

Re: Statement of support to Dr. Maiken Winter

Louvain-la-Neuve, 12 February 2025

To: The Court and the Public

I am writing in support of Dr. Maiken Winter and her fellow climate defenders, who are now facing legal proceedings for their participation in a peaceful protest aimed at raising awareness about the climate emergency. As someone who has dedicated over four decades to climate science, including serving as Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from 2008 to 2015, I feel compelled to highlight the profound injustice of this situation.

The science is unequivocal: we are in the midst of a climate crisis that threatens the stability of life conditions on our planet and the well-being of future generations. Despite decades of warnings from the scientific community, political action remains woefully insufficient. We are running out of time to prevent catastrophic consequences. Every fraction of a degree of warming we fail to avoid brings us closer to irreversible tipping points, with devastating impacts on ecosystems, food security, human societies, and the economy.

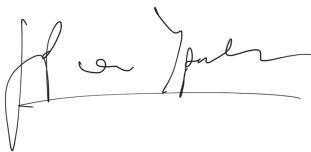
Dr. Maiken Winter, like so many others, has dedicated her life to understanding and communicating the impacts of climate change on nature and the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Her decision to engage in civil disobedience did not arise from a desire to disrupt public life, but from the recognition that conventional avenues—scientific research, reports, policy recommendations—have not led to the necessary action. She found herself in a state of necessity, compelled to take action as other methods had failed to deliver the urgent response required. Faced with the existential threat of climate change, her act of peaceful protest was not only justified but necessary in an effort to avert greater harm.

It is deeply troubling that those who sound the alarm on the climate crisis are treated as criminals, while the real harm—the continued burning of fossil fuels and political inaction—is allowed to persist unchecked. The disproportionate penalties imposed on climate activists reflect a dangerous misalignment of priorities. Instead of prosecuting those who seek to protect our common future, our institutions should be addressing the root cause of their protest: the ongoing failure to act decisively against climate change.

As a scientist and as a human being, I understand the frustration that drives people to the streets. The urgency is real. The risks are immense. And yet, the response remains inadequate. If our societies truly grasped the severity of the crisis, such protests would not be necessary. Until then, I stand in solidarity with those who refuse to remain silent in the face of existential threat.

I call on the court to recognize the moral and legal weight of this case, acknowledging that Dr. Maiken Winter acted in a state of necessity to prevent greater harm. I call on policymakers to listen to the science and act with the urgency required. And I call on the public to support those who risk their freedom to defend our future.

Sincerely,



Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele

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