



## **UKYCC UNEQUIVOCALLY SUPPORTS THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT, NOW AND ALWAYS**

This statement is one of the products of long internal reflection and analysis of the wider environmental movement by UKYCC, following the ongoing campaigning by Black Lives Matter and other racial justice organisations to highlight systemic and institutional injustices experienced by Black people.

Our commitments, work, and continued education on systemic racism and structural inequality will not end here, and this following list of actions will not be the extent of our work. UKYCC will commit to continuously evaluating, critiquing and reflecting on our actions and work as an organisation and how we both perpetuate racism, and could take positive action to tackle it.

First, the resulting commitments are shown below, detailing what UKYCC intends to do as an organisation:

1. **Train** ourselves, and redistribute online training, to ensure that any action we take is done with an appropriate understanding of anti-racism and climate justice. Importantly, continually educate ourselves in the intersectional nature of oppressions, to apply and analyse social issues like anti-black racism or sexism while being aware that the experiences around this aren't homogeneous.
2. **Connect** with other youth groups led by people of colour in the UK, and groups from the Global South, through our campaigns, actions, and communications. Wherever capacity allows, this extends to supporting their campaigns and ideas. For the internal workings of UKYCC, we are aware of the need to better represent Black and other BAME communities in our team, and in our board of trustees.
3. **Centre** climate and social justice in our climate change campaigns,

actions and communications. Furthermore, we will centre the voices of people of colour in our communications, the voices of those who have first-hand experiences of racism and other oppressions, while not limiting them to reflecting solely on these issues.

4. **Share** through our networks the opportunities that arrive in the UKYCC inbox, including event participation, campaign collaboration and occasionally fundraising. UKYCC engages a lot with the UN's annual climate negotiations (commonly known as "COP"), so with COP26 due to be held in the UK, we are keen to widen and enable participation in what is an important but usually complex and bureaucratic process.
5. **Reflect** on our campaigns and progress and against these commitments above, adapt and update these when relevant, and report in our communications what specific actions we have taken to fulfil these commitments. We publicly commit to this statement, which will evolve with our actions and communications where relevant.

*Our full statement follows, after a quick note on terminology: Throughout this statement we are speaking from a UK perspective, but are conscious of the global, interconnected nature of systemic oppression as well as the US-focus of recent news. We use BIPOC to refer to black, indigenous and people of colour, however we are aware that each acronym or identifier such as BIPOC, BAME, or POC have specific exclusions and applications. We use this term here as it best approaches the focus of this statement, which is anti-black racism in the USA, in the environmental movement, and in wider society.*

**Racism and systemic oppression** towards black, indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) in the USA is by no means a new phenomenon in 2020. However, the ongoing campaigning by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other racial justice organisations to highlight systemic and institutional injustices experienced by Black people reached a boiling point with the brutal murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department on the 25th of May, preceded by the horrific murder of Breonna Taylor by the Louisville Metro Police Department on the 13th of March 2020.

The resulting outcry and pain has since sparked protests across every state in the USA, and internationally. The global BLM movement asks the world to take action against police brutality, take steps to undo the systemic anti-black racism prolific in society, and for everyone to make individual commitments to not only be simply 'non-racist' but **actively anti-racist**.

In the USA, the protests have centred around the **injustice of police violence** with calls to defund the police and have emphasised the failures of the US incarceration system. In the UK, the protests have highlighted the **colonial and racist statues** present in British public spaces, **discriminatory “stop and search” practices** by the British police, and the brutal **“Hostile Environment” immigration system** which currently stands in the UK, in particular following the Windrush scandal. In Australia, the protests have sparked a reminder of the **injustices experienced by the country's aboriginal communities**. And all over the world, similar revelations are being elevated with protests making it clear that #BlackLivesMatter.

**“Race was not only created to justify a racially exploitative economic system, it was invented to lock people of colour into the bottom of it”**

- Ijeoma Oluo, “So you want to talk about race” p12

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Race impacts almost every part of a person's life. Whether that be through the privileges you are born with that continue to push you up a pyramid built for you to be at the top, or the discrimination placed upon you for no reason other than the colour of your skin, that continue to perpetuate a world where you have to work ten times as hard to survive in a system that is not built to allow you to flourish.

Racism is deep-rooted in the history of the earth, but European colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade deeply shaped the understandings and experiences of race that are held today. The history of how classifications of people based on race grew across the world is long, brutal, and unforgiving - learning that history is important. The outcome of that history has been a world built by whitewashing, structural and systemic racism, social norms based on racial biases, and perpetual actions, sentiments, statements and everyday realities which continue to perpetuate white supremacy.

Many structures and models of success, freedom, expression and culture are permeated by racial hierarchies and biases. **You don't have to be outwardly racist to be part of, and contribute to, a racist system.** Almost every aspect of social inequality is deeply connected to systemic racism: access to education, housing, homelessness, healthcare, poverty, mental health provision, crime, financial support and accessibility, gender inequality, and the list goes on. In short, almost everything is connected to race, and to ignore this is to fail to recognise the root of the problem.

