

# Another two years lost to climate inaction, says Greta Thunberg

Two years on from her first school strike, activist attacks ‘ignorance and unawareness’

- **Greta Thunberg: the world is still in a state of climate crisis denial**

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Wed 19 Aug 2020 06.00 BST

Last modified on Wed 19 Aug 2020 06.02 BST



A mural of Greta Thunberg in Bristol. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

Two years on from Greta Thunberg's **first solo school strike** for the climate, she says the world has wasted the time by failing to take the necessary action on the crisis.

Thunberg's strike inspired a **global movement**, and on Thursday she and other leading school strikers will meet Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the European council. They will demand a halt to all fossil fuel investments and subsidies and the establishment of annual, binding carbon budgets based on the best science.

“Looking back [over two years], a lot has happened. Many millions have taken to the streets ... and on 28 November 2019, the European parliament declared a **climate and environmental emergency**,” Thunberg said in an **article for the Guardian** with fellow strikers Luisa Neubauer, Anuna de Wever and Adélaïde Charlier.

“But over these last two years, the world has also emitted over 80bn tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. We have seen continuous natural disasters taking place across the globe. Many lives and livelihoods have been lost, and this is only the very beginning.”

They said leaders were speaking of an “existential crisis”, yet “when it comes to action, we are still in a state of denial. The gap between what we need to do and what’s actually being done is widening by the minute. Effectively, we have lost another two crucial years to political inaction.”

Thunberg and her colleagues said fighting the climate emergency must involve rich nations stopping some of their polluting activities. “However, it’s a fact which most people refuse to accept. Just the thought of being in a crisis that we cannot buy, build or invest our way out of seems to create some kind of collective mental short-circuit. This mix of ignorance, denial and unawareness is the very heart of the problem,” they said.

The trillions of dollars being spent by governments in response to the coronavirus pandemic are seen as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put the world on course to halt global heating, with **economists**, scientists and **health experts** all saying the **benefits** would outweigh the costs.

However, G20 governments’ rescue packages are giving **significantly more support to fossil fuels** than to low-carbon energy. Germany’s recovery plan includes **€40bn for climate measures** such as electric vehicles, public transport and energy efficiency, and has been praised by green groups. But elsewhere, too little is being done, Thunberg and colleagues said.

“Even a child can see that the policies of today are incompatible with the current best available science,” they said.

Scientists calculate that global carbon emissions must be cut by half by the end of this decade if humanity is to have a reasonable chance of keeping temperature rises to below 1.5C, the limit set in the Paris climate deal. Drops in emissions during coronavirus lockdowns are only a small blip in a long-term

rising trend and will have a “negligible” effect on the climate crisis, researchers say.

“We understand the world is complicated and that what we are asking for may not be easy or seem unrealistic,” said the school strikers. “But it is much more unrealistic to believe that our societies would be able to survive the global heating we’re heading for. We are inevitably going to have to fundamentally change, one way or another. The question is: will the changes be on our terms, or on nature’s terms?”

## After two years of school strikes, the world is still in a state of climate crisis denial

*Greta Thunberg, Luisa*

*Neubauer, Anuna De*

*Wever and Adélaïde Charlier*

We can have as many meetings as we like, but the will to change is nowhere in sight. Society must start treating this as a crisis

- **Report: Vital time being lost to climate inertia, say activists**

‘The gap between what we need to do and what’s actually being done is widening by the minute.’ The Rhenish brown coalfield in Bergheim, Germany, Europe’s largest carbon dioxide source. Photograph: Sascha Steinbach/EPA

Published on

Wed 19 Aug 2020 06.00 BST

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On Thursday 20 August, it will be exactly two years since the first school strike for the climate took place. Looking back, a lot has happened. Many millions have taken to the streets to join the decades-long fight for climate and environmental justice. And on 28 November 2019, the European parliament declared a “**climate and environmental emergency**”.

