

The Cow in the Room at COP28

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"Adding wings to caterpillars does not create butterflies" ~ Stephanie Pace Marshall... "Veganism is the Swiss army knife of our future; one instrument solves our ethical, economic, environmental, water and health problems, and ends animal cruelty forever" ~ Philip Wollen

The image is a screenshot of a letter. On the left, there is a vertical banner with the Climate Healers logo (a green atom-like symbol) and the text 'climate healers.org' and '2026'. Below the banner, it says 'Transform yourself. Transform our world.' To the right of the banner is the YOUNGO logo, which consists of three vertical bars in green, yellow, and blue, followed by the word 'YOUNGO' in green and a globe icon. To the right of the YOUNGO logo is a grey box with the text 'The Official Children and Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'. The main title of the letter is 'Global youth call for climate-friendly food at COP28' in bold black text. Below the title, the date '22 April 2023' is written. The letter is addressed to 'H.E. Dr. Al Jaber, H.E. Al Mazrui,'. The body of the letter states: 'We write to you on behalf of the official youth constituency to UNFCCC (YOUNGO) and over 140 youth and civil society organisations, calling on the COP28 Presidency to set an example in climate leadership by serving sustainable food at this year's climate change conference in Dubai.' It then says: 'To achieve this goal, we strongly encourage that at COP28:' followed by a bulleted list: '• At least 3/4 of all food options on the menu are plant-based; 1' '• All food options—especially plant-based items—are affordable, nutritious, regionally sourced (where feasible), and culturally inclusive;' '• A clear emissions label is displayed for all food options, as implemented at COP26.' At the bottom of the letter, there is a small grey box with the text 'Page 1 / 7' and a magnifying glass icon.

Dear Climate Healers,

As you know, we meet every quarter for the [Vegan Convergence Of the Peoples\(V-COP\)](#). Our fifteenth convergence is happening on Oct 28-29 and the theme is “Sea of Change”. The focus of [V-COP15](#) is the ocean and how to help life thrive in the ocean.

We call it the Vegan Convergence Of the Peoples, because the adoption of Veganism, a philosophy and a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to animals for food, clothing or any other purpose, is the foundation of any plausible resolution of the [SIX planetary boundaries](#) that humanity has transgressed in the biogeochemical cycles of the planet.

Every planetary boundary transgression can cause us to die off. Transgressing SIX of them is like putting six nooses around our necks and daring Mother Nature to pull them all.

Climate change is actually number four out of the six in severity. The most severe transgression is biodiversity loss, the rate at which wild animals are dying off. By going vegan, we release around 40% of the ice-free land area of the planet and the entire ocean back to Nature and this would help wildlife recover. That is the only plausible way we can solve this most severe planetary boundary transgression.

And then comes nitrogen and phosphorus loading, where again animal agriculture is the leading cause since half the crops we grow are diverted to feed animals. The third is chemical pollution, which would be safely stored away in regenerating forests when we restore the native ecosystems of the planet. Eating animal foods also delivers concentrated doses of the chemical pollution into our bodies through bio-magnification. Hence, going Vegan addresses chemical pollution at both ends.

The fourth worst transgression is climate change, which can be mitigated when the excess carbon in the atmosphere is stored away in trees and soil when we restore the ecosystems of the planet. The fifth is land use which is mitigated in a Vegan world since human land use requirement plummets by half.

The least transgressed planetary boundary is fresh water use, which is also mitigated in a Vegan world when forests recover. This is how going Vegan mitigates all six of the planetary boundary transgressions that scientists have identified.

But Veganism doesn't just solve our environmental problems. As Philip Wollen put it so correctly,

“Veganism is the Swiss army knife of our future; one instrument solves our ethical, economic, environmental, water and health problems, and ends animal cruelty forever.”

Nevertheless, Veganism was the unmentionable Cow in the Room amidst the singular focus on renewable energy infrastructure at the [Stockholm Climate Leadership forum](#), hosted by the Harvard Business School Club of Sweden in collaboration with We Don't Have Time. The studious avoidance of the Cow in the Room during the forum was truly comical. What good are degrees from Harvard if the holders have to keep pretending that there is no Cow in the Room?

Worse yet, the UN Conference Of the Parties have met 27 times and they are yet to host a single Vegan COP yet. For COP-28, YOUNGO, the official Youth and Children Constituency of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has [pleaded with the organizers](#) to have at least 3/4 of all food items on the menu to be plant-based. The letter was co-signed by 220 Non Governmental Organizations.

We didn't co-sign the letter. Instead, we have just responded to the signatories as follows:

“Esteemed Colleagues,

We want to congratulate you personally for your commitment to YOUNGO's campaign for a plant based menu at COP28. You are serving a cause far greater than you may realize since we have documented that the Cow in the Room, Animal Agriculture, is the leading cause of climate change, contributing [at least 87%](#) of the damaging gasses, when we take into account the Carbon Opportunity Cost (COC) of the land used for animal agriculture.

In fact, the plant based vegan strategy is the only solution that has the potential to actually reverse climate change and indeed, [all SIX planetary boundary transgressions](#), as industrial fishing and deforesting for cattle is stopped, and released pastures are supported to rewild.

After 28 years of COPs – and now with the world burning up – it’s time for a new strategy!

There’s no longer time for negotiating with the powers that be. Eating animal foods at COPs is like chain-smoking at lung cancer conventions. Requesting a ¾ reduction in animal foods on the menu at COP28 is like calling for a narrower selection of cigarettes to be made available to the chain smokers at the next lung cancer convention. It doesn’t ensure the seriousness of the lung cancer convention, nor COP28.

We can only strive to save the lives of billions of humans and animals by urgently and massively engaging people to use their purchasing power to cut the demand for animal products and bring about a drastic reduction of Animal Agriculture.

We get the urgency here at [Climate Healers](#), with a [calendar](#) of weekly meetings, and on October 28-29 our 15th quarterly [Vegan Convergence Of the Peoples #15](#) (V-COP15) where we host animating reports and dialogue with major vegan projects all weekend long. See more [here](#) about free open access to V-COP15 “Sea of Change”, which is focused on healing the oceans!