JOINT LETTER

Prevent a ‘Climate Lehman Moment’

The collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered the last global financial crisis. There’s a new threat on the horizon, yet a simple way to step back from the point of no return.

Brussels, 27 October 2021

To,

Alok Sharma, President of COP26, the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference

Dear Sir,

Right now, we run the risk of another financial crisis, this time caused by climate change. Climate scientists from around the world warn that global warming is dangerously close to being out of control.1 There is global recognition that this crisis also threatens the stability of our financial system.2 And yet, despite net-zero emission pledges, most banks and insurers remain on a self-destructive path.3 They perpetuate the risks of climate change by financing and insuring fossil fuel-related activities.4

As the climate meltdown unfolds, financial institutions will face losses stemming from disruptive weather events, which intensify and increase in frequency. Examples abound, such as recent heavy flooding in Europe, a terrible instance of multi-billion dollar damages from catastrophic, climate change-related forces.5 Such events are leading to huge unexpected payouts by insurance companies and to the destruction of assets and business operations that banks and insurers are exposed to. Moreover, frequent natural disasters are driving up premiums for insurance coverage, leaving citizens, businesses and financial institutions exposed to climate change related risks.6

Furthermore, with the transition to a low-carbon economy, fossil fuel assets of banks and insurers will rapidly diminish in value or become entirely worthless. This will lead to massive losses for financial institutions, which could result in them requiring bailouts, where the public is the one to pay. The truth is: we already have six times more fossil fuel reserves than we can afford to burn.7 Even the International Energy Agency (IEA) stated that if we want to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, investments in new fossil fuels must stop immediately.8 This was recently echoed by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.9

Therefore, any financing and insurance of new fossil fuel exploration and production is:

- extremely risky, as new fossil fuels will lose their value.
- at odds with the Paris Agreement.
At the moment, financing and insuring coal, oil and gas projects remains artificially cheap. The capital levels that banks and insurers must maintain to cover potential future losses do not match the risks of these exposures. The lack of action so far is grounded in a paradox: Policy-makers and supervisors recognise the near impossibility of modelling climate-related risks due to the radical uncertainty of climate events. But they say they need such modelling to be done before intervening. By waiting for these impossible calculations, financial regulators extend an indirect subsidy to climate change-causing industries.

We cannot wait. The climate clock is ticking. Other interventions on their own will not have the impact we need to prevent irreversible devastating impacts of climate change on the financial system.

As you shape the vision of the final outcomes from COP26, you will be preparing a comprehensive plan for preventing a climate crisis. We urge you to recognise the role of capital rules to avert a possible ‘Climate Lehman moment’.

We call upon you to convene leaders of the world around this solution, together with the international standard setting bodies BCBS and IAIS, to trigger decisive action and coordination.

Yours Sincerely,

111 organisations and 60 individuals, including civil society, ethical banks associations, economists and citizens (see full list below)
Annotations


4. The world’s largest banks have provided $3.8 trillion to the fossil fuel industry since the Paris Agreement. For insurers, data shows that the largest U.S. and European insurers currently have invested around $600 billion in fossil fuels and the international insurance market for oil and gas totalled premiums of $17.3 billion in 2018.


6. German Insurance Association (GDV) (2021) data, for example, shows that 54% of properties in Germany lack any insurance coverage against weather phenomena.

7. Carbon Tracker (2018) data shows that existing fossil fuel reserves amount to 2910 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, whereas the calculated carbon budget of our planet is 495 gigatonnes.


9. Guterres, A (2021) *Secretary-General's statement on the IPCC report*


11. In terms of prudential rules, this means that banks and insurers should be required to finance activities related to new fossil fuel reserves entirely out of equity (own funds). Equity acts as a buffer that absorbs losses from banks’ and insurers’ financing activities.


Signatories of our joint letter:

