

New York, 11th September 2019

To the Secretary General of the United Nations
H.E. Mr. António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres GCC GCL

Days ago, you said that **we are facing a "dramatic climate emergency"**, and urged world leaders to come to the Climate Action Summit with concrete plans, not just beautiful speeches, to confront the crisis.

Today, I'm writing on behalf of the world's largest civic movement with over fifty million members across the world to offer our help in making this happen -- and to humbly suggest a way in which we could **turn September 23rd into a pivotal moment for global climate politics.**

Avaaz is already busy mobilizing for the September 20 global climate strike -- expected to be **the largest single day of youth-led climate action in history**. From Poland to Chile, New Zealand and Germany, our team is helping young activists mobilise at scale and meet with decision makers to lobby for the future they deserve - one where scientists are listened to, and zero carbon pollution is a reality.

Together, we're hoping to help drive more ambitions and action at the summit. Yet we are aware of the serious political headwinds you and your team are facing. It is not surprising that when we measure the likely outcomes against the science, on September 24th there will still be a massive gap to close between what is scientifically necessary and what is politically possible.

Mr Secretary General, I know you have already put so much on the line to ensure the success of this summit. But following discussions with top UN experts and journalists, I'd like to respectfully suggest there might be one more thing you can do -- **use the Climate Action Summit to establish a UN Climate Emergency Task Force** to lead efforts to realise the following:

1. *Deliver 2030 net zero UN climate plans by the 2020 UNFCCC COP26*
2. *Prepare agency level climate risk assessments by COP26*
3. *Brief the Security Council on the climate emergency on a quarterly basis*
4. *Support delivery of 1.5°C compatible Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term strategies by COP26*

With an average 1°C of warming, 2018 saw 28.9 million people in need of emergency assistance, 16.1 million people displaced by weather-related factors and \$215bn in financial losses. We all agree with the climate strikers that decisive action cannot be postponed anymore.

We welcome UN efforts to lead by example in the face of this emergency. However, as the attached briefing from the think tank E3G shows, **there is significant progress to be made**. For instance, while the 'greening the blue' initiative commits the UN to climate neutrality by 2020, 28 of the UN's 67 institutions were still not climate neutral in 2017.

We believe that the above 5-point plan would not only help make the UN fit for purpose in a climate emergency -- it would also show the world is prepared to embrace the bold leadership required to meet the global challenges of the day.

I realise this close to the summit, this might seem a lot to ask. However, having followed many of the communication discussions about the summit, I feel confident that this is the sort of new, dynamic initiative that the media would require coming out of the summit to tell a story of momentum. I also have no doubt, that if you invited the UN Family, the heads of the agency on the stage as you made this announcement, that they would respond.

Finally, a bold plan like this needs to be taken with the support of member states. In our conversations with various country governments, we have received **positive feedback from some of the world's largest economies** as well as the smallest and those most vulnerable to the climate crisis. There is still time to develop the buy-in needed to accomplish this, and as we mobilise people across the world on September 20th, I'm confident that support for the UN emergency task force can be a key demand.

Honourable Secretary General, I'd like to leave you with the words of the author Rebecca Solnit: "*Inside the word 'emergency' is 'emerge'; from an emergency new things come forth. The old certainties are crumbling fast, but danger and possibility are sisters.*" You have already declared a climate emergency, and with this summit and the announcement of a UN Climate Emergency Taskforce you can **show the world that whilst the danger is present, there is still possibility and there is still hope.**

Thank you for your time and consideration, I would be happy to discuss this idea, our briefing, and ways we can help make the summit a success with you and your team.

Yours Sincerely,



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PS - We've included a copy of the report, and a two-page summary below.

Copies of this letter are being sent to: Patricia Espinosa at UNFCCC; Amina Mohammed, DSG; Achim Steiner at UNDP; Inger Anderson at UNEP; Henrietta Fore at UNICEF; Filippo Grandi at UNHCR; Jean Pierre La Croix at UNDPKO; Petteri Taalas at WMO; Qu Dongyu at UNFAO; Tedros Adhanom at WHO; Audrey Azoulay at UNESCO; and Mami Mizutor at UNDRR.

The Case for a UN Climate Emergency Plan

Millions of people are striking in the streets, activist investors are challenging the status quo and mayors and business leaders are grasping the opportunities within their reach. Despite political commitment to climate action being at an all-time high, world leaders are failing to respond with the necessary urgency. Since the Spring of 2019, United Nations (UN) Secretary General António Guterres has been sounding the alarm by calling this crisis by name – a climate emergency. Yet, declaring a climate emergency is one thing, developing and acting on a climate emergency plan, is another.

