

## **EIN Briefing for Churches on Key Climate-Related Issues Post COP26**

The Environmental issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (EIN) met together at the beginning of 2022 to discuss the three main climate-related issues we'd encourage churches to campaign on in the critical year following COP26.

As a group we agreed that the three most important issues are: ending UK fossil fuel development, compensating countries in the Global South for loss and damage caused by climate change and Ecological Conversion.

We believe that the church has a key voice as part of civil society to call on our national leaders to take bold and positive action to safeguard our common home in the face of the climate and ecological crises. We also recognise that the climate crisis is a justice issue, with those most climate vulnerable facing unequal impacts. In the lead up to COP26 a coalition of EIN members put together the Climate Sunday initiative, seeking to encourage all churches, and especially those who had not yet taken action on climate change, to engage as the UK hosted international climate negotiations on our shores. Although COP26 is over, the UK government continues as COP President, responsible for stewarding the outcomes of the conference, until COP27 in Egypt at the end of 2022. So, it is very important that churches continue to speak up and hold the UK government to account for delivering and building on the COP26 outcome.

Climate Sunday marked a unique collaboration between Christian denominations and charities. We know that the best way we can face the future and the climate crisis is together. Our hope is that this briefing becomes a useful resource for churches on these three priority 'follow up' issues. It is a mark of continuing collaboration between EIN members. We encourage churches to link up locally, to find ways of collaborating for greater collective impact on climate change in their community and nationally.

EIN comes under the umbrella of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and represents more than 30 Christian denominations and organisations. This briefing paper was put together by A Rocha UK on behalf of Climate Sunday with contributions from Christian Aid, Operation Noah and the Ecological Conversion Group.



## 1. Ending new UK fossil fuel developments

### **The context of UK fossil fuel development:**

The International Energy Agency (IEA) stated in its 2021 [Net Zero by 2050 Roadmap](#) that there can be no new coal, oil and gas developments if the world is to limit global heating to 1.5°C.

One of the key aims of COP26 in November 2021 was to 'keep 1.5 alive' and the agreement which came out of COP26 - the Glasgow Climate Pact - made history by being the first COP agreement to recognise the need to get the world off fossil fuels as the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions.

The exclusion of fossil fuels from these international agreements for so long speaks to the power of the fossil fuel 'lobby' and producer countries. In Glasgow, the role of fossil fuels in causing the climate crisis was spotlighted and the pact called for the 'phase down' of coal (the most climate-damaging of all) and an end to 'inefficient' fossil fuel subsidies.

However, despite this and the success of the [Stop Cambo](#) campaign, oil and gas companies continue exploration and extraction of new fossil fuels in the UK. [Shell is forecast to spend more than any other operator in the North Sea](#) on exploration and development of new fields in the next couple of years.

BP, Shell and other major oil companies [are also lobbying against climate legislation](#). [More than 500 fossil fuel lobbyists were granted access to COP26](#), a number greater than the largest country delegation. This stands in direct contradiction to agreements signed onto by the UK government at COP26. Fossil fuel companies are [committing human rights abuses and destabilising communities](#) in the global South, despite the fact that renewable energy is now the [cheapest form of energy](#) in most of the world.

We urgently need a fair and fast transition, which includes divestment from fossil fuels and investment in climate solutions.

Churches can play a key role in catalysing this transition to clean energy through their investment policies. Most UK Christian denominations have fully divested from fossil fuel companies, including the [Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church](#), the Church in Wales and the United Reformed Church.

Many Church of England and Catholic dioceses are joining them, including the CofE [Diocese of Oxford](#), [Diocese of Norwich](#) and [Diocese of Durham](#), and the Catholic [Archdiocese of Birmingham](#). The [Diocese of Truro](#) has divested from fossil fuels and invested nearly £2 million in funds directly investing in renewable energy.

Faith communities can have a key voice in advocating for this change, and we are seeing this on an international scale as the Vatican has [recommended fossil fuel divestment and investment in climate solutions](#).

### Three actions churches can take to support an end to UK fossil fuel developments:

1. **Write to your MP** calling for [no new oil and gas fields](#) and [a windfall tax on fossil fuel companies](#).
2. **Divest your church:** You can encourage your local church (or diocese) to divest from fossil fuel companies. Even if your church doesn't currently hold fossil fuel investments, it can make a divestment commitment by pledging not to invest in fossil fuels in the future. Find out more on [Operation Noah's Bright Now campaign website](#) or email [bokani.tshidzu@operationnoah.org](mailto:bokani.tshidzu@operationnoah.org) to register your interest.
3. **Endorse the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#):** This is a global initiative to phase out fossil fuels and support a just transition. The treaty seeks to prevent the proliferation of fossil fuels by ending all new exploration and production. You can sign the [faith letter](#) as an individual or an institution.

With thanks to Operation Noah for the briefing on fossil fuel development.



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## **2. Climate finance to compensate for Loss and Damage**

### **What is loss and damage?**

Extreme weather events and slow onset events result in permanent and irretrievable Loss and Damage, which cannot be adapted to nor fully repaired. By 2030, it is estimated that the economic cost alone of Loss and Damage will be between \$290 to \$580 billion in developing countries. The human cost and, non-economic losses will be even higher<sup>1</sup>. Countries based in the Global South are the most vulnerable, and bear the brunt of climate change even though they contribute least to the problem.

This makes Loss and Damage a matter of justice.

For example, Madagascar is suffering from the worst droughts in four decades. Bangladesh regularly faces development challenges arising from climate and non-climatic disasters such as floods, cyclones, tidal surges, salinity intrusion and river erosions. Such disasters are growing in frequency because climate change impacts are increasing. You can hear voices from the Global South describe their experience of Loss and Damage and what they need by way of response using this [link](#).

Girls, women and marginalised communities of the Global South are disproportionately affected by the increasingly intense and frequent disasters. Marginalisation of women and girls is intensified by the climate crisis, owing to their social, economic and cultural roles and responsibilities.

The concept of Loss and Damage has been a sticking point in climate talks for years. At COP26, Scotland became the first country to pledge funds to address the issue, a move widely welcomed by climate campaigners as a major breakthrough. Many vulnerable and low-income countries are nevertheless deeply unhappy with the lack of progress, and Loss and Damage will remain high on the climate agenda throughout 2022 and beyond, The UK presidency has helped to create momentum which must now be built on towards COP27, to deliver climate finance including new and additional funding for Loss and Damage.

One potential source of Loss and Damage finance, the 'Polluter Pays' principle, has been discussed for many years by experts, campaigners and organisations including Christian Aid. One way (though there may be others) of operationalising that principle is to require governments of major emitting countries to introduce a Climate Damage Tax on the fossil fuel industry, based on their extraction of coal, oil and gas: a portion of this tax would be used to compensate communities and countries affected by damage caused by climate extremes.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://us.boell.org/en/unpacking-finance-loss-and-damage>

**What we're calling for:**

- Rich/industrialised/developed countries must extend their support to developing countries for averting, minimising and addressing Loss and Damage in recognition of their historical responsibility for climate change.
- At the current rate of climate change, and even if it stopped today, in the absence of adequate mitigation and adaptation efforts the demands for Loss and Damage finance will only increase. A separate funding stream for Loss and Damage is needed and must be additional to funding for mitigation and adaptation.
- Using the 'Polluter Pays' principle, governments need to agree a way to finance Loss and Damage impacts, such as through taxing the production of fossil fuels
- To protect girls, women and marginalised communities from the Loss and Damage of extreme and slow-onset weather events, transformative social protection will be pivotal. Governments should identify sources of financing for the development of national social protection systems to respond to current and future risks.

With thanks to Christian Aid for the briefing on Loss and Damage.



### **3. Ecological Conversion**

#### **What is “Ecological Conversion?”**

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.’ For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion’ What we all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, ‘whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.’“ (LS 217).

**ECOLOGY:** Looks at interactions between living things as well as their environment.

**CONVERSION:** A radical change of heart and mind, leading to a radical change of life.

“We are not God” (LS 67). We, however, are called to be in a loving relationship with God the Creator, through whom “everything is interconnected”. The beginning of Genesis portrays human life as “grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS 66).

However, “these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.” This presumption has led us to become “masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters”, rather than stewards, of the Earth and its inhabitants (LS 11).

‘Ecological conversion’ is the process of healing this threefold rupture. The word ‘ecological’, intended to describe biological relationships, is extended widely and deeply to include relationships among God, humanity and all living creatures. The conversion happens through God’s grace - maybe through being moved by something beautiful, or acknowledging a wrongdoing, so that we are humbled, and recognise ourselves as creatures and not gods. Thus:

- We convert our hearts first to God, Creator, Word made flesh within Creation, and Spirit, sent to be with us always.
- This leads us to hear the cry of the poor, our human brothers and sisters in need, and to convert our hearts to them too.
- Loving God and other people enables us to hear the cry of the earth, our common home, and to care for all its creatures.

To restore the harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation, we need to repent, to rethink our lives. This leads us to embrace a conscious simplicity and moderation in our lives, to thirst for justice and to live with gratitude and joy.

Saint Francis is the model of “an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically”, “a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (LS 10).

With thanks to the Ecological Conversion Group for the briefing on Ecological Conversion.

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