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Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D.
Tánaiste Leo Varadkar T.D.
Minister Eamon Ryan T.D.
Government Buildings,
Merrion Street,
Dublin 2

25th June 2021

Dear Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister Ryan,

We welcome the strong commitment from all governing parties in attaching urgency to the enactment of the Climate Bill as pledged in the Programme for Government.

Christian Aid Ireland, Concern, Oxfam Ireland and Trócaire are members of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition which has campaigned for faster and fairer climate action, including strengthened climate legislation, since 2007. We have been engaging regularly with elected representatives on the specifics of the Bill throughout 2020 and 2021 via that network. We fully acknowledge the progress to date in strengthening the Climate Bill following 50 hours of pre-legislative scrutiny, and 14 hours of Committee Stage debate on the Bill.

There have been significant improvements to the draft Bill on the basis of this detailed process, notwithstanding the concerns that Stop Climate Chaos have already highlighted with the Minister on the need for amendments in a range of areas. We have echoed these calls to the Government to incorporate the relevant amendments to ensure that Ireland's Climate Bill provides a clear and binding commitment to remaining below +1.5C; to ensure that action on climate change and biodiversity loss is fully complementary; and to enshrine climate justice and just transition as the Bill's central organising principles.

However, we remain particularly concerned that the definition of Climate Justice in the Bill is very weak. Whilst there is much to welcome in the Bill, it was disappointing that the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications rejected all proposed amendments to the definition of Climate Justice under section 3 during Committee and Report Stages in the Dáil. Particularly given that guidance on a stronger definition of climate justice was included in recommendations 58, 59 and 62 of the cross-party report the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) published following their pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill.

Now that the Bill has moved to the Seanad this week we urge that this be rectified at Committee Stage, so that the principle of international equity or 'fair shares' of the global effort to hold global warming below 1.5 degrees is reflected in the definition of climate justice in section 3. It is a signature achievement that the 2015 Act enshrines regard for Climate Justice as an obligation on Government. However, we are deeply concerned that the definition currently included in the Bill actually weakens and undermines that achievement by omitting any reference to the issue of global justice and equity.

We urge you to consider replacing the current definition with either of the following texts, the first of which is drawn from the 2019 Scottish Climate Change Act:

'Climate justice' means the requirement that decisions and actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the effects of climate change must; (a) support the people who are most affected by climate change but who have done the least to cause it and are the least equipped to adapt to its effects; (b) reflect the UNFCCC commitment to 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities'; (c) safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable persons, and (d) help to address inequality.

Similarly, if there are legal objections to a more comprehensive wording, the Government should include a definition based on the text in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change from 1992, to which Ireland is a party:

'Climate justice' means the principle that global climate action should be undertaken, as agreed in the UNFCCC, "on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof."

A definition of climate justice that does not adequately reflect the extremely unequal global dimension to this problem will be a huge missed opportunity. In his testimony to the Joint Committee Professor Kevin Anderson told Members that "many people are already dying from climate change and with the 1.5°C to 2°C target, many more people will die. They will be poor. Typically, they will be people of colour, initially the burden will fall disproportionately on women and children, they will live in climate-vulnerable parts of the world and they will be low emitters. Let me be clear. We have, knowingly, in the wealthy parts of the world imposed that upon them by our choice to fail, thus far, to address climate change."

The communities that we work with daily are already experiencing the impacts of the climate emergency, which is why we have argued over the last decade that it is essential that climate breakdown is understood and tackled as an international, social justice and equality issue.

If it is not possible for the Government to agree to include either of these options in the Bill then we would urge you to delete the proposed definition altogether. That would restore the existing position in the 2015 Act that climate justice is an undefined principle the Government must have regard to when adopting climate policies. That would be preferable to the weak definition in the current Bill.

Yours sincerely,



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