

THE UN CLIMATE TALKS

A MESSAGING GUIDE

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» WHAT'S THIS & WHO'S IT FOR?

This guide draws on discussion and ideas generated during a messaging workshop about the UN Climate Talks (or COP26), hosted by NEON and the COP26 Coalition. The aim of this guide is to offer insight and guidance about messaging that fosters hope and centres key concepts of climate justice and the green transition.

The guide is for people across the progressive movement who are communicating about the Climate Talks taking place in Glasgow in November 2021. We hope the messages here are useful both for folks who see themselves as part of the climate movement and those who don't.

TOP MESSAGING TIPS

X Don't call it the COP

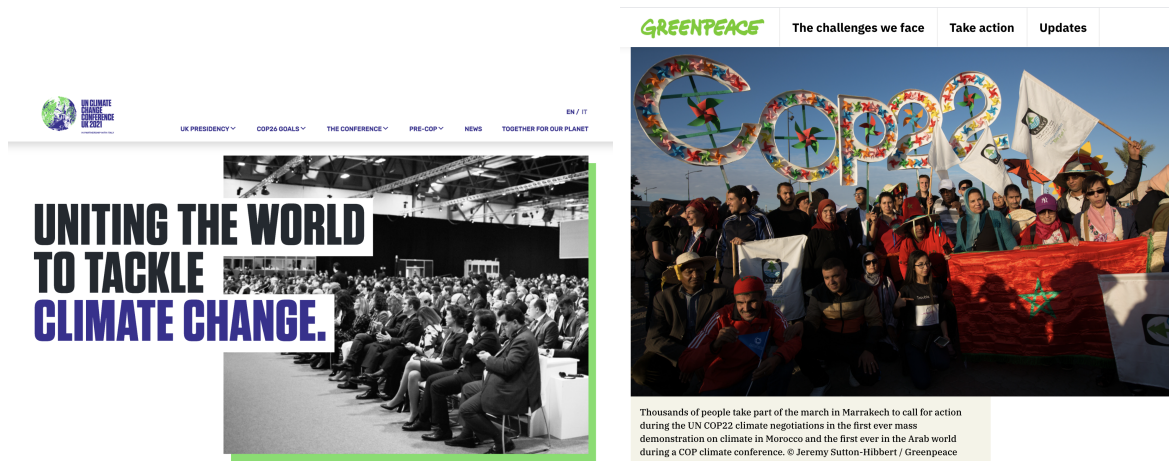
Most people have no idea what the COP is. It is an acronym that is only used by people within climate movements. You want to call it something that gives an idea of what it is: countries coming together from around the world to work together on the climate crisis.

✓ Emphasise solidarity and lift up the climate talks as a real chance for global collaboration

[Britain Talks COP26](#) found that the most understandable way of presenting the Climate Talks is as a chance for countries to meaningfully come together to tackle the climate crisis. This research also shows that people are aware that the climate crisis will affect everyone globally ([Britain Talks COP26](#)). This means that you don't have to use your communications to explain that it's a *global* crisis - people know that. Instead, talk about how the global crisis demands

global collaboration. Our communications should build global solidarity and a belief in the effectiveness of collective action. Use language like, “This Climate Summit is a chance for us to watch politicians and policymakers carefully - we will be using this as a chance to hold them to account.”

EXAMPLES:



✓ **Stress the importance of meeting in person so that everyone can have a seat at the table**

Despite largely supporting the talk, the public have concerns about people flying into Glasgow because of both the climate and COVID. They are confused about why it can't happen online. Don't feed this debate. Use the value of solidarity to make a strong case for why meeting in person is essential to getting the right outcomes from the talks. Explain that this is particularly important for less powerful countries who are most impacted by climate change to band together in person to get their voices heard. Explain that all too often these voices get sidelined or silenced in global decision-making spaces - and that we cannot let this happen here. This means putting the right things in place to make sure the UN Climate Talks can happen safely. Our messaging should not only call for the talks to centre the solutions of people who are most impacted, it should also pressure rich and polluting countries to listen and financially back the solutions put forward.

✓ **Build hope not fear**

Don't spend all your time telling people how bad things are - they already know. There is a high level of concern about climate change across British society. Voters of all stripes now rank climate change as a priority issue. Our messaging needs to convert this concern into action - rather than fuelling fatalism. [Framing Climate Justice](#) taught us that fatalism (the belief that nothing ever changes) is more often than not our biggest opponent. Crisis-only messaging that is heavy on doom and 'the-end-is-nigh' narratives provokes fear, shame and paralysis.

