Governing Our Planetary Emergency

Statement of the Climate Governance Commission (CGC)
September 2023 (UN General Assembly High-Level Week & Climate Week)

Charting a Safe Path for a Workable Future

By working with diverse partners and contributing to smart coalitions of governments, civil society groups, cities, businesses, and others worldwide, the Climate Governance Commission aims to advance innovative solutions in the near and medium-term, to catalyze a shift in global governance and provide a practical path forward for ambitious and doable climate action.

The world faces a deepening planetary emergency – and is on a reckless path toward catastrophic climate change – having already over-stepped six of nine scientifically-identified planetary boundaries.[1] A continued failure to address the underlying causes of this emergency – such as fossil fuel-based economies, resource waste/overconsumption and the destruction of nature – will have further devastating effects for *all of humanity*, triggering potentially irreversible tipping points, with dangerous consequences for planetary stability, both social and ecological. A system-wide approach to solving the climate crisis is required now, ensuring reliable climate and planetary boundary governance for the Earth as a whole.

The Climate Governance Commission (CGC) aims to address this crucial gap by developing, proposing, and building partnerships that promote feasible, high-impact global governance solutions for urgent and effective climate action to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C or less.[2] A premise of

[1] The planetary boundary framework provides scientific guardrails for all biophysical processes and systems that regulate the stability and resilience of the planet, i.e., the capacity of the biosphere to buffer and dampen drivers of global warming. Key boundaries for a "safe" climate future are, beyond the climate planetary boundary, the biosphere boundaries on biodiversity, freshwater, land use change, and overloading of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen). All these interrelated biosphere boundaries regulate the ability of terrestrial and marine ecosystems to buffer human-caused changes to the climate system. See: Stockholm Resilience Centre, *Planetary Boundaries*: https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html.

[2] Unfortunately, this is now a very high ambition, based on current policies and actions (see: Schlosser, P, 2022. *The 1.5°C global warming limit is still within grasp — here's how we can reach it*' World Economic Forum, 5: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/12/1-5-degrees-global-warming-limit-climate-change-cop-27/.); but, as underlined by the IPCC, 1.5°C in fact represents ***a scientific limit*** and not a target or aspiration: IPCC, 2023. *Climate Change 2023 Current Synthesis Report*: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf. If current inaction continues, there will be

the Commission is that new perspectives on global governance – deploying new levels of collective wisdom and political courage – are required to tackle current existential planetary risks. Informing the upcoming COP-28 meeting in Dubai and September 2024 Summit of the Future in New York, solutions recommended by the Commission aim to move the Planet toward a global just transition, leap-frogging beyond carbon based energy to renewable technologies, jobs, and holistic economic and social well-being, with a special focus on those most vulnerable to climate change.

At this unique juncture in human history, the world may have as few as six-to-seven years to catalyze the unprecedented action needed to shift course and to avert the worst of the emergency.[3] The current crossing of planetary boundaries has already caused intense suffering and heightened inequality. Employing existing governance levers in new and more robust ways, and creating new levers and management systems, are necessary now to meet our shared, unprecedented ecological challenges. The Climate Governance Commission, in its forthcoming (November 2023) report, *Governing Our Planetary Emergency*, will recommend bold and concrete steps to catalyze a shift in global governance, for the benefit of all, and with suggested pathways to address the planetary emergency. The Commission's full report will provide practical global governance innovations for sound yet ambitious climate governance and planetary stewardship.

Working proposals of the Commission – some of which can be implemented on a near-term time horizon, and some which would take more time to establish – are listed in brief below.

Crisis Leadership and Shifting to a Different Course

New governance efforts and frameworks will have to match the urgency of required action in response to present conditions, as well as build resilience to future shocks and stresses. At the same time, today's extractive economic system and over-financialized economy must be transformed to genuinely serve people, planet, and prosperity.

