



To: Ms Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary UNFCCC

Copy: Mr Ovais Sarmad, Deputy Executive Secretary UNFCCC

Ms Laura Lopez, Director, Conference Affairs UNFCCC

Ms Megumi Endo, Observer Organizations Liaison Officer, UNFCCC

UNFCCC secretariat
UN Campus
Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1
53113 Bonn
Germany

24 February 2021

Dear Ms Espinosa,

Assure equal access for Global South delegates and civil society observers for the most inclusive COP ever

Friends of the Earth International - the world's largest grassroots environmental network, with 73 national member groups (including Friends of the Earth England, Wales & Northern Ireland, and Friends of the Earth Scotland) and some 2 million members and supporters worldwide - are writing to share our growing concern about the impact of additional barriers to access and participation at COP26 arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic recession.

Even in the best of times access to and participation in UNFCCC spaces is far from equal, whether for negotiators or for civil society observers. Global inequalities play out in terms of whose delegation is biggest, best resourced and most able to cover multiple negotiations at the same time. At the UNFCCC the role of civil society is far more restricted than in other UN forums including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UNECE Aarhus Convention, both of which enable civil society participation in negotiations.

We are increasingly concerned that these inequalities will be compounded by additional barriers to participation in COP26, in particular for global south participation, in anticipation of ongoing travel restrictions from COVID-19, unequal access to vaccines, and increased financial barriers due to the economic impacts of the pandemic.

While recognising the very real challenges facing the UNFCCC Secretariat in organising a COVID-19 safe summit for November 2021, **we consider that moving all or part of the Bonn intersessional and COP26 negotiations online will only exacerbate existing inequalities to access and participation.** Experiences of online UN spaces over the last year have shown significant access problems for global south delegations, including digital connectivity and timezone issues. A virtual negotiation would also further shut out global civil society, significantly diminishing transparency and accountability. Similarly, **a slimmed-down summit further restricts civil society participation, or limits to digital only, would exacerbate existing problems with transparency and accountability, and so would not be acceptable.** If it is safe to have in-person negotiations, they must be fully inclusive of global civil society.

mobilize resist transform

Further delay of COP26 negotiations must not be used as an excuse for inaction.

As the clock ticks on this crucial decade for climate action, countries must urgently increase their ambition, setting new, stronger NDCs, with rich countries substantially increasing their climate finance contributions. The framework for such action is already established under the Paris Agreement and does not require a formal COP process to progress. **Urgency must not be used as an excuse for moving COP26 online at the sacrifice of an inclusive COP with balanced negotiations.** Urgency and ambition can be delivered now, and governments must act now, to avert catastrophic warming with worsening impacts.

Therefore we call on the UNFCCC Secretariat to ensure:

1. that COP26 and the Bonn Intersessional go ahead on terms of equal access for global South delegates and civil society observers; if it is not safe to hold a physical intersessional or COP26, then negotiations should be delayed again, not moved online; if it is safe to have a physical intersessional and COP, they must be fully inclusive of global civil society. Any further delay is no excuse for inaction on advancing ambitious climate policy.

Additionally we have written to the UK Government with the following demands:

2. to help ensure a safe, in-person COP26 is possible in November 2021, all global north governments, including the UK Government, must support the proposal at the WTO to allow countries to waive patents on COVID-19 vaccines for the course of the pandemic, redistribute surplus vaccines now to enable full global South government and civil society participation at the Bonn intersessional and COP26;

3. the UK Government, working with the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council, must enable safe civil society participation in events, protest and other activities outside the official UNFCCC spaces at the Glasgow summit, including a civil society organised convergence space, Peoples' Summit, and mass peaceful mobilisation;

4. the UK Government must provide a fund to support global south civil society observer participation at COP26 given the many additional financial and access barriers that global south CSOs will face due to the Covid-19 crisis and related global recession.

Please do all you can to ensure a safe and inclusive COP for all participants. We have copied these demands to the UK Government.

Yours sincerely,

Sara Shaw
International Program Coordinator Climate Justice & Energy
Friends of the Earth International

Jamie Peters, Interim Director of Campaign Impact
Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Mary Church, Head of Campaigns
Friends of the Earth Scotland



**Friends of
the Earth
International**



**Friends of
the Earth**
England, Wales &
Northern Ireland



**Friends of
the Earth
Scotland**