

Christian Aid's Call To Action to UK Political Parties for General Election 2024

Christian Aid has been standing together with the world's most marginalised people for 75 years. We partner with local organisations and social movements in many of the world's poorest places, to provide practical support and to help tackle the root causes of poverty.

At Christian Aid, we are not party political, but we know that poverty and its causes reflect political choices. Poverty is the result of unequal access to power and resources, often rooted in a long history of oppression and exploitation, in which the UK has played a significant part and has a crucial role in helping to repair.

The global economic system, as it stands, is making the world's population radically unequal, and trapping hundreds of millions of people in extreme poverty. The persistence of extreme poverty at a time when record levels of extreme wealth are being accumulated among a tiny yet powerful global minority points to the urgent need for political leaders to be bold and do things differently. As the climate crisis and rising conflict increasingly exacerbate poverty, Christian Aid calls on political leaders to respond with the urgency and seriousness required.

The future will be determined by political decisions: whether we tackle the climate emergency; how economies are run; how we raise and invest our finances and how resources are distributed; whether to sow the conditions for peace or war. This is not the time for tinkering around the edges or managing the status quo. As we approach a UK general election, we are calling on all those who seek to play a role in governing our country to stand up for the choices needed to create a just, more equal and sustainable world.

The UK has a moral obligation to the world's poorest people to act. A more stable, equal, and prosperous world is also in the UK's long-term interest.

Ending climate injustice

Tackling the climate crisis – the biggest existential threat to humanity of our time - must be at the heart of any future government's agenda. The effects of global heating continue to worsen, driving hunger, conflict and displacement, hitting hardest the poorest and most vulnerable countries and communities, who have done least to contribute to the problem. Women and girls are disproportionately affected. Rich countries like the UK, which hold historic and ongoing responsibility for causing the crisis, are falling far short in taking the necessary action to arrest the climate emergency and address its increasingly damaging effects.

As a historical polluter and one of the world's largest per capita emitters, the UK has a moral duty to go further and faster than most countries to bring greenhouse gas emissions down to net zero. Yet despite its previous reputation for climate leadership and its groundbreaking 2019 legislation on getting to net zero, the UK is well off course on its mitigation targets and continues to support fossil fuel expansion.

Globally, rich country pledges on climate finance to support lower income countries have been insufficient to address the needs. Even what has been pledged has been only partially met. Most of the limited finance that *has* been delivered has come in the form of loans which must be repaid with interest, instead of as grants, which acknowledge that this is money owed *to* those bearing the costs of a crisis they did not cause. Furthermore, while important steps have been

taken towards establishing a global Loss and Damage Fund to address the climate impacts that cannot be adapted to, current funding is a fraction of what's needed. The UK's small contribution is drawn from funds already earmarked for other poverty reduction and climate change priorities. The UK has the choice to raise money for global climate finance without impacting the average household, by taxing the UK's wealthiest and most polluting companies.

Trust in global climate talks is hanging by a thread, and with it the hope of limiting global warming to a level that is safe and sustainable for all. Countries like the UK must urgently demonstrate how climate finance at scale will be delivered to lower income countries without creative accounting; and must champion increased ambition globally through accelerated action at home. These are prerequisites for keeping UN talks on track. For the next UK government this will require repairing its previous reputation for climate leadership, through the following measures:

- Lead efforts to deliver an ambitious post-2025 new collective quantified goal on climate finance at COP29, responding to mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage needs, mostly through grant-based finance, that is at scale and additional to aid.
- Provide the UK's fair share of dedicated funding for the Loss and Damage Fund. This must be delivered through grants, not loans, be new money, and be based on the polluter pays principle.
- Devise a package of taxes, largely based on wealth taxes and taxes on polluters, to fund the UK's fair share of international climate finance commitments, including for Loss and Damage
- Ensure funding for adaptation and L&D is accessible and responsive to the needs and rights of affected communities, particularly women and girls and other marginalised groups. This means prioritising locally-led

approaches that strengthen the decision-making power of affected people.

- Commit to increasing the proportion of climate finance that is channelled through UNFCCC mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, which are the legitimate, democratic structures for delivering climate finance, where developing countries have an equal voice.
- Halt all new oil and gas developments, and invest in pathways to good quality, secure green jobs based on the needs of current fossil fuel sector workers and their communities. This is not only a key step in support a just UK net-zero transition, but would also provide vital global leadership in curbing fossil fuel production and preventing significant future greenhouse gas emissions at source.
- Accelerate the UK's domestic transition to a zero-carbon economy, focusing on action to support the UK's poorest households and tackle inequalities.

Shaping a fairer global economy

Whilst global wealth is at near record highs, global poverty persists – disproportionately so in countries affected by conflict. In recent years poverty has been rising. Extreme inequality is undermining the potential for people to live in dignity.

The current economic system is concentrating power and wealth in the hands of too few people. Businesses of all sizes have a key role to play in creating jobs and wealth; a well-functioning private sector can be a force for good. But, the current system is enabling some of the largest global companies to make excessive profits at the expense of people and the environment, fuelling inequality and driving conflict. Big banks and hedge funds profiting from loans to lower income country governments are failing to fully cooperate with global debt relief initiatives, depriving many of the world's poorest countries of critical revenues. Fossil fuel companies continue to make vast sums

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through the dirty energy that is destroying the planet without being taxed for the harm they cause. Meanwhile, the poorest countries' governments lack the resources to invest in their people.

To enable everyone to live sustainably and with dignity, resources must be distributed more fairly. All governments must be enabled to invest adequate public finance in the services that the poorest people, particularly women and girls, disproportionately rely on, and which play a key part in people's ability to escape poverty. Debt cancellation, and tax reforms can release resources for lower income country governments to meet the needs of their people. Government budgets and wider economic policies must deliver for women and girls.

At the global level economic and power is concentrated in ways that skew decisions and marginalise the voice of people living in poverty. While multilateral cooperation is essential to deliver progress against poverty, the governance structures of the global financial institutions run on a 'one dollar, one vote' principle and are still dominated by the wealthiest countries. They therefore lack legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness. Lower income country governments have regularly called for reforms of existing institutions like the World Bank and IMF, to enhance their voice, and for more decisions to be taken in the more democratic space of the UN, in particularly through supporting the UN's 4th international Financing for Development conference taking place in 2025. Christian Aid backs these calls. Further, we call for specific actions on debt cancellation, global tax cooperation, economies that deliver gender equality, and ensuring businesses safeguard the environment and human rights, as set out below.

Debt cancellation

Many lower income countries are in a debt crisis that is preventing them from addressing the needs of their people or responding to the climate emergency. Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic and the war in Ukraine, many lower income countries were already spending several times

more on external debt repayments than on healthcare, or on tackling the impacts of the climate

crisis. The last few years of global crises have compounded already untenable debts, which are now crippling more than 50 countries. Widespread debt cancellation is needed from all creditors, but it is the private creditors (big banks and asset management companies) that have been delaying and weakening debt relief initiatives. These creditors need to be brought to the table. Actions to cancel debts should also be complemented with building a new global consensus on making lending and borrowing more responsible and sustainable. We call on the next government to:

- Introduce legislation to facilitate debt relief for lower income countries in debt distress. As the majority of the debt owed by these countries to private creditors is governed by English or New York law, the UK government has uniquely significant powers to break the logjam on debt relief through this measure.
- Support the long-standing calls from lower income countries for a UN sovereign debt work out mechanism, providing a predictable, rules-based system that disincentivises risky lending and borrowing and compels all creditors to participate.

