

Faith for the Climate: key principles for climate justice

The following principles were developed in consultation with the COP Faith Task Group, co-convened by [Faith for the Climate](#) and the [Environmental Issues Network](#) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. We welcome its dissemination and adoption amongst any faith or non-faith groups committed to climate action.

The COP26 negotiations represent perhaps the last opportunity to keep the world below 1.5 degrees of warming – an opportunity that must not be missed. Though the negotiations have now been postponed to November 2021, the work to be done is no less urgent. COP26 will now be the first meeting of the world’s climate leaders in the wake of Covid-19. The pandemic has shown once again that when crisis hits, vulnerable and marginalised people are worst affected and inequalities are exacerbated. This time, there must be no return to ‘business as usual’.

Covid-19 has also reminded us all that we are fundamentally dependent on one another. We celebrate that interdependence, and the mutual aid networks which are springing up in the midst of disaster. What comes next must be founded on cooperation, community and love. States and civil society must work together across sectors, borders and political allegiances to ensure that the recovery from this crisis is both green and just.

Faith groups have a powerful responsibility to take action on climate, both because of our engagement with the poorest communities around the world who are already suffering most, and because the climate crisis is an existential threat. It affects humanity at the deepest level, raising profound questions about our relationship with the living world. We must all try to find the moral courage to confront these questions, and to transform ourselves and our society.

We have heard the prophetic voices of the school strikers and others within and beyond our faith communities, and we are responding to their calls.

The following principles reflect our commitment to working together to bring about a just and sustainable society where wellbeing is not sacrificed for profit. As representatives of UK faith communities, we call upon government at all levels to put these principles at the heart of their response to the climate crisis.

1. Fulfilling our global responsibility

What it means: The UK has a huge historical ‘carbon debt’ – it is responsible for more of the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere than most other countries, and its wealth has been built on fossil fuel energy. Excessive extraction of natural resources, mostly in the global south for the benefit of the global north, has caused immense damage to people and nature. Those who are least responsible for the climate crisis are suffering first and most. This is an immense moral wrong.

The global activities of the UK and many UK-based corporations continue to contribute to the climate and environmental crisis. The UK must therefore play a leading role in the global transition to net zero.

Many of our faiths and belief systems are united by the ‘Golden Rule’: treat others as you wish to be treated. In a globalised world, this doesn’t apply only to our near neighbours – it calls us to take

responsibility for the global impacts of our actions, We must begin to ask how wealthy societies can make reparation for the harm caused by centuries of imperialism, extraction and exploitation.

All this is our shared understanding of what is meant by 'climate justice'.

What is needed:

- The UK must acknowledge its carbon debt and contribute to a just transition in poorer countries through finance and technology transfers
- The government should show leadership on establishing additional sources of finance for countries suffering loss and damage caused by climate-related disasters
- The UK must urgently take greater responsibility for emissions generated by its activities overseas, including through aviation, shipping and imported consumer goods, and should factor these emissions into its carbon budget
- There should be an immediate end to the use of public money to support fossil fuel projects either in the UK or overseas. This includes tax breaks, investments and export finance
- UK trade policy must be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental agreements such as the Paris Agreement. Trade deals must not be allowed to override these commitments.

2. Care for the living world

What it means: In all our diverse faith traditions, we find a common thread: the requirement to care for the earth. Yet across the world, species are declining at the fastest rate ever. For the sake of short-term profit for a few, we are destroying Creation.

The climate crisis and ecological breakdown are two results of the same problem: overconsumption and exploitation of the living world. Love and care for nature and all living things must be the foundation of our response. We are part of the living world and cannot thrive in isolation from it.

What is needed:

- Nature-based climate solutions, such as afforestation and peatland restoration, should be prioritised. We must not rely on resource-intensive and untested technologies for carbon capture and storage
- All farmers should be supported to adopt wildlife-friendly and low-carbon farming methods
- The UK government should introduce measures to address overconsumption through education and regulation.

3. A rapid just transition in the UK

What it means: We believe all life is sacred, and we deplore the rise in poverty and inequality witnessed in the UK in recent years. The urgent need to transition to zero-carbon presents an opportunity to build a fairer, healthier, more equal society where everyone can flourish. This is not inevitable, however: it will only happen if policies are designed to achieve it.

What is needed:

- The government must significantly increase support for green industries such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and zero-waste design
- Much greater investment is also needed in order to respond to the impacts of climate change, which disproportionately affect poorer people
- Policies and investment should be designed to benefit low-income households first. The transition to zero carbon must address economic and social inequalities in the UK, and all policies should be assessed against their impact on low-income households.

4. A collaborative and honest approach, involving all of society in the rapid changes required

What it means: Responding to the climate crisis requires major change across all sectors and all parts of society. The necessary changes will not be achieved without honest collaboration on difficult questions. We need spaces where citizens can respond with creativity, emotion and imagination to the challenges we are facing; where we can all participate in determining our shared future. We need acknowledgement in public discourse that this is vast, difficult and frightening. Anything less is a form of denial, and a betrayal: a betrayal of the poor by the rich, and of the future by the present.

The government has promised to take an ‘all-society approach’ to its COP26 presidency: we welcome this and intend to participate as fully as we can. We must see leadership from government on the difficult decisions that have to be made.

What is needed:

- We call for collaboration across government and strong engagement with civil society on our shared agenda for a just transition to net zero, including a clear framework for the ‘all-society approach’
- The government must set out comprehensive sector-by-sector plans for reaching net zero, with clear targets and lines of accountability for all government departments
- We ask all those responsible for scrutinising the government to seek evidence that this work is proving effective.