The present global governance system is ill-equipped to deal with our planetary emergency, which now encompasses the "polycrisis" including, for example, international conflict, financial instability, global inequality, and pandemic risk and recovery. Empowered with new authorities and capabilities, current and new international governance institutions must exert competent crisis leadership, developing and deploying emergency plans and a new generation of effective policies while pursuing a more equitable allocation of resources. Further, scientific boundaries are not negotiable, but must drive and fundamentally inform our collective action and management systems.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions continue to rise, even though we currently have the science, technology and indigenous knowledge required to meet climate goals. Further, the world *could* be on the cusp of a major green energy transition, if leading technologies, solutions and green business trends become mainstream, circumventing any "Global North" and "Global South" divides.[4] Recent surveys have shown strong public support for robust government action, with people around the world saying "that climate change should be a "very high" or "high" priority for their governments in most areas

overshoot of this limit, and we will then have to "draw down" to attempt to re-stabilise the climate/Earth system. Regarding the latter scenario, see, for example, the work of the Climate Overshoot Commission: https://www.overshootcommission.org/.

[3] Forster, P., et al, 2023. *Indicators of Global Climate Change 2022: annual update of large-scale indicators of the state of the climate system and human influence*. Earth Syst. Sci. Data, 15. The remaining global carbon budget has been cut by half since reporting in IPCC AR6 in 2021, and amounts only to 250 Billion tons of CO2. Divide 250/40 and there are 6-7 years remaining at the current pace of global emissions. This budget is for a 50% chance of holding 1.5°C: https://essd.copernicus.org/articles/15/2295/2023/essd-15-2295-2023.pdf.

[4] "Climate action is not a Global North issue or a Global South issue. It is our collective challenge, and it affects all of us. We need to come together to find common, global solutions." H.E President William Samoei Ruto of Kenya, at the 2023 Africa Climate Summit. See: African Climate Summit 2023. *Welcome to Africa Climate Week*: https://africaclimatesummit.org.

within every region."[5] Acting quickly, following a "decisive transition" to net zero is easier, swifter and much more economically viable than thought and could save the world $12 trillion, compared to business-as-usual approaches.[6]

What is lacking is renewed and courageous "top down" leadership within all levels of government, combined with generalized "bottom up" citizen pressure and engagement (see, for example, Project Dandelion), to catalyze fundamental transformations. This is an *all of society* emergency effort requiring global, regional, national, local systems of government that, simultaneously, work with and tap the ideas, networks, and capabilities of communities, financial institutions, citizens, business, and entrepreneurs. Together, they should work swiftly to safeguard current and future generations, and all life on Earth.

Highlights of 2023 Commission Working Proposals

As a matter of urgency, the Climate Governance Commission proposes the following near-term proposals, which should be pursued at the same time as work begins on deeper, medium-term governance upgrades (see "Top 4," below). Civil society alliances and citizen engagement should be embedded in each proposal below, which together *are all* doable with political will mobilized by a combination of champion governments and partners from civil society.

Top 10 Near-Term Proposals

1. **Urgent Improvement of Climate COPs to Focus on Delivery, Action, and Accountability:** Introduce near and medium-term enhancements to ensure that Climate COPs represent an apex accountable and action-focused climate governance venue. COPs should be reformed to enhance the role of non-State actors, reduce the size of COP meetings, and ensure that they revolve around six main pillars: (1) knowledge exchange and technology co-development, (2) aligning mitigation plans with science, (3) adaptation, (4) finance, (5) delivery across pillars, and (6) accountability through measurement, reporting, and verification. These six pillars should be reconfigured with smaller annual COP meetings complemented by more frequent intersessional meetings, which focus on targeted deliverables whilst ensuring a broad base of multi-stakeholder involvement. Strengthen the role of women and young people in processes and decision-making at COPs and give central attention to just transition, ensuring the well-being of affected groups of peoples, such as workers, communities, and indigenous peoples.

2. **Declaration of Planetary Emergency, Planetary Emergency Platform, and Broadening International Security Paradigms:** The UN General Assembly should declare a global planetary emergency at the 2024 Summit of the Future, reinforced in similar statements by UN Agencies, regional bodies, and national and local governments. Elaborate on the UN Secretary-General's Proposed Emergency Platform to design and convene an inter-agency, intergovernmental Planetary Emergency Platform to bring together fragmented international institutional structures, and to develop a Planetary Emergency Plan for urgent, coordinated action, with linked national emergency plans. The Platform could bring together intergovernmental, State and non-State actors to plan for and cooperate on urgent action at all levels of governance, including a global decarbonizing package. Global security norms should be broadened to reflect the grave implications of over-stepping climate/planetary boundaries,

[5] See: Leiserowitz, A., et al, 2022. *International Public Opinion on Climate Change*, 2022 Yale Program for Climate Change and Communication, p. 15: https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/international-public-opinion-on-climate-change-2022.