Global tax cooperation

Tax is the most sustainable source of financing for public goods, from healthcare and education to measures to tackle the climate crisis. But poorer countries' tax revenues are typically too low, a key factor in driving up debt levels. This is in no small part due to major companies and wealthy individuals avoiding tax on a massive scale, hiding profits in low transparency jurisdictions, an issue that requires global cooperation. Tax rates for the richest individuals and companies are also typically set too low to raise the revenues that are needed to tackle current global challenges. The 2021 tax deal, brokered by the OECD club of rich countries, was supposed to address some of these issues, but

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failed to deliver benefits for lower income countries. We call on the next government to:

- Champion the new fully inclusive negotiations on a UN Tax Framework Convention to deliver a fair and ambitious tax deal for the world, as proposed by African governments and supported by the G77 (representing 134 countries).

Economies that deliver gender equality

Women and girls are the hardest hit by inadequate public spending, including through reduced access to health services, increased unpaid care burdens and negative impacts on employment and income levels. The proposed reforms on debt and tax to enable increased public investment, provided above, are therefore minimum requirements for addressing gender inequalities and supporting women's rights. In addition, we call on the next government to:

- increase long-term, flexible funding to women's rights organisations, enabling women to advocate to their own governments for feminist economic policies and budgets based on their own analysis and priorities.
- support to civil society and governments to conduct ex-ante gender-responsive impact assessments of economic reforms.

Human rights in global value chains

Many UK businesses make a positive contribution to poverty reduction, through the creation of jobs and livelihoods in low-income countries. However, too often negative human rights and environmental impacts are also embedded in their supply chains, including harms to workers, discrimination and violence against women, land grabs, deforestation, and pollution. Voluntary initiatives have a weak track record of preventing these harms or enabling victims to access justice. Without strong laws to level the playing field only a minority of well-

intentioned companies, or those facing consumer scrutiny, will invest in doing the right thing. We call on the next government to:

- Put in place a new UK legal requirement for companies and investors to carry out human rights and environmental due diligence in their global supply chains – i.e. a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act.
- Champion the establishment of an international legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

Changing the way UK 'aid' is spent

Christian Aid advocates for a new settlement on debt and tax, as more sustainable routes to mobilising development finance than aid. But, in the world as it is, aid still matters. Aid matters not as an act of charity, but as the fulfilment of a commitment, based on justice, solidarity, and repair for historic harms. Aid matters because it continues to provide a critical lifeline for some of the poorest and most marginalised communities in the poorest and most fragile countries, where there is typically a large gap between financing needs and ability to raise domestic resources.

But aid must be repurposed. An aid budget, re-set at 0.7% GNI, must be directed to the poorest countries and communities; and it must be channelled in ways that support the agency of, and are accountable to, people living in poverty. We call on the next government to:

- Reverse the trend away from a poverty focus, towards a re-focusing on the poorest and fragile and conflict affected countries and communities, in accordance with the UK's International Development Act (IDA) and in recognition of the SDGs' commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

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- Put resources and decision-making into the hands of communities, civil society, and other local actors in aid-recipient countries. This must involve providing flexible, multi-year core funding to local organisations, including women's rights organisations, supporting them to claim their rights and advocate for fair, equitable, feminist economic policies, and budgets, based on local people's priorities.
- Halt aid contributions to British International Investment until it significantly improves transparency of its operations and is able to demonstrate pro-poor outcomes and accountability to affected communities.

Be a force for peace in the world

Today, the need for peacebuilding is more urgent than ever. Soon, half the world's poorest people will live in fragile or conflict-affected areas. Conflicts are becoming more protracted and complex, trapping communities in poverty through repeated cycles of violence and exclusion. Conflicts are driven by multiple interconnected and compounding factors, including deep inequalities in access to power and influence, to justice, accountability, and security, and to natural resources and basic services. The climate crisis exacerbates these impacts.

The UK has played a role in perpetuating the root causes of conflict, which continues today, not least through building much of its wealth on the resources of many conflict-affected countries. Yet, the UK is also able to play a positive role in building a more just and peaceful world. As still one of the richest countries in the world, with outsized influence within political and economic multilateral fora, and with a permanent seat the Security Council, there is a special responsibility on the next government to build the UK's credibility as a force for good in the world.

