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## **New Commission chaired by former New Zealand PM and former WHO Chief Scientist urges action on clean air**

A global commission of high-level government figures, renowned health experts, academics, and leading climate change specialists has issued a call for increased efforts to tackle air pollution ahead of the World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings in Washington DC next week.

Co-chaired by Rt Hon. Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Dr Soumya Swaminathan, former Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization, the newly established *Our Common Air* Commission sets out the critical importance of clean air initiatives in a new call to action.

The Commission is made up of 18 influential figures from a dozen countries, including Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown; Junaid Kamal Ahmad, Vice President of MIGA (World Bank Group); H.E. María Espinosa, former Ecuadorian Foreign Minister and United Nations General Assembly President; Gina McCarthy, former Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor of London.

*“Air pollution has not received the attention or funding it deserves, despite causing an estimated 7 million premature deaths a year. We all rely on clean air for our survival, but — perhaps because pollution is often unseen — we take this public good for granted and assume ‘someone else’ will take responsibility for delivering it,”* the co-chairs say in a foreword.

*“Tackling air pollution has benefits that go well beyond health. It propels sustainable economic development, reduces inequity, and contributes to social justice. Achieving clean air goes hand in hand with climate objectives; it is both a pre-condition and consequence of securing a 1.5-degree world. It also builds our resilience and ability to adapt to climate change.”*

The Commission is urging global financial institutions and particularly the World Bank to invest more heavily in clean air programmes to generate climate, health and economic benefits.

In addition to advocating for increased financing, the Commission is urging global financial institutions to measure and better track the economic benefits that come from clean air, so that it is recognised as a valuable asset.



According to Helen Clark: *“Clean air is not just something that costs money to achieve, but is an asset which can improve health and productivity, and drive new models of economic growth and sustainable development more generally.”*

*“Cleaning our air is about building a shared asset that allows children to run free without wheezing, elders to enjoy active lives and communities and workforces to thrive”,* says Swaminathan. *“Every breath we inhale should come as a force of life, not a risk to it.”*

Almost the entire global population (99%) is breathing air which exceeds WHO air quality limits and threatens their health, underscoring the urgent need for action. Air pollution also exacts a heavy toll on economies, with the OECD estimating that approximately 1.2 billion workdays are lost annually due to its effects. Without intervention, this figure could soar to 3.8 billion days by 2060.

## **Ends**

## **Notes to editors**

For further information and to request interviews please contact:

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## **About Our Common Air Commission**

Our Common Air is an independent Commission that brings together powerful voices to catalyse and accelerate global collective action on air pollution. Leveraging the substantial experience of the Commissioners, including Co-Chairs Rt Hon. Helen Clark and Dr Soumya Swaminathan, it aims to inspire increased attention, financing and political backing for clean air worldwide, delivering transformational benefits for our climate, our health and our economies. The co-chairs are:

- Rt Honourable Helen Clark: Board Chair of Partnership for Maternal Newborn & Child Health, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and UNDP Administrator
- Dr Soumya Swaminathan: former Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization and chair of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation

The commissioners are serving in their personal capacity:

- Dr Adriana Abdenur: Special Adviser to the President of the Republic of Brazil
- Dr Olusoji Adeyi: President, Resilient Health Systems, LLC
- Mr Junaid Kamal Ahmad: Vice President, Operations, Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency of the World Bank Group
- Ms Yvonne Aki-Sawyers: Mayor, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- Ms Jane Burston: CEO and Founder of Clean Air Fund
- H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa: Executive Director, GWL Voices for Change & Inclusion
- Dr Arunabha Ghosh, Founder-CEO of Council on Energy, Environment and Water
- Dr Christa Hasenkopf: Director of the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC)



- Dr Naoko Ishii: Special Presidential Envoy for Global Commons, University of Tokyo, Professor at the Institute for Future Initiatives and Director, Center for Global Commons
- Dr Puji Lestari: Professor, Bandung Institute of Technology
- Ms Gina McCarthy: Senior Fellow, The Fletcher School
- Dr Maria Neira: Director of the Public Health, Environment & Social Determinants of Health Department, World Health Organization
- Ms Martina Otto: Head of Secretariat, Climate and Clean Air Coalition
- Ms Shirley Rodrigues: Deputy Mayor, Environment and Energy, Greater London Authority
- Ambassador Paul Simons: Senior Fellow, Jackson School of Global Affairs, Yale University
- Dr Izabella Teixeira: Co-Chair, International Resource Panel