April 15, 2021

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Kerry:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I write to express our appreciation for the actions that President Biden’s administration is taking to address the climate change crisis and to offer APA’s support and assistance. APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with more than 122,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students from the U.S. and other nations as its members and affiliates.

We look forward to progress being made at the Leaders Summit on Climate on April 22-23. In this letter, I share information about APA’s international activities on climate change that are relevant to the goals of the summit and may be useful in subsequent policy development and implementation.

Our association is formally committed to mobilizing the knowledge and skills of psychologists to respond to climate change and to improve the health and well-being of people of this and future generations. We sponsor and publish research on the human behavioral dimensions of climate change, including how people understand and communicate about climate, how they learn new climate-friendly behaviors, and how climate change affects mental health.

Much of our work on climate change is conducted at the international level. APA was one of the primary organizers of the 2019 International Summit on Psychology and Global Health: A Leader in Climate Action, at which leaders of 44 national and international psychological associations committed to act collaboratively to address climate change within the framework of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. With APA’s support, these associations have formed the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA) to exchange research findings, national and community experiences, and policy proposals and to participate in international gatherings, such as the 26th UN Climate Change Conference. In December 2021, the GPA will hold another international psychology summit to develop a "Psychology 2025 Agenda for Leadership on Climate."


APA is an accredited nongovernmental organization at the UN, where it holds special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and is affiliated with the Department of Global Communications. A team of APA-appointed psychologist representatives regularly participates in UN events and advocacy, with climate change among the areas of focus.

In addition, APA is an official observer organization at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the only major U.S behavioral science organization in that role. A growing number of psychologists is now involved in drafting and reviewing IPCC reports (e.g., the chapter on “Health, wellbeing and the changing structure of communities” in the forthcoming Sixth Assessment Report).

Currently, an APA task force of leading international psychologists and other professionals is developing recommendations that will guide the next stage of psychologists’ work on climate change. Thus far, the task force has identified multiple areas in which psychologists can help individuals, communities, and nations mitigate and adapt to climate change over the next decade. These areas include: (a) facilitating rapid transitions to new forms of energy, transportation, and agriculture; (b) designing new technologies that people will accept and use; (c) supporting workers and communities in the shift to new industries; (d) educating and communicating with the public about climate; (e) enhancing individual and community resilience in the face of natural disasters; (f) planning for, and adjusting to, migrations and population displacements; and (g) preventing and treating mental health problems stemming from climate change. The task force will release its full report later this year.

Once again, we at APA thank you and the Biden administration for your dedication to addressing the global climate crisis, and we offer our expertise and assistance in support of your efforts. If you would like further information, please contact me or Dr. Howard Kurtzman, APA’s Senior Science Advisor, at hkurtzman@apa.org or 202-491-4567.

Sincerely,

Arthur C. Evans, Jr., Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

cc: The Honorable Marcia Bernicat
Acting Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs