

## **“How prepared is the international community to address the current environmental crisis”**

Global momentum and pressure to address the current climate crisis has been building ever since the mid-1980s but progress has certainly not been fast enough. Devastating, extreme weather events have continued to take place all over the world, from wildfires in Australia, Europe and the United States to a record-breaking 22 weather and climate disasters in 2020. Greta Thunberg, a nineteen-year-old environmental activist who is known for urging world leaders to take immediate action against climate change, was named Time Magazine’s “Person of the Year” in 2019, illustrating the culmination of social awareness about the necessity for drastic action. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that countries *do* have the ability to respond rapidly to a global emergency; the global response to the epidemic offers an opportunity for reflection where we must ponder how we can work together to address global crises more efficiently.

According to the Urban Development Overview, 55% of the world’s population lives in cities, accounting for 4.2 billion inhabitants, this number is projected to rise to two thirds by 2030. Therefore, the approach that cities maintain against climate change leads the charge and act as an example for the rest of the world. Urban action is, therefore, critical to slowing the environmental crisis. Cities use the majority of the world’s energy supply, being responsible for roughly 70% of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions which trap heat and lead to the general warming of the earth. The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, told the Cop26 summit in November 2021 that global cities are currently acting to fight the climate crisis while many governments are delaying implementing measures that help find a solution. He said that cities are the “doers, in contrast to national governments who are the delayers,

kicking the can down the road to 2040 or 2050". He emphasised the active nature of cities whilst condemning the inability of governments to execute sufficient plans, acts or funding.

Poor planning and the layout of our cities has created an immense carbon footprint as low-density urban suburban sprawl with limited public transport services coupled with homes far away from work and shops has resulted in many more cars on the roads. In order to keep the 1.5C warming limit, established by a 2018 UN Special Report, the use of public transport must double in cities. London currently has 500 zero-emissions buses, the most in Western Europe; Khan pledged to convert all the 9,000 buses into zero-emission vehicles by 2034, a scheme that could be brought forwards to 2030 with government investment. The Mayor of Paris has made her plan for a "15-minute city", where all workplaces, schools, sport centres, cafes, restaurants and shops will be a 15-minute walk or bike ride from a resident's home.

Around 400 cities have also committed to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, alongside more than 10,500 that have joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. Cities in the United States are critical members in America's Pledge, a coalition of cities, states and businesses that have committed to deliver the climate goals of the Paris Agreement. There are huge gains to be made by changing how we plan, build, manage and power our cities.

Solutions to these issues have the potential to deliver major emissions cuts; cities are now on the road to reaching a position where they can properly address the climate change, a road paved with implementation of multiple measures. As centres of innovation and creativity, the world looks to cities to provide us with the answers and so they must be the ones to act first.

In 2019, Greta Thunberg and other young climate activists organised weekly school strikes known as Fridays for Future to protest the lack of action by world leaders against the environmental crisis. These walkouts gained the attention of the world and started a trend of

multiple political marches across the globe. In September 2019, more than 7 million people across 185 countries joined the largest climate strike in history, demanding greater government intervention. Political marches are one of the most public and vocal means of engaging in collective action and allow social movements to develop and grow as the likelihood of bystanders becoming involved drastically increases. Their goal of increasing participation creates a stronger force for change. A group's concerns are visibly, publicly and dramatically expressed on the global stage, with eyes from all over the world fixated on them. Marches influence the behaviour of others and contribute to a wider movement, emphasising the power of the people to influence the people in social, economic and political positions that allow them to exert control over societal outcomes.

Social awareness of the crisis is a crucial factor in analysing how prepared the world is to tackle the issue. People must understand the severity of the impacts of climate crisis; they must become empowered with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to act as agents of change. The UN framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and the associated Action for Climate Empowerment agenda all look to governments to educate and engage the people on policies and actions relating to climate change. The international community recognises the importance of education, awareness and training in order to properly address climate change. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation that aims to promote world peace and security through international cooperation, has been working to make education a more central part of the international response to the environmental crisis through its Education for Sustainable Development programme. This specialised agency acts as a global advocate with the goal of strengthening the capacity of governments to provide the sufficient knowledge needed. Through raising awareness and understanding of the severity of climate change, both

individual behavioural changes and societal support for actions needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be facilitated and adopted globally. There will be greater support for mitigation and future adaptation of policies that will improve health and reduce vulnerability.

Developing countries are often hit the hardest from the effects of climate change as they often do not have the capacity to face the extreme weather events and have insufficient government frameworks to manage the challenges that the crisis poses. Globally, there are an estimated 880 million people that are living in informal settlements that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Developed nations, on the other hand, are in a suitable position to address the emergency owing to their finances and technology, whereas developing nations, which face greater environmental damages, have insufficient funding to apply programs and implement policies. Therefore, developed countries must support developing countries in finding solutions, by granting funds, providing technology and assisting through education development and the advancement of research.

Business directors, city mayors, investment bankers, technological innovators and young people all over the world have voiced their concern for the increasingly severe threat of the climate crisis. Greater global action on climate change progress has been demanded and countries must act now. Diplomats from nearly 200 nations were united at COP26, tasked with the job of refining the terms of the Paris Agreement, setting more ambitious goals to reduce emissions and to help countries with the adjustment to the effects of climate change. The conference committed to fighting against climate change whilst also establishing that nations are currently not doing enough to counteract the development of the crisis. The world's two largest polluters, China and the US, announced an agreement to work together to reduce emissions in the coming decades. Considering the rivalry between the two countries,

this is a very promising result. More than 40 countries pledged to discontinue the use of coal, the world's largest source of carbon dioxide emissions, in the 2030s.

However, the unenforceable and voluntary nature of the conference means that commitments made by nations at Glasgow might not relate to substantial change and action. The Glasgow Climate Pact, which was unanimously agreed upon by all participating countries, serves as a reminder that pledges alone are insufficient to limit climate change. Nevertheless, there is room for hope as nations possess the ability to counteract global emergencies, something that the world witnesses in how countries united against the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also imposed a significant rethinking of existing approaches to international relations and international issues; it has resulted in a greater focus on health diplomacy, the politics of crisis and societal issues. If more weight and pressure is added to implement the necessary but feasible measures, there is still a chance to turn this tale of tragedy into a triumph. Without the appropriate policies, funding, projects, technologies and climate education and empowerment efforts at local, national and international levels, the international community will be ill-equipped to address the current environmental crisis.