At Christian Aid, we know that poverty is inherently political. It is the result of inequities in power and voice that are rooted in a long history of oppression and exploitation - especially of women. Poverty robs people of dignity. When people are poor at a time when there has never been more wealth globally, we must ask ourselves why.

We were founded by and are rooted in the churches of Britain and Ireland, and work to tackle global poverty and injustice. We believe that real progress can only happen when the structural causes of poverty are recognised and addressed, in this country and around the world.

As we approach a UK general election, at a time of considerable change and turmoil, it is critical that we ask those who seek to lead our country to play a positive role in order to end poverty and to create a just and sustainable world. One in which our global climate emergency is recognised by world leaders and where the rapid and radical changes required are made; one in which the world’s wealth is more evenly spread and responsibly managed; one in which every person’s voice can be heard; and one in which decision makers prioritise peace over war.

The UK has a moral obligation to the world’s poorest people to act. This is a matter of justice.

Ending climate injustice

Climate justice must be at the heart of all political parties’ work. Those already living in poverty, who bear the least responsibility for causing the crisis, are suffering the most and are the least able to adapt to climate impacts. Climate change means more floods, drought and extreme weather patterns – which leads to more hunger, conflict and insecurity. It is the poorest who suffer most.

At the heart of the problem lies an economic system that depends on ever-increasing extraction of resources to support over-consumption of a minority.

The UK is the second biggest historic emitter of greenhouse gases per capita since the industrial age began. Countries like the UK, which have contributed the most to the problem, now have a moral duty to lead the way and reach net zero as soon as possible. They also need to support other countries to develop sustainably and provide the financial and technological assistance they will need to adapt to the already irreversible effects of climate change.

We call for an end to the extraction and use of fossil fuels and serious measures to curb excessive, inefficient and unsustainable consumption by those already living with plenty. Tinkering around the edges while people suffer is not an option. The UK Government has the opportunity to be a catalyst for more ambitious action when it hosts COP26, the United Nations (UN) climate talks, in December 2020.

Christian Aid is calling on political parties to make public commitments for ambitious action on climate change, backed by investment and international leadership.

The new UK Government must commit to the following:

- End all support for fossil fuel extraction, and put in place an immediate moratorium on expansion in the UK. Create plans for a managed reduction and end to the fossil fuel industry.
- Regulate UK banks and investors and commit them to the near-term phasing out of finance for fossil fuels, in line with the Paris Agreement.
- Pass legislation for implementing measures to rapidly and radically reduce UK emissions in the near term, consistent with the 2050 net zero goal and the need to limit warming to 1.5°C.
- Invest 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) per year in a 10-year transformational plan to reach a net zero economy.

For more information, please contact Daisy-Rose Srblin, Senior UK Advocacy Adviser, on 020 7523 2164 or dsrblin@christian-aid.org
Christian Aid’s call to action

- Create a national landscape plan to show where and how nature-based solutions can help the UK achieve a domestic net zero target and increase the UK’s resilience to climate impacts.
- Commit to a just transition, ensuring that decarbonisation in the UK economy addresses social and economic inequality and leaves no one behind.
- Rule out international offsets in law, which essentially offload the UK’s own responsibilities onto poorer countries – and include international aviation and shipping in targets.
- Ensure the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other government departments have adequate climate diplomacy staffing and resources, as part of the UK’s presidency of COP26 and for ongoing engagement.
- Work with other countries to create and augment ambitious ‘coalitions of the willing’ on climate action, such as the Powering Past Coal Alliance.

Internationally, political parties should commit to:

- Stop all funding of fossil fuel production, transportation and use overseas. Shift aid into funding access to clean, renewable energy for all.
- Ensure the development of renewable energy does not exploit people or destroy the environment.
- Spearhead a massive transfer of finance and technology to poor and climate-vulnerable countries, so they can adapt to climate change and develop their economies cleanly.
- Commit to continually ramping up public international climate finance, including additional finance to build resilience in climate-vulnerable countries to avoid losses and damages.
- Ensure that the climate funds already pledged are spent on transformation in the global South, and allow for climate resilient, zero-carbon sustainable development.
- Support nature-based solutions for their multiple benefits for people (including timber, food, feed, fibre and other non-timber forest products), mitigation, resilience building and biodiversity conservation and enhancement.

A fairer global economy

There has never been so much wealth internationally – yet poverty persists across the world. The concentration of wealth is a sign of a broken economic system, where power imbalances mean that wealth tends to accumulate upwards. This is as a result of wealth and income redistribution mechanisms being too weak or not working fairly – be it via taxation or social protection systems, for example.

Governments and the private sector both have a role to play in building just, sustainable economies, where we can all benefit fairly from the world’s wealth. The UK’s engagement with the rest of the world must not be based on self-interest, but must put human rights at the heart of all that we do. This includes shifting the emphasis on financing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the overwhelming dominance of the private sector to more of a balance on public financing. It also means supporting an overhaul of the global financial system to ensure that financial institutions are aligned with the triple emergency of poverty, inequality and climate.

