



English Version

scientist rebellion_



To the Federal, Walloon, Flemish and Brussels-Capital governments,

We are Belgian scientists and academics who believe that we should expose the reality and severity of the climate and ecological emergency all are facing, by engaging in non-violent civil disobedience. We deem this necessary to bring about the systemic changes required to address these crises. The time has come to move from publications to public actions [1]. We are part of a global movement called “Scientist Rebellion”, working under a common manifesto which you can find on our website at scientistrebillion.com.

Along with 194 other countries, Belgium signed and ratified the Paris Agreement of 2015, committing it, under international law, to hold global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C [2]. Without bold and focused action, the current impacts of climate change, such as the recent summer heatwaves and droughts in Europe [3], the April floods in South Africa [4] and the August floods in Pakistan [5], will pale in comparison with what is to come, rendering current standards of living impossible.

Industrialized countries such as Belgium, which has the tenth highest historical emissions per capita in the world [6], have benefitted by far the most from fossil fuels. They therefore have an ethical responsibility to achieve the energy transition more quickly than the world as a whole. Given the uneven distribution of most impacts, global warming is already exacerbating existing Global North-South inequalities and will only continue do so [7]. Such inequalities were born from colonial practices and are continued today by neocolonialism [8].

As scientists, we have been slow to understand and communicate the holistic nature of the climate crisis, which is but the latest symptom of a toxic system based on colonialism and extractivism. Our current economic system, with its imperative of endless growth, has caused terrible harm to life on Earth of which humans are just a small part. It is impossible to adequately address the climate crisis without acknowledging this, by placing the climate crisis in the wider context of social inequalities and the ecological crisis.

We believe that it is not a question of choosing between "the end of the world and the end of the month". Addressing both at once is crucial if either is to be resolved, especially in the context of an energy crisis in which many Belgians must choose between heating and eating. Those who have benefitted most from our ecologically destructive way of life, i.e. the richest among us, should bear the brunt of the costs, both within Belgium and globally by leading the way in climate mitigation, compensating for loss and damages and cancelling the illegitimate debts of the Global South.



Besides and partly because of the climate crisis, we are currently witnessing the sixth mass extinction. Between 1970 and 2018, an average fall of 69% in wildlife population sizes of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles was recorded [9]. 40% of insect species are threatened with extinction, with habitat loss being the main driver [10]. The current trajectory is so alarming that the academic literature describes it as "biological annihilation" [11].

Climate action also requires facing up to harsh realities, instead of mostly relying on wishful, purely technological solutions. In 2021, an anonymous survey of IPCC authors in Nature revealed that just 4% of respondents thought limiting warming to 1.5°C was likely. The majority said they expect at least a catastrophic 3°C of warming by the end of the century [12,13]. These results are not surprising, given that global emissions reached an all-time high in 2021, a year in which governments spent more on subsidizing fossil fuel than when the Paris Agreement was signed [14, 15].

Therefore we, Scientist Rebellion Belgium, call upon the wider scientific community to level with the public and openly admit that the target of 1.5°C is dead [16]. Although this failure represents a catastrophe for many communities worldwide, it is no reason for despair and inaction. On the contrary, it remains critical to rapidly transition towards a more resilient and sustainable society. The longer we wait, the greater the harm to life on Earth.

Our Belgian governments have the huge responsibility of creating the necessary framework conditions in a timely manner. Policies are needed to make it simple and desirable to act sustainably. Examples include effective regulations and allocation of finite resources; cessation of subsidies for environmentally-damaging actions and products; energy efficiency measures, such as nationwide insulation of buildings; social innovations; massive, directed investment in electrification, public transport infrastructure, regenerative land use and other forms of sustainable agriculture and, most importantly, incentivizing demand reduction.

Unfortunately, in the face of one of the greatest threats humanity has ever faced, the response of the Belgian governments has so far been pitiful. Last year, the Brussels Court of First Instance condemned our federal government as well as all three regional governments, for their negligent climate policy in a lawsuit lodged by Klimaatzaak/Affaire Climat [16]. The Court ruled that the governments breached their duty to exercise due caution and diligence and violated the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is crystal clear to us that the climate and ecological predicament we are living through is deepening the inequalities and injustices in our societies and will require radical and far-reaching measures to mitigate its impact. It will not be successfully addressed by tinkering around with business as usual. Every citizen has a right to demand a just transition to a sustainable society, but, as scientists, we bear a particular responsibility to do so. While our political leaders persist in ignoring hard truths, we must continue to sound the alarm and start to act accordingly, of which one way is by engaging in non-violent civil disobedience. We have the privilege of knowing and therefore the duty to act.

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