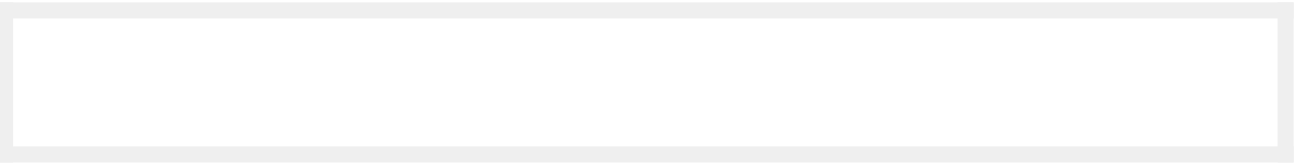
Our messages build hope when they provide a vision of a better future and the steps we need to take to make that future a reality. Make sure your messages reinforce the idea that things could be different. Do this by making it clear that citizens, community groups and social movements have historically changed the world, and continue to do so. Use examples of people coming together to fight for change and moments of movement success to help people see that when we work together things can change. We should also stress that politicians have choices and that it is in their power to do the right thing.

EXAMPLES:



"Today marks the final blow for fracking in the UK. The tenacious campaigning of local communities has forced the hand of the Conservative government to ban dangerous, climate wrecking fracking. Backed by national opposition, together we defeated the industry before it even started.

After years of resistance, the government had no choice but to admit defeat and make this decision. A late move from the Conservatives, but a timely victory for the climate. This is a victory of people power and a display of what's to come with more and more people demanding an end to fossil fuels and taking action for climate justice."



✓ **Talk about big solutions in component parts**

A challenge for progressive communicators is how to talk about the big transformational change we want to see in a way that isn't too abstract or removed from everyday life. We know that the public don't always join the dots in the way we want them to, for example, struggling to see how climate action will lead to a better economy ([YouGov](#)).

It is imperative to talk about big solutions that match the scale of the crisis, broken down into component parts.

EXAMPLES:

"Only a Green New Deal will do what needs to be done to stop the climate crisis and that work can start tomorrow with a scheme to retrofit homes that creates jobs in every community and keeps people warm in the winter."

✓ **Join the dots**

Whether we are talking about colonialism or a Just Transition, join the dots for people by explaining what these things mean and, where possible, connecting it to everyday life. Stay away from throw away statements like "it's about climate justice" or "rich countries will pay".

Framing Climate Justice recommends using goods and how they are produced to do this. We can show how colonial practices of exploitation still exist today by using specific examples - such as how phones are produced - to highlight a specific instance of injustice in the system, illustrate systemic injustice and call for a system solution. Offering a specific example will make climate justice real for your audience. Linking it back to long-standing and systemic issues will guard against people seeing changing how they consume as the solution.

This is particularly useful when tackling the inevitable "how will we pay for it?" question. Whenever you offer up a solution, make sure you follow it with a statement about how it will be funded. It could be as simple as saying, "This government has shown that in moments of crises it can find the funds to pay for this. They can do the same for the climate crisis by increasing the tax on big polluters."

☆ CORE MESSAGE

This message is based on ideas from a messaging workshop which have been developed by NEON and empirically tested. We found aspects of this message a) increased people's concern about climate change and its impacts b) Increased people's awareness of COP and confidence in their own understanding of COP and c) increased how likely people were to follow COP26 in the news. For more information about the testing phase email funmibi@neweconomyorganisers.org

Value

Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, background or postcode, believe that climate change can only be dealt with by working together. We need scientists, campaigners, engineers and affected communities around the world to collaborate and find global solutions to ensure we can pass on a healthy planet to future generations.

Problem & impact

Rising sea levels and erratic weather affect all of us, no matter where we live. But while we worry about the air kids breathe, the livelihoods of smallholder farmers around the world and rising sea levels - a handful of politicians continue to prioritise the interests of corporations and the fossil fuel lobby over people like us.

Right now, the UK is hosting the UN Climate Talks.

This is a meaningful moment. World leaders and civil society are coming together to agree on a way forward on climate change. It must take us in the right direction and step up ideas and action. The talks provide a seat at the table for countries and communities around the world, providing a chance to learn from the people and places that have already felt the force of climate change.

Solution

Tackling the climate crisis head on is an opportunity to make a better life for all of us.

Solutions won't come from polluting corporations and fossil fuel lobbyist who have profited from the destruction of nature and the displacement of communities. It is up to us to put the pressure on, demanding meaningful action that meets this moment.

That means scrapping fossil fuel subsidies and transitioning to a 100% renewable energy. It means learning from communities that have successfully embraced renewables -and listening to Indigenous communities and farmers who have protected biodiversity and grown food in sustainable ways for the solutions for our broken food system. It means making sure everyone has a decent, warm and comfortable home by resourcing huge retrofitting programmes that bring energy bills down and create good jobs.

