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Press Release: Open Letter to COP29 Leaders

An S.O.S. From the Poles to World Leaders at COP29

November 22, 2024 – On the last day of a deadlocked COP29, a group of leading polar and glacier research organizations issued an Open Letter urging immediate and substantial action to address the escalating climate crisis due to the risk of triggering irreversible global impacts from polar ice melt.

The Open Letter has been endorsed by, among others the World Climate Research Program (WCRP), Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), the European Polar Board (EPB), and the International Glaciological Society (IGS).

Taken at the initiative of several polar research programs alarmed at the lack of inaction in the face of growing observations of polar ice loss, the letter underscores the urgent need to uphold the +1.5°C global warming threshold set by the 2015 UN Paris Agreement.

“The changes in the cryosphere are not isolated events,” the letter emphasizes. “They cascade into widespread and severe impacts on climate stability, ecosystems, livelihoods, economies, and the safety of societies worldwide.”

The research bodies stress that exceeding the +1.5°C threshold risks triggering climate tipping points, with devastating consequences for current and future generations. They call on world leaders to meet their commitments under the 2015 UN Paris Agreement and implement robust policies and measures to keep the +1.5°C limit achievable.

The cryosphere – Earth's ice-covered regions – is melting at an alarming rate. *The State of the Cryosphere Report 2024* details the rapid loss of glaciers, ice sheets, and sea ice, alongside the thawing of permafrost. These changes are accelerating sea level rise, threatening to displace millions of people, and destabilizing ecosystems, economies, and societies.

Last year at COP28 in Dubai, over 1000 cryosphere scientists called for countries to focus on the lower 1.5°C Paris limit “because 2°C is too high” for the cryosphere; but this is the first time the leading polar research groups have weighed in on these threats in the climate talks, which remain deadlocked over lack of a clear financing goal.

“There is no more time to waste,” the Open Letter concludes. “Immediate and decisive action is not just necessary—it is essential for the future of our planet and humanity.”

Key messages from the Open Letter:

- The global climate is perilously close to exceeding the +1.5°C warming threshold, with profound consequences for the cryosphere and Earth system.
- Unprecedented ice loss is accelerating sea-level rise and exacerbating climate instability.

- Exceeding the +1.5°C limit risks triggering irreversible and uncontrollable shifts in the Earth's climate, endangering ecosystems and societies worldwide.
- Immediate and decisive action is essential to meet commitments under the 2015 UN Paris Agreement to protect our future.

¹State of the Cryosphere Report 2024: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CaM_sTK-IrdzlcJxA2ZBxsqkLuu9mSF-/view

The issuing scientific programs are:

- Biogeochemical Exchange Processes at Sea-Ice Interfaces [[BEPSII](#)]
- Antarctic Sea Ice Processes and Climate [[ASPeCt](#)]
- Cryosphere and ATmospheric CHEmistry [[CATCH](#)],
- Air Pollution in the Arctic: Climate, Environment and Societies [[PACES](#)]
- Quantifying the Indirect Effect: from Sources to Climate Effects of Natural and Transported aerosol in the Arctic [[QuIESCENT](#)]

Expert contacts:

Dr Letizia Tedesco for BEPSII [E: Letizia.Tedesco@environment.fi; Ph: +358 295 251 686]

Dr Petra Heil for ASPeCt [E: petra.heil@utas.edu.au; Ph: +61 422 939 331]

Dr Paul Zieger for CATCH [E: paul.zieger@aces.su.se; Ph: +46 08-674 76 34]

Dr Steve Arnolds for PACES [E: s.arnold@leeds.ac.uk; Ph: +44 113 343 7245]

Dr Georgia Sotiropoulou for QuIESCENT [E: georgia.sotiropoulou@epfl.ch]

On-site expert contact in Baku:

Dr. Florence Colleoni (SCAR-INSTANT): [E: fcolleoni@ogs.it; Ph: +39 340 240 8644]

Open Letter:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DUSyH7VXCjHwOapq_dTeV03dbieUFySb/view?usp=sharing

The open letter can also be read in full on the next page.

Open letter: An S.O.S. from the Poles to World Leaders at COP29

The undersigned scientific organizations call on world leaders and their representatives attending COP29 to commit to immediate and substantial de-carbonization and to collaborate in implementing the measures necessary to achieve this goal.

The climate is dangerously close to exceeding the 1.5°C global temperature increase above pre-industrial levels, a threshold that has already triggered alarming changes in the world's ice-covered regions¹. We are witnessing unprecedented melting of ice sheets, glaciers, sea ice, and thawing of permafrost. This has set us on a trajectory toward accelerated sea-level rise, displacing hundreds of millions of people. These changes are not isolated; they cascade into widespread and severe impacts on climate stability, ecosystems, livelihoods, economies, and the safety of societies worldwide.

The undersigned organizations emphasize that exceeding the 1.5°C threshold risks triggering irreversible and uncontrollable shifts in the Earth's climate system, with catastrophic consequences for both current and future generations.

There is no more time to waste. We urge world leaders to fulfill the commitments made in the 2015 UN Paris Agreement and to ensure that the 1.5°C limit remains achievable. Immediate and decisive action is not just necessary—it is essential for the future of our planet and humanity.

References:

1. State of the Cryosphere Report 2024: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CaM_sTK-lrdzlcJxA2ZBxsqkLuu9mSF-/view