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STATEMENT

COP26: Statement of support

Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP)

COP26, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, is being held in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November. As counselling psychologists, we know that the environment has a critical impact on people's physical and psychological wellbeing^{1,2} and join other allied professions in supporting the delegates attending this most important of meetings.

We join our colleagues in calling for action that protects health, wellbeing, and at a minimum, the survival of current and future generations of human and other living beings. We hope that the conference goes further than setting abstract targets and leads to policy and legal structures that will facilitate explicit and tangible outcomes that lead to a low carbon society, one that is no longer reliant on fossil fuels or economic investment in them.

Success is essential. The upcoming 2022 IPCC report states that 'Current greenhouse gas emission (GGE) trends at the global level are incompatible with the goals agreed in the Paris agreement'³ – the historic precedent set by COP21. The report further states that GGE must peak before 2025. Without swift and effective change, in addition to the ongoing degradation of the physical environment, we will see an escalation of the already serious psychological and physical damage that climate change produces⁴. We are already seeing psychological distress caused by changing landscapes⁵, and the adverse physical and emotional impacts of loss of homes and environment⁶. We are seeing people, young and old, experiencing increased anxiety⁷, depression⁸ and grief⁹ at current and future disturbance¹⁰.

As well as immediate distress at the impact of climate disruption and environmental devastation, the fact that we as the global population have not yet found ourselves able to act sufficiently on the scientific information before us, leads to social and psychological difficulty. As climate instability leads to more frequent extreme weather events, such as flooding, landslides, droughts and wildfires across the world, counselling psychologists are aware of the potential for wide-spread trauma as a consequence. Inaction has amplified a sense of hopelessness and despair, anger, public outcry, and social disruption.

The facts, when deeply engaged with, are devastating. We recognise that part of humanity's paralysis may arise from emotional overwhelm. Counselling psychologists wish to offer our skills to support individuals to engage with the issues of the climate crisis, to skilfully manage the resultant emotions and restore the sense of being able to be responsive. More than that, we can help to mobilise individual and collective psychological capital¹¹, with a realistic optimism and hope, through enhancing self-efficacy, resilience, and the belief that we can change things together. Psychologists can also help to move the population away from learned helplessness¹².

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While the climate crisis is a shared responsibility, it is not something that can be left for younger generations to repair. We are therefore pleased that COP26 invites young people to the conferences, and we hope that their voices are recognised as a particularly helpful perspective and call to action.

We also encourage delegates to adopt an inclusive strategy, one that tackles systemic injustices that weigh unduly on the most vulnerable. We hope delegates will prioritise decisions that advocate for the protection of both people and the planet and that delegates will recognise that injustices impacting on marginalised communities and the earth are interconnected^{13,14}.

We recognise that some of the decisions will require delegates to be resilient in the face of short-term personal or political disfavour, in order to prioritise effective long-term outcomes. We hope that your deliberations based on the principles of hope balanced with concern, common purpose and cohesion, fairness, and justice, will empower all our societies to make the changes required to tackle the climate emergency. We trust courageous leadership will arise in this time of need, and, as psychologists, commit to supporting you however we can.

Signed

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