Rather than prioritising lobbyists and corporations, we need leaders who listen to people outside their political bubble - and turn words into action. With the Climate Talks happening right now and on our doorstep, we say it is time for real change that tackles climate change and makes a better world for all of us - today and for generations to come.

✓ WORDS THAT WORK

(For more please visit the [Climate Justice Guide](#))

Do say	Don't say
Global Climate talks in the UK later this year. UN Climate Talks. UN Climate Summit.	COP. <i>[This is jargon that only people working in the movement will understand.]</i>
We all... Everyone... Most of us... Many of us...	As a climate activist... As a climate justice campaigner... As someone who has been working on this for many years... <i>[Avoid starting your messaging with this altogether; it can be useful for technical interviews where you are asked about statistics but generally steer away from this. Instead use universalising statements that make it clear climate change is of shared concern.]</i>
Countries in Africa, South America, etc. <i>[Be specific when possible, it's important to not generalise the experiences of different countries. And it will also help paint the picture of what's really happening.]</i>	Global South. <i>[This erases the different situations of different countries/regions, also the term isn't common with an average person.]</i>
In this country / the UK. Local. <i>[Clearer to spell out what you mean by domestic, especially if your audience is international.]</i>	Domestic.

Limit the impacts - These are actions we need to take to limit the impacts of climate change.

Adjust - This means helping communities adjust to the impacts of climate change already underway.

[Make sure to include specific examples to make it real for people.]

Adaptation.

[This is a technical term that most people won't know without explanation.]

We have an opportunity to change course. Tackling climate change provides an opportunity to create secure jobs that are also good for the planet.

Just transition.

[On first read, this isn't easy to understand, it's quite a complicated theory so it is always best to spell it out.]

Jobs that are good for people and the environment - from care work to teaching to building wind turbines.

Green jobs.

European countries, the US and Australia/the UK/rich countries and big corporations must rapidly stop polluting, and bring their annual emissions down to nearly zero within a decade.

Real Zero.

People being hit hardest.

Frontline communities.

People whose lives are being most affected by the climate crisis right now.

People have died, had their homes and communities destroyed and been put on the breadline because of the climate crisis. We need to make sure repairable damages to people's lives caused by the climate crisis are dealt with.

Loss and damage.

[It is helpful to have an example of what dealing with repairable damages looks like and elevating work that is already happening.]

We need to put a stop to the production of polluting fuels like coal, petrol and diesel. This will significantly slow down the effects of the climate crisis. The next step is making sure our economy is powered by a selection of renewables.	Mitigation.
Big corporations are often more interested in looking like they are acting on climate change, than acting on climate change. That's why we must hold them to account for the solutions we need. <i>[Call out what makes these solutions false or fake, use this to level the blame at big corporations.]</i>	False solutions.
This is just cooking the books by continuing as we are while asking those least responsible to pick up the price.	Carbon markets.
The UN climate change report.	IPCC report.
What each country is doing to tackle the crisis.	NDCs.
Groups and organisations working for the interest of people.	Civil Society.
History shows.../ When we look back at British history...	Historic responsibility.

✂ COMMON ATTACKS

We all care about climate change but these protestors take it too far with their disruptive protests.

We all want to live in a society where people can express their opinion and speak up when decisions are made they disagree with - and this demonstration is a reflection of just that. Imagine a smoke alarm that is beeping loudly to get your attention and alert you to imminent

danger. That's exactly what these demonstrators are trying to do. We face major threats to the planet and human life, and most of us want to see solutions that match the scale of the problem. If this government acts soon, we will have a chance to repair the damage that has been done. We want to tell this government on behalf of the UK public that action is needed. [See a longer guide on how to talk about demonstrations [here](#).]

Isn't it sheer hypocrisy that delegates are flying into a conference to talk about climate change?

We understand why people are frustrated by this but having these talks in person is the only way to centre the voices of the people who represent countries that are most impacted by the crisis - and from whom we have the most to learn. International talks should be an opportunity to learn from successful responses to climate change at both the policy and at the community level. Such as Indigenous communities and smallholder farmers who have protected biodiversity and grown food in sustainable ways, and who provide a vision of a sustainable food system. We need their input if we are to implement real solutions.

The UK's emissions are only a fraction of the world's total, what we do won't make an impact.

