglican Consultative Council welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) as an admitted non-governmental organisation for the first time.

The Anglican Communion consists of 85 million members across 165 countries. Across the Anglican Communion people are experiencing the devastating impacts of the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.² However, in the face of an uncertain future, they are also developing skills in adaptation, mitigation, disaster response, disaster preparedness, resilience and advocacy. Anglicans across the world have long been concerned with environmental issues and member churches of the Anglican Communion³ have valuable experience, expertise and learning to contribute to global efforts to tackle climate change. **The negotiations at COP26 and global decisions on climate change are therefore issues of significance and importance to the Anglican Communion.**

Key concerns for COP26: Climate resilience, just finance and political courage

The experience and expertise of Anglicans across the world has led the Anglican Consultative Council to focus on two key concerns within the wide array of issues to be negotiated at COP26: **climate resilience** and **just finance**. Additionally, we raise the importance of centering the voices and participation of indigenous peoples and youth as groups that are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis and whose perspectives are critical to a just response.

Climate Resilience and Adaptation

As the country holding the Presidency of COP26, the United Kingdom has stated that one of its key goals for the conference is to find agreement on the need to ‘urgently adapt to protect communities and natural habitats’ and has said that “the international community must unite and support people who are most vulnerable to the impacts of the changing climate”.

¹ The Anglican Communion is the world’s third largest Christian communion, comprised of forty-two provinces across 165 countries representing 85 million members, all working in various capacities to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence, pursue peace and reconciliation, safeguard creation and act in loving service.

² It should be understood that while the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change focuses predominantly on climate change, the interrelated crises of biodiversity loss and pollution deserve equal attention.

³ The Anglican Episcopal family comprises tens of millions Christians who are members of 46 different Churches. These make up 41 member churches (also called provinces) and five other national or local churches known as Extra Provincials, spread across the globe.

As climate-related disasters have increased in intensity and frequency in recent years, disaster preparedness and building resilience has become even more critically important. The Anglican Communion has long been aware of the devastating impacts of both sudden-onset and slow-onset disasters. Local churches are often on the frontline of disasters, both impacted by them and responding to the needs of the affected communities.

Building resilience and adaptation activities should be contextual and supported as a localised, grassroots-level activity. **It involves processes that demand significant time, energy, and resources, and, as such, requires adequate financing, with a focus on justice and equity, to achieve its goals.** Because the climate crisis disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable in our global family, there is a particular obligation to prioritise the needs of those communities most threatened by the impacts of climate change.

It is important to note, however, that building resilience has its limits. It should never be an isolated activity, nor is it the sole responsibility of affected communities to build their resilience without proper support, including financial. Therefore, **resilience should never be used as an excuse for failing to focus on--and finance--mitigation activities and losses and damages.** Both adaptation and mitigation require practical resources such as new technologies and infrastructure as well as the financing to support them. Notably, these technologies are primarily held by wealthy countries; therefore, facilitated technology transfers to lower-income, highly vulnerable countries must be part of a just approach to climate resilience.

Just Finance

There are shocks and stressors that even the most resilient communities are unable to withstand, such as multiple disasters or loss of land due to rising sea levels. Inevitable consequences of the worsening impacts of climate change, such as loss of human life and economic instability, necessitate effective loss and damage mechanisms. **Loss and Damage should be mobilised to measure the societal and financial costs of climate impacts, especially those losses that are enduring, such as species extinction, or life-disrupting damage such as demolished infrastructure.**⁴ At COP26, Parties must prioritise putting in place the necessary financial mechanisms to provide compensation to those communities and countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Those countries most on the forefront of climate change will be financially overburdened by the task of tackling both current and future losses and damages.⁵ **The acknowledgment that climate impacts, and its related environmental crises of biodiversity loss and pollution, are not equally distributed and have disproportionate effects on historically marginalised or underserved communities demands that a justice lens be applied to all climate action—financing and resilience included.** A climate justice, rights-based approach stresses that the burden of climate change exacerbates pre-existing inequities and vulnerabilities, with countries in the majority world (sometimes referred to as the Global South) bearing the largest burden, and proposes ways of addressing these imbalances, including centering those most affected in our response.

Critical need for political courage

This statement is both a call for ambitious and bold policy decisions as well as imagination and vision, especially from leaders and those tasked with negotiating at COP26. **Addressing climate change requires not only policy leadership but also political courage to take the actions necessary.** Whilst the global and historic significance of what was

⁴ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-dealing-with-the-loss-and-damage-caused-by-climate-change>

⁵ https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ClimateFinance_LossDamage.pdf

achieved at the 21st UN Climate Change conference in Paris in 2015 was rightly celebrated, **commitments made but not delivered on will be an injustice that has biggest impact on those least responsible for causing climate change.**

Alongside coming to COP26 with robust policy commitments that meet the urgency of this moment, our world leaders must also deliver on what has been already promised and bring determination to agree what must still be achieved, including:

- Meeting the \$100bn per year commitment of climate finance to poorer countries
- Agree new targets to enable them to become climate resilient
- Provide the necessary financial support to enable genuine adaptation and also to agree a financing mechanism for loss and damage

Climate justice emphasises the principle of common but differentiated responses.⁶ **We call on wealthier countries to show moral leadership and political courage both in reducing their own emissions and providing finance to poorer nations--to facilitate resilience-building, enable adaptation and mitigation activities, and address loss and damage.** We call on leaders to look beyond election cycles and short-term political gain. In addition to agreeing and delivering short-term actions to increase ambition immediately, COP26 must also not overlook the urgent need to deliver action to achieve medium- and long- term commitments.

