

Right Hon David Cameron MP and Right Hon Nick Clegg MP
c/o 10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

1st June 2010

OPEN LETTER

Dear Prime Minister Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Clegg

Towards a new politics of the future

We write to endorse your concern to tackle ‘short-termism’ in the nation’s democracy and to urge you to go further; to initiate a new “politics of the future” in the UK.

As a group of researchers, advocates and campaigners for sustainable development, we well understand the importance of aligning short-term democratic decision-making with long-term benefits to society as a whole, and with consideration for the interests of future generations both in the UK and abroad.

We fear that short-termism in contemporary politics on issues including climate change, changing demographics, youth unemployment, and environmental and social injustice, could endanger not only our ability to achieve meaningful progress in these areas, but even democracy itself. For when social injustice and inequality become more pronounced and natural resources more scarce, the real risk is that democracy itself may be sacrificed as the need for action becomes more urgent.

You have the power to take simple and cost-effective steps now to guard against that risk.

You would not be alone in taking steps consciously to ‘future-proof’ UK democratic processes. On the contrary, your Government would join a handful of progressive leaders around the world. In 2007, the Hungarian Parliament appointed the world’s first ‘Green Ombudsman’; a Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations. And in Finland, a cross-party parliamentary Committee for the Future has been operating since 1993, preparing statements and reports on ‘futures’ issues affecting Finland’s development, and responding to the Government’s annual Report on the Future.

Here in the UK, we urge you immediately to commit to an annual, televised, ‘State of the Future’ speech and public debate, starting in 2010. That speech should describe how your Government has taken steps, and plans, to take account of long-term threats to our environment and our society, and to the interests of future generations.

Finally, we urge you to initiate an effort fully to investigate whether there are other innovations in the parliamentary and policy process that could better equip and encourage Members of Parliament to consider the long-term interests of future generations in policy decisions. We would be delighted to work with you in such an endeavour.

We welcome your commitment to tackle short-termism in the nation’s governance, for political short-termism is one of the chief causes of unsustainable development. But we believe that that commitment must be backed by demonstrable institutional and procedural innovation.

In this era of new politics, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, we call on you to adopt a New Politics of the Future.

Yours sincerely

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