We therefore call on all parties to do their part to shift financial power from institutions dominated by the global North, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank, towards the UN and its regional and human rights treaty bodies to ensure that financing is aligned with the SDGs, human rights and climate change commitments.

Financing sustainable development

There is a difference between legitimate and illegitimate debt. We consider legitimate debt to be debt used to fund sustainable development, while illegitimate debt is acquired or used illegally or immorally.

Illegitimate debt can also be a source of illicit financial flows through market abuses by vulture funds, and a lack of transparency feeds irresponsible lending and borrowing. While most debt is legitimate, we believe that all debt should be declared on a public registry to prevent irresponsible lending and borrowing and corrupt practices. The UK is complicit in not making debt more transparent, and in keeping an open door to vulture...
funds that can prey on distressed country debt when a country is in a technical debt default situation.

To redress this, we call on all political parties to:

• Commit to work for a global debt restructuring mechanism to relieve unfair and illegitimate debt.

• Crack down on vulture funds which abuse UK law to enable predatory debt practices in the world’s poorest countries.

• Legislate to ensure that, for a loan to be enforceable under UK law, it should be publicly disclosed when it is given.

• Work with the IMF to set clear guidelines for all lenders, both private and official, on what constitutes unsustainable debt.

Protecting 0.7% for aid and development

International public financing in the form of development aid should be kept at the level of 0.7% of gross national income every year, especially to provide sustainable financing for the poorest countries. We want to see all official development assistance (ODA) spent on poverty alleviation and sustainable development, so we call on all political parties to commit to:

• Spend 0.7% for its original intention, on the very poorest and those left behind in the world, not in the pursuit of the UK’s self-interests.

• Commit to an independent Department for International Development (DFID), which has been proven to be the most efficient department in distributing ODA. DFID should be able to work across government departments to ensure the UK contributes in the most effective way possible to poverty eradication.

• Invest more in disaster prevention and resilience because this has a high return on investment when disasters do strike. Emergency responses will still be desperately needed during humanitarian disasters.

• Reform all DFID programmes to accelerate climate-safe development at community levels, and make all ODA nature positive.

• Allocate at least 25% of humanitarian UK aid funding directly to local groups by 2020, in line with commitments made last year at the World Humanitarian Summit.

• Reform all funds that have been shown to be spending aid badly, such as the Prosperity Fund and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

Tax reform

Tax abuses in the context of illicit financial flows keep people trapped in poverty. We have to see an end to UK tax rules rigged in favour of tax dodgers. We ask all political parties to:

• Ensure that the commitment to creating public tax registers of beneficial ownership in the British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies by 2020 is enforced.

• Bring forward legislation which requires all UK companies to publish their key economic indicators such as taxes paid on a country-by-country basis, so that developing nations know where money is made, and where tax is paid.

• Support a wider definition of illicit financial flows that includes tax abuse and avoidance.
Responding to conflict and disaster, and working for peace

In a world where growing numbers of people are being displaced by extreme poverty, conflicts and disasters, the UK has an important role to play. It must ensure that it is not contributing to the factors that cause conflict, is playing its role in upholding human rights and is supporting those seeking refuge.

It is uncomfortable, but important, to remember that the UK does not have a good reputation as a peacemaker. For example, while the UK seeks peaceful outcome to the humanitarian emergency in Yemen, our country also sells weapons to the Saudi-led coalition, despite its consistent violations of humanitarian law and evidence that it is deliberately bombing civilian targets.

When it comes to those who have fled conflict, 86% of refugees are hosted in developing countries – and well over half of the people displaced by war remain within national boundaries as internally displaced people, with a lack of clarity about their rights and limited ability to improve their life chances. For example, at present the UK has only agreed to give refuge to 0.4% of the total number of Syrian refugees, in comparison to the 20% Lebanon has taken in.

Palestinians living under occupation, a population protected under international law, are significantly poorer and have seen their rights further eroded since the Oslo Accords were signed 25 years ago.

We call on the UK Government to do the following, in the interests of prioritising peace over war:

- Increase our funding of global peacekeeping by committing to more than 1.5% via the UN Security Council.
- Suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates immediately. Reform arms exports controls to be much stronger in vetting UK arms deals, because the UK cannot be an international actor committed to peace while this hypocrisy continues.
- Expand the refugee resettlement scheme and significantly increase the number of Syrian children and families allowed into the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme above the current commitment of 21,000 people.
- Support UK funding to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory with impartial political interventions to hold all parties to account for violations under international law. These include: ending the blockade of Gaza, banning trade in illegal settlement produce and initiating a meaningful conversation on Palestinian refugees’ right to return and political intervention in the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.