

# **The Kids Will Be All Right** **(if we're not lost and damaged by COP-26)**

**This op-ed is directed at decision-makers at COP-26. It has been co-created this week by 60 young people from all over the world, to make a unified call for climate justice. Most of us didn't grow up speaking English and we had not met each other before. Yet in just 4 hours, we listened to each other, shared our experiences, and put together our vision for the future we want to inherit. If we can do this, decision makers can do it too.**

There is a Palauan proverb that says *A klukuk a rkemei*, which translates as 'tomorrow is still to come'. It teaches young kids in Palau the importance of taking care of the future. Our actions today, define what tomorrow looks like. Yet, these same children experience enormous loss and damage because of the current climate crisis they didn't cause.

We are 60 young people. We come from Burkina Faso, Burundi, Niger, the Central African Republic, Columbia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Belgium, and Spain. We come from diverse backgrounds, but all experience the devastating effects of the climate crisis, and are united in our demands for decision makers at COP-26.

We demand that Loss and Damage is a priority at COP-26 and a permanent theme in the COPs that follow. We believe that he who breaks the vase, must pay for it.

Today the opposite is true: he who breaks the vase, lets someone else clean up the mess. The climate crisis is caused by people and countries that don't put care at the centre of proverbs, let alone policies. The violent climate of hurricanes, droughts and flooding is not the root cause of this problem, but the consequence of a climate of violence. A climate fuelled by greed, exploitation, competition, colonization, inequality, racism, intergenerational injustice and gender-based violence.

If this is all a bit too abstract, allow us to illustrate what this looks like. Imagine your livelihood depends on the cultivation of a land you don't own and can't inherit because of your gender, or social status, yet you break your back every day to change it into fertile ground. Your neighbours have the biggest house on the block and generate a lot of waste that pollutes your land. Your ground becomes infertile. You lose your income, livelihood and eventually your house. You try to claim reparations at the local court but are ignored. You try to get your plea across the ocean, where policymakers are deciding over the fate of the trees, water, and air of your community. But your voice isn't heard. You end up with nothing but the clothes on your back, unsheltered from all kinds of violence. You follow in the footsteps of the 30 million people who became climate refugees before you.

This fictional story echoes the innumerable stories of people living with the climate of violence. People we have encountered here at COP26, who became activists so others don't have to experience what has become their daily reality. People like Marinel Sumook Ubaldo, a 24 year old Filipino whose family lived a harmonious life with nature, before they became

victims of Typhoon Haiyan, victims of our climate of violence. She became an activist, not by choice but out of necessity, to prevent this happening again to her community or others.

We must move instead to a climate of care, and place care at the centre of loss and damage policies. A climate of care addresses the physical, economic and severe psychological burdens caused by loss and damage. A climate of care could be based on community, local solutions, collective efforts, equality, intersectional responses, power sharing and attention to mental health.

### **How do we disrupt our climate of violence?**

First, let the person who breaks the vase, pay for it. The countries and corporations who contributed the most to the climate crisis should be held accountable. This can no longer be a voluntary commitment but must become a systemic and legally binding responsibility. There's a need for a structural framework where historical damage is considered and where adaptation and mitigation must be prioritized to avoid future loss and damage. Funding must be based on responsibility, not on charity, and it must be separate from the funding that is needed for adaptation and mitigation. More regular NDCs (nationally determined contributions) which include regular, explicit, and legally binding Loss and Damage contribution plans, will help ensure that those who are responsible are kept to their commitments.

Second, put communities at the head and heart of Loss and Damage policies. Those who have been affected, know the extent to where Loss and Damages reaches, let them decide the scope of policies. Let communities manage Loss and Damage resources and programs and make sure that women and youth are represented. To avoid further loss and damage, forests and natural habitats should be protected by their rightful guardians so that once again they can buzz with the rich biodiversity we rely on to thrive. Putting the most affected communities at the heart of Loss and Damage also acknowledges psychological impacts. Provide support and take into account emotional wellbeing.

Finally, rethink what global citizenship looks like in light of climate related displacement. People should be able to move by choice, not by tragedy. Resources, land and reparations must be accessible and shared equitably.

Rethink what childhood you want to give to us, children, so that we no longer need to carry the weight of the world as we become adults in the midst of an emergency. Don't let this climate of violence be our legacy, because we are your tomorrow.