[6] See: Institute for New Economic Thinking, 2023. *Reconsidering Renewables: RE:TV film on INET Oxford research*: https://www.inet.ox.ac.uk/news/reconsidering-renewables-retv-film-on-inet-oxford-research.

including UN Security Council practices to better reflect the climate policy challenges and priorities of the Global South and of all peoples.

3. **Transformative Action & Accountability of Powerful Actors**: Establish a "grand bargain" led by the following States or regional organizations: the US, EU, China, and India,[7] (representing more than half of global emissions) – joined also by other high-emitting nations – on GHG reduction targets and fossil fuel phase out with concrete timelines and implementation plans. Establish a new global Corporate Accountability Mechanism to track corporate climate commitments, and a Supplier Carbon-Disclosure Platform to facilitate the transition to low-carbon practices among supplier companies through knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices.

4. **Enhance International Scientific Capacity for Earth System Governance:** Establish an International Panel on Planetary Boundaries (IPPB), drawing on the Earth Commission's work, which would have a technical function – to integrate information and reporting from sectoral/technical bodies – and a policy function – to communicate scientific findings and policy matters to relevant national and international governance bodies, global or regional summits and conferences, and the general public.[8] A linked international expert subpanel on Earth System Risks, as a supplementary science-policy mechanism, should provide systematic assessments and on-going monitoring of the status of Earth system vital functions.[9] The enhancement of the global science-policy interface should inform governmental decision-making on an ongoing basis.

5. **Elevate Environmental Governance within the Multilateral System and MEA Accountability**: As recommended by the High-Level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Effective Multilateralism, strengthen the authority of UNEP and the UNEA to address the climate and interrelated environmental crises to increase accountability, action, incentives, and support for commitments under current key multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Provide them with an advisory role at the IMF and World Bank, and endow them with a facility (via an IPPB or otherwise; see No. 4, above) for information exchange and consolidation, and a policy clearinghouse to generate recommended actions in real-time. A public accountability platform could oblige States to publicly state their progress on commitments and be subject to criticism and feedback**.**

6. **International Economic/Financial Measures**: Introduce multilaterally endorsed new measures to bridge the great finance divide between developed and developing countries on climate finance. In line with the Bridgetown Initiative and the Debt Relief for Green and Inclusive Recovery initiative, promote long-term de-risked finance at lower market rates for climate mitigation and adaptation, expand the lending capacity of multilateral development banks for developing nations, and increase private investment through new financial

[7] It is critical to highlight in such a bargain that India is at a very different development scale and path, compared to the US, EU and China. Though India's 2070 net-zero target is two decades later than the US and EU and a decade later than China, it would still emit 59 per cent less than China, 58 per cent less than the US and 49 per cent less than the EU cumulatively (1850-2100). Between 2020 and 2030, the US, the EU and China would consume 45 per cent — and by 2050, 91 per cent — of the 1.5 °C carbon space. If all four were to be scaled similarly, then we must call on the other three to bring ahead their net zero targets by a decade. The latter would save 28.5% of the global carbon budget to stay below 1.5 °C. See: M, Ankur and V, Chaturved, 2021. T*he Carbon Space Implications of Net Negative Targets. New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water* New Delhi: Council on Energy, Environment and Water; https://www.ceew.in/publications/implications-of-negative-carbon-emissions-on-global-carbon-budget-space *and* A, Ghosh, 2023. *Can India Become a Green Superpower?* Foreign Affairs: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/can-india-become-green-superpower.

[8] See: D, Obura, 2022. *The Case for an International Expert Panel on Planetary Boundaries* Global Challenges Foundation.