But over these past two years, the world has also **emitted** more than 80 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. We have seen continuous natural disasters taking place across the globe: wildfires, heatwaves, flooding, hurricanes, storms, thawing of permafrost and collapsing of glaciers and whole ecosystems. Many lives and livelihoods have been lost. And this is only the very beginning.

Today, leaders all over the world are speaking of an “existential crisis”. The climate emergency is discussed on countless panels and summits. Commitments are being made, big speeches are given. Yet, **when it comes to action** we are still in a state of denial. The climate and ecological crisis has never once been treated as a crisis. The gap between what we need to do and what’s actually being done is widening by the minute. Effectively, we have lost another two crucial years to political inaction.

Last month, just ahead of the European council summit, we published an open letter with **demands to EU and world leaders**. Since then, more than 125,000 people have signed this letter. Tomorrow we will meet the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, and deliver the letter and demands, as well as the signatures.

We will tell Merkel that she must face up to the climate emergency – especially as Germany now holds the presidency of the European council. Europe has a responsibility to act. The EU and the United Kingdom are **accountable for 22%** of historic accumulative global emissions, second only to the United States. It is immoral that the countries that have done the least to cause the problem

are suffering first and worst. The EU must act now, as it has signed up to do in the Paris agreement.

Our demands include halting all fossil fuel investments and subsidies, divesting from fossil fuels, making ecocide an international crime, designing policies that protect workers and the most vulnerable, safeguarding democracy and establishing annual, binding carbon budgets based on the best available science.

We understand the world is complicated and that what we are asking for may not be easy or may seem unrealistic. But it is much more unrealistic to believe that our societies would be able to survive the global heating we're heading for – as well as other disastrous ecological consequences of today's business as usual. We are inevitably going to have to fundamentally change, one way or another. The question is, will the changes be on our terms, or on nature's terms?

**In the Paris agreement**, world leaders committed themselves to keeping the global average temperature rise to well below 2C, and aiming for 1.5C. Our demands demonstrate what that commitment means. Yet this is just the very minimum of what needs to be done to deliver on those promises.

So if leaders are not willing to do this, they'll have to start explaining why they're giving up on the Paris agreement. Giving up on their promises. Giving up on the people living in the most affected areas. Giving up on the chances of handing over a safe future for their children. Giving up without even trying.

Science doesn't tell anyone what to do, it merely collects and presents verified information. It is up to us to study and connect the dots. When you read the **IPCC SR1.5 report** and the **UNEP production gap report**, as well as what leaders have actually signed up for in the Paris agreement, you see that the climate and ecological crisis can no longer be solved within today's systems. Even a child can see that policies of today don't add up with the current best available science.

We need to end the ongoing wrecking, exploitation and destruction of our life support systems and move towards a fully decarbonised economy that is centred on the wellbeing of all people, democracy and the natural world.

If we are to have a chance of staying below 1.5C of warming, our emissions need to immediately start reducing rapidly towards zero and then on to negative figures. That's a fact. And since we don't have all the technical solutions we need to achieve that, we have to work with what we have at hand today. And this has to include stopping doing certain things. That's also a fact. However, it's a fact that most people refuse to accept. Just the thought of being in a crisis that we cannot buy, build or invest our way out of seems to create some kind of collective mental short circuit.

This mix of ignorance, denial and unawareness is at the very heart of the problem. As it is now, we can have as many meetings and climate conferences as we want. They will not lead to sufficient changes, because the willingness to act and the level of awareness needed are still nowhere in sight. The only way forward is for society to start treating the crisis like a crisis.

We still have the future in our own hands. But time is rapidly slipping through our fingers. We can still avoid the worst consequences. But to do that, we have to face the climate emergency and change our ways. And that is the uncomfortable truth we cannot escape.

- **Greta Thunberg** is a 17-year-old environmental campaigner from Sweden. This article was co-written with youth climate activists Luisa Neubauer from Germany, Anuna de Wever from Belgium, and Adélaïde Charlier from Belgium