

Declaration of climate emergency

Dear

The General Assembly of the Ghent Student Council has decided to declare a climate crisis emergency on Tuesday, March 28, 2023. We acknowledge that climate change is the cause of a critical situation, and we want to work together by taking additional measures to address this issue.

This decision follows recent events regarding sustainability at Ghent University and in society. First of all, the leak of the note on core tasks, in which deep cuts were proposed to the sustainability policy. This is contrary to the image the university portrays regarding social engagement and sustainability. Additionally, the Kenyan climate activist Elisabeth Wathuti was awarded the Amnesty International Chair at the university and the honorary doctorate to European commissioner Frans Timmermans, the latter of whom gave a powerful speech on the importance of individual responsibility. Furthermore, the IPCC report was released, which confirmed that the current climate problem is an urgent issue that is deteriorating rapidly. This was recently emphasized on the Belgian Earth Overshoot Day.

With this decision, we aim to raise awareness about the urgency of the climate crisis: it is about our future. We see sustainability as a core responsibility of the university, especially now that keeping the rise in temperature below 1.5°C is becoming increasingly more challenging. This decision is not just symbolic; we will also scrutinize our own organization and align our internal processes with this climate emergency.

With this decision, we do not want to close doors, but rather engage in an open dialogue to make sustainable choices that are inclusive and holistic.

- Helena Van Tichelen, policy maker sustainability

In 2020, the Board of Directors of UGhent declared a climate urgency following an open letter, which was co-signed by the Ghent Student Council. It is now time for our own organization to declare a similar climate emergency. Currently, there is another open letter circulating about sustainability and the budget cuts at UGhent. This letter was written by the Center for Sustainable Development and has already been signed by more than 1100 students.

At major climate conferences, they look at Western higher education institutions not only for innovative research, but also for implementing the necessary measures. We have planned three workgroups, to which all our members are invited, to improve and adapt our internal

functioning. With this decision, we want to primarily focus on our own responsibility and possibilities in this matter.

In short, we not only dare to think about our future, but also dare to take action to improve it.