



YOUNG PEOPLE vs UK GOVERNMENT

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Young people to sue Boris Johnson for financing climate catastrophe

Today, 12 December, on the 5th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, three young people, Adetola Onamade, 23, Marina Tricks 19 and Jerry Amokwandoh, 22, together with the climate litigation charity Plan B and the Stop The Maangamizi campaign, launched a legal action against Boris Johnson and the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, alleging that the Government's ongoing financing of the climate crisis and its failure to develop a plan to tackle it, constitute a violation of

their rights to life and to family life, a violation of the Paris Agreement and a violation of international law.

They have sent Mr Johnson and Mr Sunak a formal “letter before action” which requires the Government to respond (normally within 14 days) or face adverse consequences in court.

As confirmed last week by the National Audit Office, the Government is failing to meet even its old, discredited domestic emission reduction targets, let alone “net-zero”. Boris Johnson’s “*10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution*” amounts to no more than £4billion in new funding compared to:

- £27billion of new investment in the road network
- £4billion climate condition-free loans for fossil-fuel based companies such as the US oil services company Baker Hughes, and airlines such as RyanAir, Easyjet and Wizzair.
- £1billion in export finance for a new liquid natural gas project in Mozambique.

Taken together these projects are inconsistent with the Government’s legally binding obligations under the Climate Change Act, the Human Rights Act and international law and consequently unlawful.

Recent reports from the Committee on Climate Change, the Government’s own statutory adviser, emphasise the gulf between the Government’s rhetoric on the climate emergency and action to implement practical and effective measures to tackle it:

“Overall the Government has only fully achieved two milestones out of the 31 set out in the 2019 Progress Report ...

... UK plans have failed to prepare for even the minimum climate risks faced”¹.

Crucially, the UK’s net-zero target does not account for the UK’s disproportionate consumption of fossil-fuel based imports, its continued commitment to maximising the recovery of North Sea oil and gas, and its leading role in financing fossil fuels projects overseas. As recently highlighted by Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency:

“[D]istressingly, [Aviva’s] analysis ... said the FTSE 100 index as a whole is heading towards 3.9 degrees”².

The Government claims to be showing leadership on the basis of an inadequate net zero target it is failing to meet. Yet, it has failed to prepare even for the minimum level of climate impact and plans to cut financial support for the most vulnerable communities around the world. It knows

¹

<https://d423d1558e1d71897434.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Reducing-UK-emissions-Progress-Report-to-Parliament-Committee-on-Climate-Change-002-1.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/adapting-to-4c-of-global-warming>

the City of London is financing levels of warming that would devastate our society, which is a form of terrorist funding and already terrorising young people and the Global South.

The three young people bringing the case are all British citizens but are from and have family in West Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, regions of the world which are already experiencing extreme impacts from climate change and ecological degradation. They are demanding that the Government take practical and effective measures, based on the science, to:

- a. meet its legally binding targets for reducing domestic greenhouse gas emissions;
- b. adapt to the impacts of climate change and to support vulnerable communities in adapting to the impacts of climate change;
- c. prevent UK-based financing from driving catastrophic levels of global warming.

They are also challenging the Chancellor's unlawful interpretation of "international obligations" as excluding international obligations relating to climate change. Since the Chancellor is required to take into account the UK's international obligations in managing financial crises, this calls into question the legality of much of the Treasury's decision-making during COVID-19.

Tim Crosland, Director, Plan B said:

"The Government has been emphasising its net zero target (even though it knows it is not meeting it) to distract us from the real story - the City of London's "world-leading" role in financing climate catastrophe. The FTSE100 is driving us towards 4°C warming, which is terrorism for the younger generation and terrorism for the Global South. How can the Government provide "global leadership" through COP26 and the G7 without first confronting the true extent of the UK's complicity in the crisis?"

Marina Tricks, 19, said:

"This government is criminal and as a younger generation we will not be complicit. As a member of the Latinx diaspora, I will not be complicit in the genocide of my people, the selling off of my futures or the uprooting of our heritage communities. We want to live full lives not just lives running from disasters. We do not, want to live in a world in which our friends and families living in Abya Yala, Afrika, Asia and the Caribbean are drowning, burning, starving or having to migrate because countries like the UK, who got rich off the back of colonialism, capitalism and slavery and who have a historic responsibility to tackle the climate crisis, are in fact deciding to carry on with business as usual."

Jerry Amokwandoh, 22, said:

“By the Government’s own admission it has failed to safeguard our fundamental human rights by ignoring its international obligations. Rather than funding repair for our communities, funding a sustainable future for our generation, and following the leadership of communities organising for planet repair globally, we are being made to invest in our own deaths and continuing to finance ecocide, dispossession, and genocide. UK leadership means stopping the harm now, and funding repair right across society.”

Adetola Onamade, 23 said:

“ We, as young people of the global majority, have witnessed the UK government fail to prepare and protect the most vulnerable in our communities, disproportionately on the frontlines of covid-19. This is no different to its flippant approach to the international risks of this climate crisis. The UK, with its predominant wealth dependent on the fossil fuels of the Industrial Revolution, had a historic responsibility to transition its economy. To not repeat the crimes of colonialism and erasure of whole cultures, communities and families. Instead, the government has prepared for 4 degrees warming and is complicit in the destruction our friends and family in the global majority face daily. We will not allow this trajectory to continue, our families lives depend on it! Your Global family’s lives depend on it!”

Note for editors

It has been estimated that the City of London finances a minimum of 15% of global emissions:

<https://carbontracker.org/uk-net-zero-2050-good-intentions-but-arent-we-missing-something/>

For a draft version of the letter see here (final version to go out Saturday 8am):

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IKGd_LaQZSwUC_NMs7ovFnFJf0zwqeJy-pg20LrOsb/edit?usp=sharing

For FAQs on the case see here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kn5RbiVBTA5b0J7RblaOuPdY5Hcx8jTCwG3MjQuWHjs/edit>

For our Crowdfunder appeal:

<https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/young-people-vs/>

For Podcast:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ezoHTFy0UFRRp4EOIQLIZ0Cc4cDfTbpk/view?usp=sharing>

[Plan B](#) is the climate litigation charity which brought a successful legal action against the Government's plans to expand Heathrow Airport, on the grounds that it had failed to take into account the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The [Stop the Maangamizi campaign: We Charge Genocide/Ecocide!](#), which is a key partner to the action, brings expert knowledge and practical organisational experience in critical legal praxis and its expression in 'law as resistance'.

Even with the current 1.2°C warming, people are dying and being displaced at scale. Research suggests the beyond 1.5°C the risks of multiple, simultaneous bread-basket failure rise substantially³.

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³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308521X18307674>