[9] See: M, Jiborn, 2022. *The Case for an International Expert Panel on Earth System Catastrophic Risks* Global Challenges Foundation.

instruments, as well as establish international measures to finance a just transition and a loss and damage fund (see proposals here, here, and here). Debt management, pause and restructuring mechanisms can be remodeled to include climate risks, allowing for suspension of debt in climate vulnerable countries. De-risking of climate finance, particularly clean energy finance in developing and emerging markets, is vital to accelerate the pace and scale of clean energy deployment and infrastructural development to drive decarbonisation without deindustrialisation. Utilization of novel taxes and ending subsidies for brown energy would further contribute to global financial flows for global solidarity and reinforce fiscal sovereignty, i.e., increasing the fiscal space to face the crises of the future.

7. **Better use of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Law, and UN Human Rights Council, and Facilitate Citizen Participation**: Adopt a protocol to key multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to give the ICJ jurisdiction over obligations, ensuring that citizens and civil society have a voice – and legal standing – in such litigation, building on the success of recent citizen-initiated cases at the ICJ and International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and across national jurisdictions. Complete the forward-looking intergovernmental process toward a Global Pact for the Environment, which already possesses a General Assembly mandate. Introduce a special rapporteur group to investigate and report publicly on environmental violations and uphold the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, while taking measures to ensure diverse and inclusive viewpoints in global deliberations on planetary governance, in the global public interest (e.g., see these proposals).

8. **Connecting Trade and International Investment Law with Climate/Planetary Ecological Priorities**: Introduce global carbon tariffs and expand on aid-for-trade climate strategies to assist developing countries in climate adaptation and resilience. Reform the G7 Climate Club to promote climate finance for developing countries and provide clear accountability mechanisms for members of the Club. Developed economies should invest carbon tariff receipts in developing countries, as this would both level the playing field as well as reduce perceptions of trade protectionism. WTO reforms would enable it to act as a policy clearinghouse for international trade law and to account for climate priorities, while new and existing bilateral investment treaties should be reformed and remodeled to oblige investors to account for ecological priorities.

9. **Business as a Force for Good while holding it Environmentally Accountable**: Business actors can be agents of transformation and powerfully contribute solutions to the "triple planetary crisis" by catalyzing paradigmatic economic shifts from an extractivist and "shareholder first" mindset to a green tech revolution and economy based on active regeneration of people and planet, aligning advocacy with the public interest through a strengthened, transparent, and responsible global "green lobby" (see, e.g., BCorp, BTeam, etc.). Global supply chains should be shifted from a transactional/extractivist model to relationally-accountable responsibility chains. All levels of government should establish new legal structures and policies that support this shift, while enforcing accountability of strict environmental standards. Businesses also have a responsibility to invest in a just transition for communities dependent on the fossil fuel economy, and to make the economy more people-centric. Greater scrutiny and accountability for the private sector is required to ensure this needed shift in business objectives, mindset, and actual performance.

10. **Boosting "Next Generation" City and Regional Alliances**: Ensure that cities play a pivotal role in efforts to address global climate change and resilience through the use of new and

existing city forums, networks, and alliances, and the enhancement of the role cities play in international climate governance venues, as part of a multilevel, highly networked form of global climate governance. Create new action-focused initiatives, such as a global network of arid cities to accelerate the delivery of sustainable and resilient solutions at local, regional and global scales.

Top 4 Deeper Reforms:

Given the nature of the unprecedented planetary emergency, and the new realities of life on Earth in the Anthropocene, the international community will have to manifest a new vision and leadership to move towards "next generation" global governance to grapple with the magnitude and gravity of planetary challenges. Though achieving fruition may require a medium-term (5-10 years) time-horizon, work on these deeper international architecture reforms – including focused expert and diplomatic deliberation – should commence immediately.

1. **A Global Environment Agency (GEA)**: UNEP will have to be upgraded to a properly-endowed international agency, with ambitious and clear authorities and the capacity to effectively manage our shared global environmental commons. To catalyze a network of global, regional, national, and sub-national institutions for climate and planetary boundary governance, the GEA must perform five main functions: (1) A knowledge function to share and monitor climate and planetary boundary information; (2) a deliberative and legislative function; (3) an enabling and implementing function; (4) a trust and justice-building function; and (5) an iterative learning function. A GEA could work closely with other international institutions in the energy field, to phase out fossil fuels/GHGs and "phase in" renewable energy, power livelihoods, ensure energy security, and drive holistic wellbeing.

