

Global Commission chaired by former New Zealand PM and former WHO Chief Scientist calls for urgent action to close gaps in air quality data

A global air quality commission made up of high-level government figures, health experts, academics, and leading climate change specialists, has released a new report urging governments worldwide to address critical gaps in air quality data.

The *Our Common Air* Commission, 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, is calling for the creation of a global air quality database to combat the widespread health and environmental damage caused by air pollution.

Ahead of the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies on September 7, the report underscores the critical gaps in global air quality data, particularly concerning particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). Over one-third (39%) of countries currently lack the basic capability to monitor PM_{2.5}.¹ This creates significant challenges in identifying pollution hotspots, allocating resources effectively, and holding leaders accountable for air quality and public health.

Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, said: “Air pollution is one of the greatest public health threats of our time. Yet, we lack a unified, accessible system to monitor it. Without reliable data, we cannot track progress or demand accountability. A global database would end this inequality of awareness, as well as pave the way for more ambitious actions against air pollution.”

The report highlights how many countries lack the infrastructure to estimate their annual pollution levels - due to a lack of resources and modelling capacity, monitoring data, or both. The Commission calls for the standardisation of air quality monitoring globally, ensuring that even countries with limited infrastructure and tracking mechanisms are able to access high-quality and robust air quality data.

At least one billion people are living in highly polluted countries where their national government doesn't monitor the most serious environmental risk factor for their health. Even among the 53% of countries which do share their air quality data, most do not do

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<https://epic.uchicago.edu/insights/a-countrys-first-air-quality-monitor-the-most-valuable-step-to-clean-air/>

so in a way that is fully transparent and usable.

The Commission is urging governments worldwide to take immediate action by installing at least one PM2.5 monitor in each country, ensuring real-time, open access to air quality data for all citizens. Its report calls for UN agencies and major development and regional development banks to play a role in coordinating and financing these efforts.

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, said: “It is deeply ironic that on a day dedicated to the importance of clean air, millions of people around the world still lack access to reliable information about the air they breathe.

We must bridge this data gap by providing financial resources, non-fiscal incentives and through sustained capacity building efforts. This will ensure that everyone, regardless of where they live, can be informed and empowered to protect their health and demand action against air pollution.”

The report also calls for:

- Following an intergovernmental process, creating a global, country-led system to track annual average PM2.5 levels at the national-level for every country;
- Dedicated funding that builds air quality monitoring capacity in countries where there is currently no or little capacity;
- Default methods used to estimate PM2.5 levels, so no country is left behind even when tracking is simply not yet possible;
- The creation of a combined, global target for PM2.5 reductions, akin to other global goals, such as net zero by 2050.

The Commission includes 19 influential figures from across the globe, including Gina McCarthy, former Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, H.E. Maria Espinosa, former Ecuadorian Foreign Minister and United Nations General Assembly President; Junaid Ahmad, Vice President of the World Bank Group, Izabella Texiera, Former Environment Minister of Brazil, Yvonne Aki Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown, and other renowned leaders and diplomats in the climate change space.

Notes to editors

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About Our Common Air Commission

Our Common Air is an independent Commission that brings together powerful voices to catalyse ambitious 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 MS Swaminathan Research Foundation

The commissioners are (in the alphabetical order):

- 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)
- Ms Gina McCarthy: Senior Fellow, The Fletcher School
- Dr Izabella Teixeira: Co-Chair, International Resource Panel
- Ms Jane Burston: CEO and founder of Clean Air Fund
- Mr Junaid Ahmad: Vice President, Operations, Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency of the World Bank Group
- Mr MA Jun: Founding Director, Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs
- H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa: Executive Director, GWL Voices for Change & Inclusion
- 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 (United Nations Environment Programme)
- Dr Naoko Ishii: Executive Vice President, Professor, Institute for Future initiative, University of Tokyo
- Dr Olusoji Adeyi: President, Resilient Health Systems, LCC
- Dr Omnia El Omrani: Climate and Health Policy Fellow at Imperial College London
- Ambassador Paul Simons: Senior Fellow, Yale Jackson School of Global Affairs
- Dr Puji Lestari: Professor, Bandung Institute of Technology
- Ms Shirley Rodrigues: Former Deputy Mayor, Environment and Energy, Greater London Authority
- Ms Yvonne Aki-Sawyer: Mayor, Freetown, Sierra Leone