



Climate Justice and the Environment Bill – Mini Briefing for MPs

The Environment Bill is returning to the Commons for report stage. The Government claims it wants the legislation to set a “gold standard” and be “world-leading” on environmental governance. However, there are inadequacies in the Bill in relation to air pollution and ensuring the UK’s global ecological footprint is reduced, with these issues in the scope of the Bill threatening human rights in the UK and overseas. In advance of COP26, it is vital that the UK adheres to the highest standards of environmental protection nationally to set the best possible example internationally as countries renew their commitments to the Paris Agreement. The Labour Campaign for Human Rights wishes to see greater appreciation in UK environmental policy of our historic role in contributing to the current crisis, as well as the continuing environmental pressures facing countries in the global south as a result of our extractive economic model and consumerist lifestyle. This should be coupled with appreciation of the effects of the climate crisis on human rights and the disproportionate impact of such effects on already marginalised communities. Whilst the Environment Bill as a single piece of legislation cannot hope to remediate all these issues, we believe there are vital amendments all Labour MPs can support to strengthen the Bill from a Climate Justice perspective:

1. **Air Pollution** – Amendment 2 on WHO-aligned legal limits of Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5)

Last month, the inquest into the death of Ella Kissi-Debrah concluded, for the first time, that a loss of life in the UK was attributable to air pollution. Ella’s case is not an anomaly - evidence suggests that in some urban areas around 1 in 19 deaths are now linked to air pollution. COVID-19 has exacerbated the impact of poor air quality, and it is ethnic minority groups who are more likely to live in areas above legal limits and consequently die from COVID-19 at higher rates than the rest of the population. For the first time last year, levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) met legal limits in Ella’s borough of Lewisham, thanks in part to the introduction of Ultra-Low Emissions Zones and Clean Air Zones. However, 75% of reporting zones still breach the limits, including on fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). An estimated 40,000 deaths in the UK are attributable to illegally high air pollution levels, and we now have legal certainty of this. With the UK now outside the EU, we are no longer bound by the Air Quality Directive. As such, ***we risk backsliding on air quality unless MPs support Amendment 2 on aligning legal limits on fine particulate matter stipulated in secondary legislation to World Health Organisation guidelines on safe levels of PM_{2.5} as a bare minimum.***

The Labour Campaign for Human Rights is calling for greater awareness and recognition of the disproportionate effects of the climate crisis, including air pollution, on the human rights of ethnic minorities and already marginalised groups in the UK and internationally. You can read our blog on this issue [here](#).

2. **Environmental harms in UK Company supply chains - Amendments 26, 27, 36, 37 and 38 - and the need for greater action on the environmental and human rights impact of UK-based companies**

The world has been shocked by the appalling evidence coming from China on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims. The genocide has shone a spotlight on the need for strengthened due diligence requirements mandated by law for UK companies to ensure they are not complicit in this atrocity through their supply chains. The Labour Campaign for Human Rights also believes that UK-based companies have a moral imperative to reduce the environmental impacts of their supply chains and welcomes Amendment 27 as a means of strengthening due diligence obligations on UK-based companies to prevent illegal deforestation through their supply chains. However, we need this Bill to move further in response to the scale of the crisis before us. The Government should take into account its own Global Resource Initiative (GRI) Taskforce and DEFRA's due diligence consultation and amend the legality-only approach to due diligence to include a **target for ending all deforestation and conversion in UK company supply chains by 2030 at the latest**. This is because relying on locally defined definitions of 'illegal' deforestation is inadequate to meet the scale and pace of this issue. 2020 saw the highest deforestation figure since 2008 in the Amazon, equivalent to an area half the size of Wales lost in one year alone. Given that we know UK demand for forest-risk commodities such as soy is a key driver of this deforestation, we have a moral duty to halt the deforestation our consumerist and extractive lifestyle is contributing to.

The Labour Campaign for Human Rights also urges Labour MPs to support Amendment 26, which obligates UK companies to seek consent of indigenous peoples and local communities before prohibiting forest-risk commodities. According to the UN, around 60 million people globally are employed in forest-based industries. The UK must therefore support locally-informed sustainable forest management practices, and this can be done both by prioritising this as a focus area for international development and reducing our contribution to deforestation through UK-based company supply chains.

We would also call for Labour MPs to **support further action on the environmental impacts of UK-based companies and trade beyond deforestation and the corresponding impacts on the human rights of local populations**. The recent [case of UK-based Vedanta Resources Limited](#) and Zambian subsidiary Konkola Copper Mines PLC has highlighted the obligations on UK-based companies to provide a duty of care over local populations and prove they are mitigating the environmental impact of their operations. The company had faced a claim from more than 2,500 villagers for the adverse effects of the mine's pollution on their health and livelihoods. Labour should support further measures to increase obligations on UK-based companies to disclose and manage the environmental and human rights impacts of their operations as a precursor to reducing our global environmental footprint.