2. **An International Court for the Environment**: A tailored international legal institution to uphold the obligations of State and non-State actors under MEAs and other relevant law will be needed, serving as the central venue for the resolution of international environmental law disputes, scaling up recent successes in national and international climate litigation. This would closely interface with the GEA and have an explicit mandate to, among others: (1) resolve disputes and issue advisory opinions, with broad coverage; (2) facilitate access by NGOs and the private sector parties in the work of the court; (3) draw upon a scientific body to assess technical issues; and (4) establish specialist panels related, for example, to mining, aviation, and other such fields.

3. **Institutional Reform of the Global Financial System**: Overhaul the Bretton Woods Institutions, taking forward the Bridgetown Agenda for the Reform of the Global Financial Architecture, Earth4All, and the Debt Relief for Green and Inclusive Recovery (DRGR) Project, among other initiatives. Reforms should improve representation and legitimacy, strengthen the debt architecture to provide fairer outcomes for developing countries, and increase lending capacities to catalyze private and public climate finance, all within the context of managing the planetary emergency. Such institutional reforms should ensure a shift from an extractive economy to a well-being economy, moving from GDP as the sole indicator to indicators that measure, most importantly, health care, education, and other core dimensions of human development, all within delineated planetary carrying capacity. Other strategies for reform include the design of a long-proposed "Tobin Tax" on financial transactions (and other public international revenue-generation tools), and the establishment of a global public investment (GPI) concept as an essential principle for modern international public finance, both poised to finance the green transition.

4. **UN Charter Reform**: Strengthen principal UN organs and improve their ability to cope with the deepening planetary emergency, while enhancing the international rule of law to ensure greater accountability for climate action and broader global ecological risk, as well as international peace and stability. Additionally, establish a parliamentary body or bodies at the United Nations and other international organizations to advise and better represent the world's peoples, and improve representation and accountabilities within the UN Security Council so that it aligns with contemporary standards of governance legitimacy.

Through working with diverse and pro-active partners and contributing to smart coalitions of governments, civil society groups, cities, businesses, and others worldwide, the Climate Governance Commission aims to advance these and other forward-leaning innovations in the near and medium-term, to catalyze a shift in global governance and provide a practical path forward for *ambitious and doable* climate action.

List of Commissioners

Commissioners		
Mary Robinson	Lead Chair	Chair of the Elders, Former President of Ireland
Maria Fernanda Espinosa	Co-Chair	Group of Women Leaders, 73rd President of the UN General Assembly
Johan Rockström	Co-Chair	Director, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research
Adriana Erthal Abdenur	Commissioner	Co-Founder, Plataforma CIPÓ
Bader Al-Dafa	Commissioner	Executive Director, The Global Drylands Alliance, Special Envoy for Climate Change and Sustainability
Xiye Bastida	Commissioner	Re-Earth Initiative, Co-Founder, Climate Activist
Sharan Burrow	Commissioner	Vice Chair, European Climate Foundation, Former General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation
Sandrine Dixson-Declève	Commissioner	Co-President, Club of Rome
Arunabha Ghosh	Commissioner	Chief Executive Officer, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), New Delhi
Thilmeeza Hussain	Commissioner	Permanent Representative of The Maldives to the United Nations
Ma Jun	Commissioner	Director, Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE), Beijing
Sophia Kianni	Commissioner	Founder and Executive Director of Climate Cardinals; Member UN Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change
Wanjira Mathai	Commissioner	Managing Director, Africa & Global Partnerships, World Resources Institute (WRI)
Chido Mpemba	Commissioner	Youth Envoy at the African Union Commission and Youngest Diplomat in the AU Chairperson's Cabinet
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	Commissioner	Former President of Liberia and an Elder
Nobuo Tanaka	Commissioner	Chair, Steering Committee of Innovation for Cool Earth Forum (ICEF) & Former Executive Director, International Energy Agency (IEA)
Ernesto Zedillo	Commissioner	Former President of Mexico, an Elder, and Director, Yale Center on the Study of Globalization