



Press release: For immediate release

LEADING LAWYERS JOIN CIVIL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT BY REFUSING TO PROSECUTE JUST STOP OIL

More than 120 leading lawyers have published a "[Declaration of Conscience](#)", refusing to act for new fossil fuel projects or to prosecute members of campaign groups opposing new fossil fuel projects, such as Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil.

The barristers now face the prospect of disciplinary action for breach of professional regulations (such as the 'cab-rank rule'), which require them to take on any case within their competence. Some of them have self-reported to the Bar Standards Board. This is understood to be the first time in legal history that barristers have engaged in a collective act of civil disobedience. The action by the group calling themselves "*Lawyers Are Responsible*", comes just a week after the IPCC published its "[final warning](#)" to humanity, urging an end to new fossil fuel developments.

The [signatories](#) include some of the most prominent and influential members of the legal profession, such as Sir Geoffrey Bindman KC, Chair of the British Institute of Human Rights, Farhana Yamin, one of the architects of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Imran Khan KC, who represented the family of Stephen Lawrence, Professor Leslie Thomas KC, Gresham Professor of Law, and Jolyon Maugham KC, founder of the Good Law Project, as well as younger lawyers such as, Aoife Fleming, Legal Coordinator for World's Youth for Climate Justice, and Tim Hirschel-Burns, Co-founder, Law Students for Climate Accountability.

There has been a surge of support for the Declaration following publication of the IPCC Report and the imprisonment of members of the campaign group, Insulate Britain, not for blocking the roads, but simply for talking to the jury about climate change and fuel poverty, [contrary to Judge Silas Reid's order that they should stay silent on those matters](#).

Exposing the contribution of the legal profession to accelerating the climate crisis, Law Students for Climate Accountability has estimated that since 2017, leading law firms have facilitated [\\$1,620,000,000,000 \(\\$1.62 trillion\)](#) in fossil fuel transactions, while the City of London is understood to support at least [15% of global carbon emissions](#) around the world. The Declaration will be launched on 29 March at 12.30pm outside the Royal Courts of Justice, hosted by the writer and analyst [Anouchka Grose](#). Press are invited to attend.

Paul Powlesland, a barrister signatory to the Declaration, said:

"We're refusing to advise fossil fuel companies on how to dig for new oil and gas, the same way we wouldn't advise a killer how to commit serial murders."

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Matt Hutchings KC, one of the drafters of the Declaration, said:

"The IPCC has warned that continuing with implemented emissions policies will lead to projected global warming of 3.2°C this century. We are looking at a global catastrophe. The UK needs to divest from fossil fuels and invest in alternatives far more rapidly than we are. It is imperative that everyone, including lawyers, does what they can to make this happen."

A junior lawyer, who wished to remain anonymous, said:

"Young lawyers are being placed in an impossible position. We're being told by our firms and regulators it's a professional obligation to act for fossil fuel projects, knowing that doing so will poison our own future and all of life on earth. That's wrong on every level. It's indefensible. If the profession doesn't look out for my generation, how does it expect to survive?"

Commenting on the Declaration, Michael Mansfield KC said:

"I live on planet earth but I do not own it. I see myself as a custodian whose good fortune and responsibility is to represent its interests and those of fellow guardians; not those who seek to exploit its resources for profit or oppress the voice of the protectors."

Tim Crosland, Director of the climate justice charity, Plan B.Earth, one of the organisations backing the initiative (alongside the Good Law Project) said:

"The UN has said we're on a "highway to climate hell" and that to get off it, we need to stop new fossil fuel developments now. But behind every new oil and gas deal sits a lawyer getting rich. Many of them in the City of London law firms with strong and historic ties to the fossil fuel industry. For the time being, these firms remain as reputable as Harvey Weinstein before #MeToo. Meanwhile, it's the ordinary people of this country, taking a stand against this greed and destruction that the British legal system prosecutes and imprisons, jailing them just for talking about the climate crisis and fuel poverty. The rule of law has been turned on its head. Lawyers are responsible. It's time to take a stand."

The Declaration will be proclaimed outside the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand, London, at 12.30pm on 29 March 2023.

Last September, more than 250 lawyers signed an [open letter](#), warning that breach of the 1.5°C limit *"risks mass loss of life and threatens the conditions for a stable civilisation, including the rule of law"*.

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