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Climate crisis

UK academics urge Royal Society to condemn fossil fuel industry

Thursday 24 August 2023, by [SHERWOOD Harriet](#) (Date first published: 23 August 2023).

Exclusive: Letter signed by more than 1,200 leading figures calls for ‘unambiguous statement’ about climate crisis

The [Royal Society](#) is under pressure from more than 1,200 leading academics to issue a clear condemnation of the fossil fuel industry.

The academics have written to the association of the world’s most eminent scientists calling for an “unambiguous statement about the culpability of the fossil fuel industry in driving the climate crisis”.

The society has agreed to meet representatives of the academics to discuss their demands. Most of those who signed the letter to the society’s president and council are based in the UK.

The [letter](#) says: “The Royal Society has thus far failed to condemn fossil fuel companies that are building new infrastructure that will carry the world far beyond 1.5 degrees of warming and that are lobbying across the world to dictate the pace and terms of an energy transition that will protect their profits at the planet’s expense.”

The companies were “committing an unprecedented act of violence against humanity”, the letter said, referring to a [statement from the UN secretary general, António Guterres](#).

“It is imperative that our premier scientific institutions recognise this fact and condemn the agents in question, and the governments that permit their activities, in the strongest possible terms.”

Jason Scott-Warren, a professor of early modern literature and culture at Cambridge University and the organiser of the letter, said it was the result of “a sense of frustration that the Royal Society, our leading scientific institution in the UK, was not backing up the powerful statements of Guterres and others”.

He added: “We need to see the gas industry in the same light that we now see the tobacco industry: sowing all kinds of misinformation and disinformation in order to keep on generating profits.”

The Royal Society “recognises itself as a voice in the policy debate, but probably should take a more radical position in that debate”.

In a response to the letter, Adrian Smith, the society’s president, acknowledged that climate change was “a real and present danger that is having a deadly impact around the world”.

He said the Royal Society had been “active on the science of climate change for decades and remains committed to ensuring that the harms and risks of climate change are addressed”.

Energy companies must “shift their activities to renewable energy sources more quickly”, he said. The Royal Society was focused on governments, in the UK and internationally, “who control the levers to drive rapid change across industry and wider society”.

A spokesperson for the Royal Society confirmed that a meeting between some of the letter’s signatories and representatives of the society was being arranged.

Guterres told a climate conference organised by the White House last year: [“Fossil fuel producers and financiers have humanity by the throat.”](#) He said: “For decades, the fossil fuel industry has invested heavily in pseudoscience and public relations, with a false narrative to minimise their responsibility for climate change and undermine ambitious climate policies.

“They exploited precisely the same scandalous tactics as big tobacco decades before. Like tobacco interests, fossil fuel interests and their financial accomplices must not escape responsibility.”

The Royal Society, founded in 1660, says it is “dedicated to promoting excellence in science for the benefit of humanity”. It is the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence.

Harriet Sherwood
@harrietsherwood

P.S.

- The Guardian. Wed 23 Aug 2023 11.00 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/23/uk-academics-urge-royal-society-to-condemn-fossil-fuel-industry>

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