6 July 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing as 135 members of the UK’s climate change research community to urge you to challenge President Trump about his policy of inaction on climate change when he visits on 13 and 14 July 2018.

The UK has a strong track record on climate change. Margaret Thatcher was the first world leader to warn of the risks of rising greenhouse gas levels at the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and the UK became the first country in the world in 2008 to lay down in law, with strong support across the political spectrum, targets for reducing its emissions.

You have also demonstrated leadership on this issue domestically through your continued commitment to implementation of the Climate Change Act and your personal endorsement of the Clean Growth Strategy. Additionally you have shown international leadership through your personal involvement in discussions at, for instance, the One Planet Summit in Paris in December 2017, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April 2018, and most recently at the summit of G7 leaders in Charlevoix, Canada, in June 2018.

In contrast, President Trump has made clear that he does not intend to tackle climate change. He left the G7 summit before the discussion about climate change, and indicated that he would not sign that part of the communiqué. This was the latest signal by President Trump that the United States Government will not contribute to international efforts to manage the substantial risks caused by rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

President Trump announced in June 2017 that he is withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement and he has attempted to stop all financial support for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. With the help of the United States Congress, President Trump has also halted contributions to the Green Climate Fund which supports poor countries in their efforts to cut emissions and to make themselves more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including shifts in extreme weather events and sea level rise.

In addition, President Trump’s administration has attempted to weaken or remove many federal curbs on greenhouse gas emissions. As a result, the latest projections by the United States Energy Information Administration suggest that its annual energy-related emissions of carbon dioxide will rise in 2018 and 2019.

In refusing to take action on climate change, President Trump is ignoring the advice both of international experts and of experts in the United States, such as the Global Change Research Program and the National Academy of Sciences. Since his inauguration as President in January 2017, Mr. Trump has overseen a number of actions to undermine climate researchers in the United States whose findings are used by policy-makers around the world.

As the United States is the world’s second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, President Trump’s policy of inaction on climate change is putting at risk the UK’s national security and its
interests overseas. The Government’s ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review’, published in November 2015, identified climate change as a major driver of global risk which threatens stability overseas and the UK’s long-term security. The UK is already being directly affected by the impacts of climate change: from 2000 onwards, it has experienced its nine warmest years and six of its seven wettest years since records began in 1910.

We believe that the UK Government should challenge President Trump about this policy of inaction on climate change. President Macron of France has publicly criticised President Trump’s stance and we believe that the UK should take advantage of its special relationship with the United States to show similar leadership. We do not believe that the best interests of the UK, or the rest of the world, would be best served by attempting to appease President Trump on this issue.

The UK Government is well-placed to draw the attention of President Trump to the case for urgently recognising and managing the risks of climate change. It can demonstrate, for instance, that economic growth does not have to be sacrificed in order to tackle climate change. According to the latest figures, the United States increased its real GDP per capita by 44 per cent between 1990 and 2016, while its annual emissions of greenhouse gases rose by 2.4 per cent. Over the same period, the UK’s real GDP per capita climbed by 46 per cent, while its annual emissions fell by 41 per cent. Hence the UK has shown that it is possible to achieve economic growth while strongly reducing annual emissions of greenhouse gases.

Above all, the UK government should make the argument that policy-making about climate change should be based on the best available evidence. Policy-makers should draw on the findings of the global climate research community, and take account of the risks it poses across the world and to future generations. Climate change should not be treated as if it were just as an issue of partisan domestic politics.

We are signing as individuals, rather than as representatives of our employers, but we list our affiliations as evidence of our membership of the climate change research community.

Yours sincerely (in alphabetical order),

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