The UN itself is exposed to climate change. Whilst Secretary General Guterres must empower and demand more of world leaders, he also needs to get his own house in order. A cocktail of escalating climate change, resource pressures, demographic shifts, mass urbanisation, widening inequality and political instability is straining the UN's operating system. In times of global emergency, a fit and functioning international system is needed more than ever.

Secretary General Guterres has rightly put pressure on UN Member States to put forward concrete action plans for tackling the climate emergency. To maximise the UN's political leverage, it is vital that the UN system itself responds to the climate emergency across all its operations. At the upcoming UN Climate Action Summit on 23 September, the UN Secretary General should establish a UN Climate Emergency Taskforce to:

- a. Deliver 2030 net zero UN climate plans by the 2020 UNFCCC COP26
- b. Prepare agency level climate risk assessments by COP26
- c. Brief the Security Council on the climate emergency on a quarterly basis
- d. Support delivery of 1.5°C compatible Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term strategies by COP26

A UN Climate Emergency Plan

The UN Climate Action Summit presents the UN with an opportunity to present its own Climate Emergency response plan. Building on engagement with UN and government stakeholders and analysis of best practice change processes in the UN system, this report recommends the following five-step plan.

1. Establish a UN Climate Emergency Taskforce

Overseeing and commanding the political support for change requires dedicated capacity. Similar UN approaches have been most effective when situated within the Secretary General's good offices.

The taskforce would provide a locus for strategy development, policy advice and support capacity building across the UN system. It would support the delivery of recommendations two through five below. To develop strong buy-in from UN agencies the UN's Climate Principles and/or other leadership groups could provide additional support and guidance. In addition, a channel for independent inputs and oversight would increase the effectiveness of this taskforce.

2. Deliver 2030 net zero UN climate plans by the 2020 UNFCCC COP26

These plans would be an upgrade from the 'climate neutral 2020' UN goal and go beyond decoupling and offsetting energy-related emissions. These plans should assess how the agency operations will align with net zero delivery and could positively affect ways of working and programming choices. For example, policy

advice relating to land, building, water and agriculture may shift, while stabilization and reconstruction approaches could alter.

100% renewable energy procurement should become a baseline. This includes field missions where there are significant cost saving opportunities¹. Other sectors including UN-related catering, travel and finance should also develop net zero plans. This may involve providing plant-based catering services, changing travel cultures and divesting UN funds and industries that are incompatible with zero. Offsetting should be strictly limited.

3. Prepare agency level climate risk assessments by COP26

Climate related risks from the transition and climate impacts will affect how the UN operates, altering geopolitical fault-lines, political alliances, conflict-related pressures, development and humanitarian responses.

Each agency should allocate capacity to prepare a climate risk assessment. The assessment will review the implications of Paris compatible warming (well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C) and contingency plan consistent with current (2.7-3.7°C), and worse, trajectories (4-6°C). These risk assessments should also include options for risk reduction strategies and be reviewed every three years. Independent analysis and oversight to support learning and best practice should also be incorporated.

4. Brief the Security Council on the climate emergency on a quarterly basis

Regular Security Council briefing is a cornerstone of any UN emergency response. In recent years the UN Security Council has been discussing climate-related security risks more regularly, largely integrated into other country or region focused Council debate. However, there is not a current practice of regular briefing on the state of the climate, monitoring climatic tipping point breach, emissions trajectories and emerging hot spots.

An annual report assessing immediate and medium-term climate-related risks to peace and security would support this process. Here analysis of emerging challenges to the financial and trade systems could also be prepared in consultation with the relevant bodies (the G20 Financial Stability Board and WTO respectively).

5. Support delivery of 1.5°C compatible NDCs and long-term strategies by COP26

Member-states are the primary delivery agents of the Paris Agreement. The UN can support countries by providing technical support to produce 1.5°C consistent Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC's) for both mitigation and adaptation, as well as net zero and resilience Long-term Strategies (LTS).

Beyond his Climate Action Summit this September, the Secretary General should play an ongoing role in convening countries and leaders to help build the political consensus for action. This agenda should include supporting countries to better understand climate-related choices in their national and collective interest and to develop new shared approaches for international responses, especially to climate impacts.

For further information please contact the author Camilla Born via email at: Camilla.born@e3g.org Or Avaaz Campaign Director Iain Keith on iain@avaaz.org

You can read the full report online [here](#).

¹ The humanitarian sector spent \$1.2 billion on diesel generators in 2017, Chatham House (2018) **The Costs of Fuelling Humanitarian Aid**