The Climate Talks are a moment to realise global solutions to a global problem. Extreme heat, unpredictable weather and corporations causing huge environmental destruction is not the problem of one country. We also need to remember that the UK is a wealthy and powerful country. Our economy has been designed in a way that has caused great harm in many countries around the world, and continues to. Our clothes, phones and laptops are produced in a way that pollutes people's air, poisons people's water and traps people in dangerous working conditions. British companies today continue the UK's historic major role in exploiting oil and resources in other countries. This UK government needs to take responsibility for this. We want to see communities and countries who have been most impacted by climate change being given support and resources to help them deal with the climate crisis.

Climate action is going too far, too fast. They are going to rip out our boilers and force expensive alternatives on us.

This is not the case and is simply fear mongering by a small group of people who want to stoke fear and distract us from the bigger and more important conversation: how do we bring about a fairer, greener and cleaner society. If we want to pass on a healthy planet to our children and grandchildren, we have to address home heating. Gas boilers are a huge contributor to emissions - and that means they are driving climate change and making the air we breathe dirty. But no one should have to shoulder the burden of switching if they can't afford to. This government needs to offer support, in terms of money and infrastructure, to households and families up and down the country to help them transition to greener and

cleaner heating. We want to see free heat pumps for low-income households and grants to anyone wanting to make the switch. As we have seen with solar and electric cars, clean tech can appear expensive at first but, when the government sets a clear direction, costs plummet. [See a longer messaging guide on heat decarbonisation [here](#).]

Who will pay? Won't the cost fall on everyday people?

The pandemic has taught us that when we face a crisis this government can find the resources to meet it head on. There are lots of avenues we can take to redesign our economy and society so that it is good for people and the environment. And we know that taking action now will actually benefit all of us economically too. If we invest now in clean energy and energy efficiency we can drop the price of our fuel bills - at the same time as getting our own house in order when it comes to climate emissions.

And we can make better choices when it comes to who is paying for climate action. This should start with ending handouts to fuel companies, increasing the level of tax for polluting industries and investing in projects and infrastructure that will pay off in the long-term. The cost of the transition should rest solely on those who are getting richer because of climate change.

HOW THE PUBLIC THINK ABOUT THE UN CLIMATE TALKS

1. People have heard very little about the COP.

Less than a quarter of the British public have heard about the COP ([YouGov](#)). However, Climate Outreach found that when they explained the COP to people they understood its purpose and were also likely to support it ([Britain Talks COP26](#)). Though they think that it's unacceptable that global leaders should be flying into Glasgow when it can happen online. People are also dubious about its prospects, only 1 in 5 people think that the conference will result in significant action to tackle climate change.

2. People tend to think that the crisis can be averted if we act drastically.

The climate crisis is a top concern for British people - it ranks second in a poll of issues people think are the most important ([Ipsos](#)). The majority (73%) agree that the effects of it can be felt in the UK right now ([Ipsos](#)). People (66%) are broadly optimistic that something can be done to avoid the worst impacts of climate change but it has to be drastic and immediate action. 43% of all Britons think that the government should prioritise spending on the crisis, and this belief is stronger amongst 2019 Labour voters (60%) ([YouGov](#)).

3. But many are fatalistic about the UK government being able to act as fast as is needed.

Although people are hopeful that there are actions that can be taken to deal with the crisis, 54% of people don't trust Boris Johnson to make the right decisions about climate change

([YouGov](#)). Half of the population are equally pessimistic about this government reaching their net-zero goal by 2050 ([Survation](#)).

4. People don't connect this government's climate action to a better economy.

Along with net-zero, people are cynical about other government proposals, with 38% of people thinking that they will be effective in combating climate change. When it comes to positively impacting the economy, only 33% believe this. The majority of the public aren't convinced that climate action will lead to better jobs - only 28% of people think it will ([YouGov](#)).

5. People know the crisis is global, but their ideas for solutions remain individualised and localised.

Britain Talks COP26 shows that extreme weather events have increased people's understanding of our dependence on the natural world and that they understand how its suffering is linked to theirs ([Britain Talks COP26](#)). Although global weather changes have helped people see that the crisis is global, there is still no sign of climate justice. Just under half of the population (45%) still see plastics as a pressing environmental issue. 33% of them think protecting the countryside and green spaces is the most pressing, while 20% believe it's more recycling ([YouGov](#)).

6. People believe the least impacted are the least responsible.

45% agree that the people and communities around the world that are least responsible for climate change are suffering the worst impacts (although they didn't feel strongly about this). People who voted Labour were much more likely to agree (59%) than Conservative voters (35%) ([Framing Climate Justice](#)).

7. Young people think that climate change multiplies other inequalities.

In general, people in the UK actually don't think this: they are more likely to say that climate change has no impact on existing inequalities. But young people (aged 18-25) do think that marginalised groups are most impacted by climate change, and choose this over the other interpretations of who it affects ([Framing Climate Justice](#)).