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## Police Brutality

Police violence and killing of Black and other BIPOC communities has been a significant issue for the Black Lives Matter movement. It is also not new to 2020; 24% of those killed by police in 2019 were members of the Black community in the US despite only representing 13% of the population. Racial profiling and police violence are deeply rooted in the USA's history of slavery and settler colonialism and is perpetuated through both policing practices and societal biases that actively discriminate against BIPOC communities, in particular, Black Americans. There are countless horrifying examples of BIPOC being killed or violently harmed for in-existent-to-misdemeanor crimes. This is unacceptable for any individual but is more likely to happen to individuals of BIPOC communities making this a deeply racist problem.

As a result, communities have been calling to defund the police (a sector of public services with significant funding sources compared others) and instead to train **specialists who could assist** in cases connected to mental health, domestic abuse and sexual assault - leaving the policing of petty crimes to community representatives (removing the police force altogether) and/or a much smaller police force with training that would foster **non-violent and de-escalation approaches to policing**. The aim is to address the systemic racism prevalent in law enforcement structures and show that alternative systems could go a long way to **removing the fear, pain and injustice** that racist policing has caused for Black and other BIPOC communities for decades.

## **It's not just the US, the UK is not innocent**

Many of the responses to the protests in the UK have been built around the misconception that the police deaths and systematic racism experienced in the US are unique to the US alone. This is not true. As shown in the violently inhumane treatment of asylum seeker Mercy Baguma, systematic racism in the UK is a powerful force, rife in the migration, employment, justice, and healthcare systems among many others.

It's not just the United States, the UK is not innocent. 8% of the people who die in police custody in the UK are Black, from Mark Duggan to Sarah Reed, despite making up only 3% of the population. Families like those of Roger Sylvester and Kingsley Burrell are still fighting for justice, years after these crimes were committed. Over 20 years after the Macpherson report into Stephen Lawrence's death named the Metropolitan police as institutionally racist, commentators from within the police are still saying that nothing has changed.

Systemic racism is at play in the UK in the disproportionate effects of COVID-19, where Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals are more than four times as likely to die from the virus than white people. Rather than address these inequalities, the response from the government has been to attempt to cover up these findings.

Furthermore, **Boris Johnson's condemnation of removing statues as 'to lie about our history'** fails to realise that the education system in the UK is already lying about history, namely the impacts of colonialism, or the absence of Black British history in the curriculum. It was the British Empire which set up the systems of apartheid, Trans-Atlantic slavery, and overseas colonies, that created the anti-Black racism that is seen in the US today. And yet many public figures are quick to talk of the UK's credentials, insisting that the problem is 'over there'.

The list of racial inequalities running through UK employment, the justice system, healthcare, and so on, are practically endless. The UK is not innocent.

## **The climate movement must join hands to fight systemic racism**

It is unacceptable for anyone working in the climate movement to stay silent on systemic racism when climate change disproportionately impacts BIPOC, BAME and Global South communities. For the same reasons that UKYCC promotes the need for systemic change (see our statement [here](#)) many groups across the environmental community recognise that fighting the injustices of air pollution, energy poverty, land grabbing, extractivism, water pollution, and the destruction of nature are all deeply connected to systems of power and privilege that continue to exacerbate social inequalities.

The Western industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries kick-started our intensive extractive, high-emission and polluting relationship with Mother Earth as we know it today. However, **this phenomenon was built not only in the context of industrialisation in the West but also through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade** and through colonialism in the Global South, all led by European colonial powers, for the benefit of Western countries and their predominantly white populations. In this way, these high-emission and polluting activities which have led to the climate and ecological crises which we are faced with today have not only affected nature and climate: they also underpinned the development and establishment of racial hierarchies and unequal social relations which characterise societies across the world.

While these activities primarily benefit the white upper and middle classes in countries like the USA and the UK, and despite them being responsible for the climate emergency, it is BIPOC/BAME, Southern, working-class and marginalised communities who are feeling its worst effects; whether that be through a loss of land, forced migration, economic insecurity, or devastating health impacts.

And yet, if we are not careful, Western governments and companies will build a transition out of fossil fuels based on “clean growth”, green capitalism, and low-carbon technological solutions that continue to perpetuate white supremacy, **while not producing the meaningful systemic change needed**

**to address the climate and ecological crises.**

The crisis we are in is not because of rising emissions alone. It is because of globally entrenched systems of exploitation that put profit before people. **It is not possible to speak of tackling the climate crisis without also tackling inequalities and entrenched racism and colonialism.**

It's therefore not surprising that in places like the UK, BAME communities are **under-represented in the mainstream climate and environmental movements**, which stems not from a lack of concern for a crisis that disproportionately affects their communities, but from these movement's failure to properly consider and advocate for wider racial and social justice.

This growing recognition of the need to tackle climate change through the lens of social justice, intersectionality and systems change has been a step in the right direction. But for the climate and environmental movement on mass - these statements, acknowledgements and understandings that underpin the work are not enough (and UKYCC is included here too) - and certainly have not done enough to tackle racism.