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Organisations

1. Finance Watch
2. The Sunrise Project
3. Climate Safe Lending Network
4. Public Citizen
5. New Economics Foundation
6. Reclaim Finance
7. ClientEarth
8. 350.org
9. E3G
10. Positive Money UK
11. Transport & Environment
12. Insure Our Future
13. Bürgerbewegung Finanzwende
14. ShareAction
15. WWF European Policy Office
16. Cop26climateactionplan.Com
17. Change Finance
18. National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal
19. WEED - World Economy, Ecology & Development
20. Profundo
21. Fondazione Finanza Etica
22. ATTAC Liège
23. etka
24. Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development, IPGFforSD
25. Clean Air Action Group
26. 350 Seattle
27. Connecticut Citizen Action Group (OCAG)
28. Fundacja Rozwój Tak – Odkrywki Nie
29. Re-set: plataforma pro socialní-ekologickou transformaci
30. ASUFIN
31. Climate Alliance Switzerland / Klima-Allianz Schweiz / Alliance climatique suisse
32. Revolving Door Project
33. Positive Money US
34. Majority Action
35. Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell, NJ
36. Sisters of Charity Federation
37. Ekumenická akademie (Ecumenical Academy)
38. BankTrack
39. Association of Ethical Shareholders Germany
40. As You Sow
41. KOTHOWAIN (Vulnerable Peoples Development Organisation)
42. Basel Institute of Commons and Economics
43. Rethinking Economics Australia
44. Fair Finance Institute
45. Debt Observatory in Globalisation (ODG)
46. Eerlijke Geldwijzer (Fair Finance Guide Netherlands)
47. Attac Togo (Les Amis de la Terre France)
48. Attac Spain
49. Change Partnership
50. Freedom from Debt Campaign Pakistan
51. WEAll - the Wellbeing Economy Alliance
52. Association For Promotion Sustainable Development
53. Gestos (soropositividad, comunicación, género)
54. Fondation Nicolas Hulot
55. Attac Germany, Financial Markets & Tax Working Group
56. Rural Area Development Programme (RADP)
57. RIHRDO (Rural Infrastructure and Human Resource Development Organization)
58. Positive Money Europe
59. Global Policy Forum
60. Attac Austria
61. Institut Veblen pour les réformes économiques
62. Grands-parents pour le climat / Klima-Grosseltern CH
63. Galway One World Centre
64. Observatorio Mexicano de la Crisis
65. Financité
66. revo Prosperidad Sostenible
67. Waterkeeper Alliance
68. FracTracker Alliance
69. Polish Zero Waste Association
70. Both ENDS
71. Nipe Fagio
72. Finance Innovation Lab
73. NOVACT
74. Ban SUP (Single Use Plastics)
75. Servicios Ecnomicos para Reconciliacion y Reconstruccioin Millersville University
76. Talousedemokratia – Economic Democracy Finland
77. Africa Europe Faith & Justice Network
78. European Federation for Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers
79. Fund Our Future
80. Lithuanian Consumers Alliance
81. Our New Economy
82. AfroLeadership
83. Jamaa Resource Initiatives
84. Iraqi Journalists Rights Defence Association
85. Institut Rousseau
86. Jovem para os Direitos Humanos Portugal / INCUB Portugal
87. Bio Vision Africa (BVA)
88. Escape-jobs pour l’emploi sans carbone
89. Zukunftskonvent, Germany
90. The Gaia Foundation
91. Centre for Financial Accountability
92. Attac Norway
93. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)
94. Global Justice Now
95. Fair Finance International
96. Agir pour le Climat
97. ZERO - Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável
98. European Trade Union Confederation
99. urgewald
100. Sustainable Value Investors
101. KoalaKollektiv
102. Leave it in the Ground Initiative (LINGO)
103. Global Peace and Development Organization
104. Les Amis de la Terre France / Friends of the Earth France
105. Fundación Finanzas Éticas
106. Campax
107. NOAH- Friends of the Earth Denmark
108. Rainforest Action Network
109. Global Alliance for Banking on Values
110. ZEF: Cooperative for ethical financing
111. Better Markets

Individuals

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2. Adam Tooze, Professor of History at Columbia University
3. Stephany Griffith Jones, Economist
4. Ann Pettifor, Economist
5. Ian Dunlop, Co-author, “Degrees of Risk”, Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration
6. Steve Keen, Economist
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10. Laurence Scialom, Professor of Economics, University Paris Nanterre
11. Susana Martin Belmonte, Economist - Monetary Innovator
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13. Andrew Denis, Fellow Emeritus in Economics
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15. Brett Scott, Author
16. Christoph Scherrer, Professor and Director of the International Center for Development and Decent Work
17. Edgar Blaustein, Economist
18. Jakob Kapeller, Professor of Economics
19. Jeff Tan, Associate Professor of Political Economy, Aga Khan University
20. Lucas Trentin Rech, Adjunct Professor of Economics, Federal University of Bahia
21. Maud Abdelli, Initiative lead for greening financial regulation, WWF
22. Neil Lancaster, Senior Lecturer for Business and Law, De Montfort University
Among a growing number of economists, influencers, citizens and campaigners who support us.