

Marching for climate and youth's future

Victor Kristof[®]

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Following the initiative of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, about 1.7 million young people across 128 countries and over 2200 cities marched on Friday, 15 March, for the future of our planet. Youth across the globe are asking adults to act as such: grown-ups. They are demanding decision-makers take their responsibilities and show the political will that climate action is crucially missing. To respond to the climate crisis, ambitious policies must be enforced and ambitious actions must be taken. Not because it is a nice thing to do, but because it is an absolute necessity.

In September last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—the United Nations (UN) consortium of climate scientists—released its special report on a warming of 1.5°C. The conclusions are irrevocable. First, above this threshold, we can expect catastrophic consequences, such as more extreme weather events (eg, heat waves, heavy rains and hurricanes), food and energy shortage, the spreading of diseases and parasites, wildlife extinction and ecosystem collapse, ocean acidification leading to coral bleaching and the vanishing

of coastal zones due to sea-level rise threatening the life of hundreds of millions of people. Second, the measures required to limit a warming of 1.5°C are drastic and need to be implemented right now. The longer we wait, the more difficult and the more expensive the transition will be.

DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES

But the IPCC report is also crystal clear: keeping temperatures below 1.5°C is achievable. To do so, we must stop burning fossil fuels and reduce our CO₂ emissions by 45% in 2030 compared with the 2010 levels. Technically and economically, our societies are ready to shift to a net-zero emission economy, and numerous solutions already exist. Renewable energy such as wind and solar is now competitive with coal-based and gas-based energy and must provide 100% of our energy needs. Transportation is being electrified everywhere, from electric public buses to electric cars replacing thermal motors. Financial institutions are divesting their funds from fossil-fuel companies. And vegetarian diets provide (tasty!) alternatives to carbon-intense bovine agriculture.

A problem as complex as climate change requires efforts at the regional, national and international levels. It requires efforts by individuals, businesses and governments. The solutions must be technological, economic and political: it must be systemic. In 2015 during the UN's 21st international climate conference (COP21, for Conference of the Parties), 196 nations signed the Paris Agreement and, in 2018, they finalised the Paris Rulebook. The Agreement sets general goals and a framework for solving the climate crisis. The Rulebook defines the implementation strategies to mitigate emissions and monitor the progress made. Those two documents will serve as a roadmap for governments and businesses in the next decades.

My suggestions

- ▶ Governments must consider climate in each of their political decision and follow scientific recommendations to set their agenda. They must switch to 100% renewable energy before 2030 and develop resilient, sustainable agriculture, transportation, trade, and housing.
- ▶ Individuals must use their citizen's right to vote and elect politicians that will take ambitious climate actions. Flying less, reducing their meat consumption, and turning down the heater and air-conditioner by 1 or 2°C form simple yet effective actions to fight climate change.
- ▶ Health professionals should prepare for a world in a disrupted climate. Heat waves and extreme cold will threaten vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. More frequent natural disasters will require more emergency personnel. By their direct contact with people, health professionals also have a great opportunity to raise awareness around climate change.



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Swiss Youth for Climate,
Lausanne, Switzerland

Correspondence to

Mr Victor Kristof; victor.kristof@syfc.ch



WHAT CAN A YOUTH ORGANISATION DO?

Swiss Youth for Climate (SYFC, <http://www.syfc.ch>) was founded in 2015 to give the opportunity to young people in Switzerland to participate as civil society observers during COP21. As of today, it counts 250 members and is active in five regions in Switzerland: Lausanne, Bern, Ticino, Geneva and Zurich. Since 2015, we have taken part in every COP. During those events, we meet with other youth organisations from all around the world with whom we coordinate actions and share experiences. Civil society plays a crucial role to watch the advance of negotiations, report to the external world and put pressure on negotiators and the UN to raise ambitions.

Effective and concrete solutions are, however, developed and implemented at the national and regional levels. SYFC's mission is to raise awareness around climate change and to advocate for ambitious climate policies. We recently organised *Climate Express*, a 3-day race during which four teams had to reach specific locations in Switzerland related to sustainability (eg, a dam, a solar farm and so on). The winner of the race was the team emitting the least CO₂. We also conduct advocacy activities with *Adopt a Parliamentarian*. Every member of the project 'adopts' a Swiss parliamentarian and follows his or her behaviour at the Parliament. We follow their votes,

their speeches and try to interact with them on social media, by email or even face-to-face. Meanwhile, our five regional groups meet monthly during *Climate Beers*. They organise conferences, photography exhibitions, movie projections and improvisation theatre. They also coordinate *Divest* campaigns, demanding public institutions and universities to remove their investments from fossil fuel companies.

And we also march. For as long as our future is not safe, we will march.

Victor Kristof, President of Swiss Youth for Climate.

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