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**Representation in the climate and environmental movement**

The mainstream climate and environmental movement in the UK is predominantly white. This is problematic for many reasons, but do not misunderstand. The problem is not that BAME communities aren't willing, or don't recognise the work as important, it's that the climate and environmental movement in the UK is built through and for the interests and concerns of the white middle classes. Just one of many examples has been the **rise of the Extinction Rebellion movement** calling on governments to act now, tell the truth, and go beyond politics - marked by mass civil disobedience across the UK and beyond. Their efforts undeniably helped to put climate change back on the public agenda but they have been, and continue to be heavily criticised for building a movement that mainly speaks to the white middle classes, and arguably dangerous and exclusive for BAME communities and the working classes in the UK. Extinction Rebellion is not

the only group guilty of this, in fact, they certainly aren't alone.

The professional environmental sector continues to be dominated by white, middle-class individuals. One factor behind this is that many environmental organisations, despite talking about social and racial equality, still fail to pay their interns in 2020! Unpaid internships are disproportionately performed by the white, middle-class can live in expensive cities, like New York or London, on no income. For those who can access these unpaid internships, they often get a head start in job interviews and many of them will be hired into full-time positions by the organisations they interned for. Unpaid internships invalidate attempts to work towards climate and environmental justice by excluding non-white, non-middle class individuals from environmental work and decision-making, reducing the talent, the energy, and the accessibility of the movement.

Getting rid of unpaid internships is only the start, however, the environmental and charity sector continues to be full of institutional racism. In 2019, numerous individuals from BAME communities shared their experiences in charity work using the hashtag #charitysowhite, with horrific stories of being presumed to be ex-cons at criminal justice events and consistently being underpaid compared to white colleagues. [Charity So White](#) is now an organisation seeking to address institutional racism in the charity sector.

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### **Going beyond gestures and promises**

What is so evidently missing within the environmental community is the recognition that written statements, recognitions of systemic injustice and promises to be intersectional do not go far enough to actually tackle racism. There has been a preference for the environmental movement to “stay in their lane” and let racial-justice-focused groups tackle racism, this cannot continue. This is not enough. There is a need for actual allyship and solidarity.

UKYCC has continued to grow as a collective over its 12 year history. During this time our work has edged closer and closer towards an understanding of social justice, the need for systems change and the need for inclusivity and intersectionality in our approach to climate justice. UKYCC have come a long way, but there is still a huge amount of work to do to ensure that; our campaigns are inclusive, accessible, and thoughtful; that our members are diverse, supported and feel recognised; and to ensure that we do not shy away from talking about issues related to race and social inequality through an intersectional lens.

The latest data UKYCC has on its members was a survey carried out in January 2019 asked the open question "Please tell us your ethnic origin." The results showed that individuals self-reported as 4% Black, 12% Indian, 85% White. It should be noted only 22 of our approximately 50 members completed this survey.

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### **Ways to show solidarity and support**

- **Learn:** Educate yourself and allow yourself to be educated by others, from activists and scholars to social groups and organisations. From the issues at hand (e.g. anti-black racism) to actions to tackle them (e.g. defunding the police and reinvesting the money in other public services), there are many terms, concepts and ideas floating around right now which you might not be familiar with. Take your time to research and learn about them to properly understand where their proponents come from and where you stand. Remember that feeling uncertain, apprehensive and even challenged is part of the process: change is, more often than not, uncomfortable. Here are some links to lists of suggested materials for learning about Blackness/anti-blackness and wider racism/anti-racism issues: <https://blm.btown-in.org/anti-racist-resource-list.html#> and [https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/148962.BLM\\_recommended\\_reading](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/148962.BLM_recommended_reading).
- **Donate:** There are several funds you can donate to, so if you have financial privilege, use it! Take a moment to decide which fund speaks

to you, from donating to the families of victims of police brutality through donating to bail funds for protestors to donating to Black-led organisations and groups doing wider work in their communities. Here are some examples: Official George Floyd Memorial Fund, Justice For Breonna Taylor, R.I.P Belly Mujinga, Black Lives Matters UK, bail funds - there are several.

- **Amplify:** share information and start having conversations, even if difficult. While social media remains powerful to spread awareness, 1:1 offline messaging and advocacy is important too, particularly to reach those potentially beyond your own activist/campaigning bubble. Also, remember that Black Lives Matter is not just a trend or even a slogan: it's a movement, it is an action, a way of life and blueprint for the present. When comes to the diversity and representation issues in the climate and environmental movement in the UK, there are groups and projects dedicated to particularly uplift voices and concerns by Black people and other individuals from BAME/marginalised communities, such as the grassroots collective Wretched of Earth and the project Climate Reframe.
- **Act:** many actions can be taken both online and offline, publicly and privately, to support the BLM movement. Speak up for Black and other individuals from BAME communities when you witness racism, provide them both the support and space that they might need. Support Black-led and Black-owned campaigns, initiatives, local businesses and projects. Write to your MP and sign petitions to support ongoing efforts in the UK, such as the Black Curriculum campaign to address the lack of Black British history in the UK curriculum. If you habitually practice meditation, take an 08min46 second silence and reflect on the experience of George Floyd as Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck until he died (this audio resource created by BLM can be found on vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/425981516>).