Inclusion of indigenous peoples, women, and youth

Experiences and testimony from across the Anglican Communion establish the significance and necessity of lifting up **Indigenous communities**, whose very survival and way of life is threatened by the climate emergency; **young people**, who are now facing the fallout of decisions made by past generations; and **women**, who are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change across all population groups. As such, we wish to emphasise the following:

- Indigenous perspectives on the climate emergency and stewardship of natural resources offer both practical and spiritual responses. Indigenous peoples are holders of local knowledge on the sustainable management of lands, forests, and earth's abundance and emphasise connection and relationship with the natural world. While Indigenous voices are increasingly being recognised in climate discussions, their ability to meaningfully participate in and influence decision-making remains limited. **Their voices must be centered in policy advocacy and their equal participation assured in decision-making spaces.**
- The failure of those in positions of power and authority to address the crisis with adequate resources and sufficient urgency has impacted the well-being and opportunities of young people and motivated them to mobilise globally for climate action on a scale not seen on any other policy issue. Young people are seeing the effects of inaction on a daily basis; therefore, if genuine solutions to the climate crisis are to be achieved, **the voices, experiences and ambitions of young people must be at the heart of the climate decision-making process.**
- Evidence shows that women are disproportionately impacted by the negative consequences of the climate crisis, particularly those living in low-income contexts affected by poverty and with limited access to resources. For example, women are more likely than men to die in climate-related natural disasters and are more vulnerable to sexual abuse when they are displaced from

⁶ <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/07/what-is-climate-justice/>

their homes.⁷ As such, **it is critical that any environmental intervention must be gender-sensitive with all responses carried out with the full inclusion, participation, and decision-making of women of all ages.**

Recommendations

Drawing on the distinctive experience and expertise of Anglicans around the world, **the Anglican Consultative Council calls for concrete actions** to be taken by policy makers, governments, multilateral organisations, private sector, and civil society, including faith-based organisations, in key areas:

- Governments, multilateral organisations, financial institutions and private sector business should **recognise the strategic importance of faith actors and include them as key partners** in disaster preparedness, response, and other adaptation and mitigation activities.
- Faith actors should leverage both their **capacity and influence to advocate for urgent, bold climate action by key stakeholders**. They should also utilise their capacity to transform hearts and minds away from destructive attitudes and behaviours towards responsible creation care.
- Resilience planning must include **comprehensive, multi-sector interventions and responses supported by adaptive and flexible funding** and designed with the active participation of local and affected communities, particularly Indigenous peoples, women, and youth.
- **Investment in localised capacity building through just financing practices and the inclusion of local practitioners in policy and other decision-making spaces** is key to an effective global response to climate disasters and resilience building.
- Governments, especially those in the Global North, must **fulfil their financial commitments to climate finance**, scale up development assistance to support mitigation and adaptation initiatives, encourage financial institutions to provide grants, rather than loans, and **consider broad-based debt relief for financially overburdened countries**.
- **Technology transfers and sharing of information** across countries should be expediently facilitated to support resilience building measures, **especially in climate-vulnerable countries**.

An urgent call to action

These actions, along with the well-understood need to drastically reduce carbon emissions, are critical to prevent irreversible climate catastrophe and protect our common home. We must also acknowledge that actions, particularly those that are bold in the face of the current political inaction on climate change, are difficult to sustain unless there is also the transformation of hearts and minds from which such action flows. The climate crisis is not simply a physical crisis--it is also a spiritual one.

To respond to the climate crisis, we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. Hearts and minds must shift in order to change the way we see the world and how we relate to it.

Those who hold an extractive worldview---one in which we see the world as something to be exploited and is prevalent in industrialised countries whose wealth is derived from an economy based on extractive industries, such as gas, oil, and mining and high levels of consumerism--need to turn away from such a mindset and embrace one of

⁷https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

relationship and interconnectedness. An extractive worldview that regards the earth as a commodity that can be used and exploited without regard for the consequences promotes unsustainable ways of living and is causing catastrophic harm and suffering. **Indigenous wisdom and a nature-centered worldview, which emphasise connection and interdependence, should shape our thinking moving forward--not only in our personal lives but also in our corporate decision making, political thinking and economic philosophies.**

Negotiations, such as those that will take place during COP26, are typically places of compromise and trading, where ambition is curbed in the face of political pragmatism and there is a disregard for morality as a determinant of action. Too often, national self-interest supersedes our collective wellbeing. **However, the scale and urgency of the climate emergency is such that politics must give way to action based on science and rooted in a moral call to acknowledge our interdependence with each other and the natural world. Inadequate action and compromise can no longer be the status quo.** The science shows that we must take bold, urgent action in the face of the climate emergency. Science also tells us it is still possible to avert widespread catastrophe. **The question is: do we have the faith to act?**