Dear Prime Minister,

Successive UK Prime Ministers, including yourself, have stood on podium after podium and declared the UK a global leader on climate action - promising net zero by 2050 and £11.6bn in climate finance over five years from 2021 - and urging other countries to do more to address this global crisis.

The existential threat we all face due to climate change can only be tackled with global cooperation - and progress that we all benefit from can only be achieved when there is trust that promises made will be kept.

At COP27 in Egypt in November, you stood up and said "it is morally right to honour our promises, but it is also economically right too" - and we wholeheartedly agreed. Yet last week the Climate Change Committee revealed that the UK is off course to deliver its promised emissions reductions, and now it is reported that your government may break its promise on climate finance too.

As 92 UK civil society organisations working across environment, international development, humanitarian response, inclusion and rights issues, we are writing to urge you to keep your promise to communities on the frontline of the climate crisis to provide £11.6bn in climate finance between 2021/22 and 2025/26, and to urgently demonstrate how this commitment will be met.

Climate finance is a vital component of the Paris Agreement, without which limiting the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C will not be possible; without which the devastation of climate change will cost countless lives and livelihoods around the world for those least responsible for causing the climate crisis and cause irreversible damage to the ecosystems on which they depend; and without which meaningful international cooperation on climate action would collapse.

The world cannot afford such tragedies from short-sighted decisions.
While fossil fuel companies in the UK enjoy record-breaking profits, it is impossible for the world to comprehend claims from this government that the UK cannot afford more than 0.5% of gross national income to contribute towards global efforts to address poverty, nature degradation and loss, and climate change. This government has chosen to cut Official Development Assistance (ODA) while at the same time drawing on it for climate finance, which civil society has repeatedly warned is both unsustainable and unjust. This double counting puts climate finance in direct competition with other vital non-climate ODA priorities and is not in the spirit of the UN agreement to provide new and additional climate finance to countries least responsible for causing the climate crisis.

Climate finance is not a handout, but a debt we owe to countries and communities that have been made vulnerable to climate change, while the UK has benefited from burning fossil fuels. We have a historical responsibility to address the harm caused and to play a leading role in financing a global just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels and towards resilience. This is not aid and climate finance should not have come from the ODA budget in the first place. It is also in the UK’s enlightened self-interest to prevent further climate breakdown.

The UK’s credibility on the global stage now hangs in the balance, and we urge you to demonstrate how the £11.6bn will be met and live up to your own words from COP27:

“By honouring the promises we made in Glasgow and by directing public and private finance towards the protection of our planet, we can turn our struggle against climate change into a global mission for new jobs and clean growth and we can bequeath our children a greener planet and a more prosperous future. That’s a legacy we could be proud of.”

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Pettengell
Executive Director, Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK)

On behalf of the following 92 UK civil society organisations:
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