

Fati N’Zi-Hassane, Oxfam in Africa Director, Opening Statement to Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action, 28th November, 2023.

Chairperson, members,

I come before you today with a simple message.

Your inertia is killing us.

Your apathy is destroying us.

Please let that sink in for a moment.

We don’t know how many people we have lost in East Africa in the last two years.

We have figures showing us that someone is dying every 28 seconds. We know that there are 27 million people at crisis point in just four countries in East Africa. Amidst one of the most severe droughts in four decades in East Africa, devastating heavy rains and flash floods have claimed the lives of many people in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia.

We hear the stories and we see the harrowing pictures of children starving, of families perishing after their livestock have died and livelihoods destroyed. But we don’t yet know the overall mortality figures.

In Africa, we found ourselves helplessly confronting and navigating through cycles of increasing frequent and intense climatic shocks transitioning from one to another.

What we do know is that these droughts and floods would not have happened at all in a world without climate change.

We cannot say that five failed rainy seasons followed by devastating floods and heavy rains is not climate-related.

Yes, there are other causes like conflict and inequality but these factors existed before the five failed rainy seasons.

This is the reality of life in East Africa today.

This is what global warming looks like.

What will it look like when it reaches 2C, or 3.2C, where we are heading?

This is why we need urgent action now.

This is why we need climate justice.

Some of you may think of COP 28 as a conference far away without too much relevance to your daily lives.

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Maybe even as a last chance for the fossil fuel industry to clean up its act, in some unlikely, technological way?

We don’t have the luxury of thinking in the abstract.

To us, this is a vital conference for our present and future.

Oxfam has the following aims for COP 28:

- We must limit global warming to 1.5C - by fairly phasing out fossil fuels faster.
- We must reach the \$100 billion climate finance goal, making up for the shortfalls in the years that it has not been met since 2020 - while doubling adaptation finance.
- And we must establish a Loss and Damage fund which does not repeat the mistakes of the past, but instead gives agency to affected communities.

At Oxfam in Africa, we have these additional expectations from COP28:

- We must recognise the bottom-up approach, emphasizing the importance of empowering local leaders in climate negotiations. We call for empowering local communities to co-create solutions.
- We urge just levels of support and prioritization of locally-led adaptation solutions to address the impacts of climate change and we must emphasize actionable measures and a collaborative, inclusive approach to ensure a sustainable future for all.

And Oxfam in Africa asks Ireland – which was always our friend and supporter – to do this at COP 28:

- Be a champion of Loss and Damage. Support us to make the fund fair, grounded in human-rights and gender-responsive, to reach people and ecosystems quickly.
- You have heard the phrase ‘nothing about us without us’ – make this a reality with Loss and Damage. Help us enshrine ‘locally-led’ delivery in the DNA of the Loss and Damage Fund from the beginning.
- Through the global stocktake, make sure our food systems are balanced, resilient and fair both in production and consumption. This is vital in Africa, as you know in Ireland.
- Be imaginative. The richest 1% are amassing 2/3 of all new global wealth and creating at least a quarter of all carbon emissions. Your environment minister, Mr Ryan, says: “This is wrong. This cannot go on. This has to change.”

Will you help us tax the super-rich to stop them? And gain a vital new source of climate finance by doing so?

We know that Ireland was always one of the best partners in development aid.

Not loans but life-saving grants.

No ties to your aid.

We urge you to stand by these principles in climate finance and in Loss and Damage.

All of these questions are highly political.

Ireland is a member of the European Union and is very close to the United States.

Yet last year, this committee played a vital role in establishing the Loss and Damage Fund by pushing the Irish Government to advocate for it as lead EU negotiator at COP 27.

At COP 28, please stand with us again.

Help us to make the Loss and Damage Fund locally-led, and real.