

Practice 2(a): Features of an argument

Sample essay 3: 'Global Warming Requires a Global Solution'. Discuss.

- 1 The term 'global warming' is used to refer to what scientists more accurately refer to as 'climate change' (Nunez, 2019) and some refer to as climate 'crisis'. The rapid increase in the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases emitted since the industrial revolution, and carbon dioxide in particular, have led to large, extreme and complex changes in global weather, and are the focus of world-wide attention. It should be noted that these have caused severe warming effects in some regions but, at least in the short term, cooling in others. This essay will argue that the impact of human-caused climatic change makes a solution urgent but that, in so far as there is a 'global solution', this lies in taking on board that there is neither a single global solution nor an equal level of responsibility to address global warming. High Income Countries (HICs) and the highest emitting corporations should lead on taking action and bearing the costs.
- 2 Given the severity of the consequences, it is imperative to find a solution to global warming. According to the IPCC, climate change is already causing 'substantial damages and increasingly irreversible losses', greater than had been anticipated in previous decades, and with major negative consequence for most species and ecosystems, as well human health and socio-economic systems (IPCC, 2022). Since the IPCC's 2014 report, the world has seen not only increased temperatures and precipitation, rising sea levels and reduced food and water security, but also humanitarian crises and greater inequality. For the near-term (to 2040), even if a rise in global warming was limited to 1.5°C, it is estimated that this would merely reduce such damages but not eliminate them. To date, international agreements have not been able to find ways of limiting a rise below 2°C. The United Nations Environment Programme report estimated that actions taken to date would reduce emissions by 7.5% by 2030, but reductions of 55% are needed to reduce global warming. The incentive for global action now is to mitigate against, and limit, damage.
- 3 Despite the extensive research detailed in reports such as those of the IPCC, not everyone has accepted that global warming exists nor needs a solution. For example, thousands of scientists signed up to the Global Warming Petition Project (2008), arguing there was no evidence that carbon emissions would harm the environment. Since then, on the contrary, multiple studies have found over 90% scientific agreement on anthropogenic

Comments (Use prompts and numbers from page 270)

Practice 2(a): Features of an argument (continued)

(human-caused) climate change (Carlton, 2015). Nonetheless, such scepticism has been a threat to finding a solution, not least when such voices are raised in areas of high carbon emission, where there is the greatest need for action. Governments can be sensitive to such scepticism: the USA removed its name from the 2015 UN Paris Agreement in 2020, (although it re-signed it after a change of Government). Therefore, part of the solution is addressing harmful cynicism in high emitting countries.

- 4 However, the phrase 'a global solution' suggests that there is a single solution and/or a need for concerted action in a similar direction, by all individuals, countries or other entities. To some extent, the focus on reducing carbon emissions worldwide is an attempt at such a solution. The Paris Agreement (2015) is an international accord for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and limiting the increase in global average temperature to below two degrees Celsius. By 2022, 197 countries had signed up to this. Yet the agreement is not legally enforceable and each country will decide its own national targets. The impact of the Agreement will depend on how far each nation sets, and adheres to, ambitious targets for reduced emissions. In effect, there is not a single route even to reducing carbon emissions.
- 5 The phrase 'global solution' suggests that the burden for reducing carbon emissions should, or could, fall equally on a global basis. Whilst that might sound admirable at first glance, it is disputed on multiple grounds, not least because responsibility for high carbon emissions varies hugely across the world (Ritchie and Roser, 2022). Given that a differential solution seems justified, there are differing views on how to calculate what is fair – such as on a per capita or national basis, by emission or consumption, currently or cumulatively. Low-Income Countries (LICs) argue that (HICs) have played a greater role in raising carbon emissions historically, continue to have high carbon footprints, and continue to profit most from them. At COP26, Bruce Bilamon from the Marshall Islands pointed out that G20 nations are responsible for 80% of harmful emissions and called for them both to limit climate change and support LICs financially in mitigating existing damage such as from rising sea levels (SPREP, 2021). HICs have both a greater moral responsibility and the financial capacity to bear the brunt of addressing climate change.
- 6 Nonetheless, it could be argued that, as global warming is a problem for everyone, it still requires everyone to participate. Indeed, LICs have a vested interest, as they are most vulnerable to the climate crisis. This point was made by Sonam Wangdi,

Comments *(Use prompts and numbers from page 270)*

Practice 2(a): Features of an argument (continued)

chair of the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group on climate change. He stated: "Our existing plans are not enough to protect our people" and argued that LICs need to adapt plans now to mitigate against both existing and future damage (in Gyeltzen, 2021). It is understandable that LICs want to have control of such plans rather than wait on HICs to deliver. The UN (2021b), reported that HICs had failed in their commitment to provide \$100 billion a year by 2020 to support actions in LICs – 50% of which was for mitigation projects

- 7 Furthermore, LICs also need to take urgent action to alleviate poverty, but this is likely to raise global emission levels. Studies indicate that foreign direct investment (FDI), urbanisation and GDP per capita damage the environment most (Shah et al., 2022). Elliot (2015) noted that HICs also outsource manufacturing to LICs where costs are cheaper. This increases the demand for energy in LICs, most of which still comes from fossil fuel, adding to their carbon emissions. LICs are not well placed, financially, to address such issues. The Jubilee Debt Campaign (2022) argues that LICs contribute least to global warming, are affected the most, but cannot take action because of poverty and high levels of debt owed to HICs and global banks. The campaign calls for these debts to be cancelled, to release necessary resources. Other studies have shown that greater income equality is essential to sustainable development and environmental protection in LICs (Khan and Yahong, 2021). Addressing carbon emissions in isolation is not enough: addressing global poverty, income inequality and sustainable growth are also part of the solution to global warming.
- 8 It is difficult to leverage reduced use of fossil fuels in LICs and MICs, or indeed, through individual consumption in any country, when HICs continue to invest in them. Despite their relative wealth, the amount invested by HICs in fossil fuels between 2013–2019 actually increased; only France invested more in clean energy than fossil fuels (Ferris 2021). Also, HICs actively seek low-priced manufacturing options and imports from LICs and MICs reliant on those fuels or which affect carbon levels negatively on other ways, such as through deforestation. Furthermore, Byskov (2019) argues that, despite pressure on the public to take individual action, this is unlikely to yield the necessary change – which needs to come from key corporates. The Carbon Majors Report, cited in the Guardian, found that only 100 companies or state enterprises, mainly those producing fossil fuels, were responsible for nearly three quarters of global emissions in the last 30 years, with just 25 responsible for nearly half of industrial emissions (Riley, 2017).

Comments (Use prompts and numbers from page 270)

Practice 2(a): Features of an argument (continued)

HIC trading practices, investment in clean energy and radical action by corporates could all effect major beneficial climate change faster and more effectively than relying on LICs or the consumption patterns of billions of individuals globally.

- 9 The level, and global extent, of human-caused climatic change mean it is imperative that a solution is found. This needs to be global in its impact. As carbon emissions are a key factor in the climate crisis, it is logical that all nations look for ways of minimising these. However, it has to be recognised that not all countries bear equal responsibility nor have equal means to do so. Differential targets for carbon emissions for HICs and LICs are part of a global solution. Also, emissions cannot be addressed in isolation from other considerations, such as inequalities, poverty and sustainable growth. HIC trading and investment practices also need to change and the role of large corporations, in particular, has to be addressed. It is only in recognising and addressing these differential responsibilities and multiple actions that there is a global solution to global warming.

Comments (Use prompts and numbers from page 270)

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Practice 2(a): Features of an argument (continued)

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Comments (Use prompts and numbers from page 270)