Invest in a peace first approach

In a world with more violent conflicts than at any time in the last 30 years, we are also seeing record levels of military spending globally. Yet military responses rarely address the drivers of conflict or contribute to its overall reduction.

Conflict needs to be tackled through dealing with root causes. Actioning our calls to tackle the climate crisis, build a fairer economy and repurpose UK aid, would go a long way towards tackling the root causes of conflict.

There is also a need to invest in targeted, community-led conflict prevention approaches, with meaningful participation from affected communities, including women at every level, over the long-term. The proportion of the UK aid budget spent on peacebuilding and conflict prevention fell by half during the ten years up to 2020. Steep cuts to such prevention work in many of the poorest countries, like South Sudan and Afghanistan where Christian Aid works, have undermined the road to peace.

Meanwhile, UK military spending remains at 2% of GNI, and the UK is one of the world's biggest exporters of military equipment and training, with British arms having been at the heart of war in some of the poorest places in the world. The promotion of peace and security is incompatible with permitting UK-based firms to sell arms to parties involved in conflicts where there is evidence or risk of violations of international law. Further, the UK has obstructed UN resolutions that support peace, in the case of Gaza and in Yemen in 2016.

The UK will only be able to help deliver a more peaceful world if it is prepared to invest in peace over and above military intervention. We call on the next UK government to invest in a peace first approach, which should include asks in the above sections of this document, to address root causes of conflict, and, beyond that the following measures:

- Shift a greater percentage of defence budgets into conflict prevention and

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peacebuilding. This should include not only reorientating more of the aid budget towards conflict-prevention and peacebuilding, but also conducting a review of defence spending with the aim of shifting the balance away from militaristic approaches and towards prevention and peace.

- Ensure peacebuilding initiatives are led by affected communities. This means significantly stepping up long-term flexible funding to local organisations that are embedded in, and can engage with and amplify the voices of, affected communities, to build political will for peace; and who can adopt a preventative approach in hotspots of violence. Ensuring the meaningful participation of women at all levels must be central to such an approach.
- Review its arms export control strategy. Adopt a precautionary approach that prevents arms sales to governments or armed groups with a record of violating international law or human rights. This should be shaped by robust cross-government policy and subject to full and regular parliamentary scrutiny. Licenses must be subject to timely and rapid review where there is evidence or risk of related military equipment being used to commit or facilitate violations of international law or human rights.
- Consistently vote for peace at the UN. As one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the UK has a specific responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It plays a key role in the drafting and adoption of resolutions on conflict situations, including those mandating the use of force, and has the right of veto. Consistency and transparency in its application of this vote is

critical to international peace and security and trust in the multilateral system. The next government should commit to using its seat on the UNSC to deliver peace, always.

Stand up for accountability and justice

There can be no lasting peace without upholding human rights, justice, and mechanisms for accountability. Some of the richest countries in the world are also the largest suppliers of military equipment used to commit human rights abuses. At the same time, we are witnessing a lack of accountability for violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), with parties to conflict increasingly disregarding norms and rules designed to protect civilians in conflict and prevent mass atrocities. Governments like the UK need to step up to reinforce global rules and processes that are there to protect civilians, prevent atrocities, uphold human rights, and to ensure accountability and justice when abuses and war crimes are committed. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is one such vehicle for this and the UK government has been a long-standing supporter. However, inconsistency in the application of legal routes undermines their effectiveness overall. The UK government's position of withholding support for the ICC investigation in IOPT, whilst rightly supporting investigation into war crimes committed in Ukraine smacks of double standards, eroding trust in a rules-based system that should protect all people. We call on the next UK government to:

- Uphold humanitarian law: Be consistent and unwavering in its calls for all parties to armed conflict to protect civilians and uphold international law, and unequivocally call out potential violations.
- Consistently support mechanisms for accountability: Be consistent in its support for the ICC and its independent investigations into war crimes to ensure accountability, whether in relation to Ukraine, IOPT or other contexts.

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