

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
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United Kingdom

CC: Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero; Rt Hon Therese Coffey MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, Minister for Development; Rt Hon Sir Alok Sharma MP, COP26 President

17 July 2023

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing this letter as the Friends of COP, a group appointed by the UK Government to advise and support the COP26 Presidency. We were proud to play our part in what was a remarkable achievement in Glasgow and, across the Presidency, a highpoint for “Global Britain” diplomacy.

We have reconvened and are writing at this time because of a shared and deep concern for your government’s lackadaisical approach to international climate, nature, and environment issues. At a time of multiple and interrelated global crises, and growing distrust between the Global North and South, it seems, inconceivably, that the UK’s interest in the world beyond its borders has narrowed.

It was especially concerning to read Lord Goldsmith’s resignation letter. That letter painted a picture of a government “simply uninterested” and “absent from key international fora” such as the critical Paris Summit. The letter also noted that the UK’s totemic £11.6 billion climate finance pledge had been “effectively abandoned,” due to the fiscal constraints of the 0.5% ODA settlement. And whilst we know the government’s position is that the latter point is not true, it is clear that the line only holds on the technicality that the inevitable failure to meet the pledge will come after the next election and will be the problem of the next government.

But despite all the above, we do believe you can recapture the COP Presidency’s spirit of leadership. Indeed, we believe it is critical that you do so, and that the following steps are imperative:

1. Any international leadership must flow from implementation of an ambitious domestic agenda. The UK’s world leading NDC was published in recognition of this fact. And you recognised this personally when you announced, at COP26, that the UK would be the world’s first Net Zero Aligned Financial Centre, and when you established the Transition Plan Taskforce. The UK must remain resolute in its domestic climate and energy commitments, ensuring all action and decisions are 1.5-aligned. A stable investment environment is also critical for businesses and for the City of London, not least to ensure the UK remains a world-leading green finance centre.
2. Domestic action alone is not enough -- we must also deliver on our international commitments. Most notably, it is time to set out a plan for the delivery of the UK’s £11.6 billion promise on international climate finance, which is not just the right thing to do, but also a matter of trust fundamental to much of the UK’s diplomacy around the world. It is no longer adequate to say the £11.6 billion will be delivered, given the recent evidence that delivery is technically impossible on the current trajectory. We must also remain committed to international finance reform, increasing access to climate funding (including at subnational and city level), our reputation as a leader in international financial institutions, and the timely implementation of the Paris roadmap – all of which underpins the Sustainable Development Goals and global transition agenda.

3. Finally, it is clear the global green economy is bringing with it new geopolitics, with critical new markets and consequential new players. This reality requires a renewed commitment to diplomacy and greater investment in the relationships and institutions that will shape the economic and political opportunities ahead. And there are ample opportunities for you to lean in personally, across some of the major moments ahead of us in the 2023 international calendar. Your attendance and focus on this agenda at the Africa Climate Summit (ACS), UNGA, and COP28 would be recognised and appreciated by key partners around the world, including all those with whom we work in the one-country-one-vote General Assembly. Supporting the ACS in particular would elevate the remarkable leadership of one of the UK's priority partners in Africa, demonstrate that the UK is keen to harness the opportunities of the Summit's climate-positive growth story, and lay the groundwork for the important second iteration of the UK-Africa Investment Summit in early 2024.

Prime Minister, embracing this agenda is good for the climate, for the environment, and for nature. That is a given. This agenda is also good for people around the world – whether in terms of health benefits, climate security, or economic recovery – including for the future generations to whom we as decision-makers have a profound responsibility.

This work is good for the UK, too. Delivering on our existing commitments and our carbon budgets is a powerful growth strategy that will ensure the UK can compete in the global green economy – in terms of jobs, prosperity, and economic security. In fact, both the evidence and the wisdom of the private sector are clear: the faster we move and the bolder we are, the greater the prize; the longer the delay, the greater the cost. And economics aside, this agenda is good for our diplomatic and geopolitical interests: friends and allies around the world still value the UK's partnership, resources, and expertise, and will welcome you back with open arms to the international stage and to vital multilateral fora.

As ever, we stand ready to support you as and when required.

Yours sincerely,
Friends of COP

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