

# THE EARTH INSTITUTE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Dear Prime Minister Solberg,

A year ago I wrote an open letter urging you to carry out an act of transformational climate leadership. I held the faint hope that your government might yet waken to the realities of climate change, heed the call of thousands of Norwegians and rescind the 23<sup>rd</sup> licensing round, which allows oil companies to exploit massive fossil resources in the Barents Sea. That act of responsible stewardship – pulling out of an Arctic oil race that puts all of humanity at risk – would have salvaged Norway's reputation as an environmental champion and set a bold example for the rest of the world. It would also have secured your legacy as one of a handful of political leaders reacting decisively to the greatest threat civilization has ever faced.

Clearly my hopes were misplaced. Over the past year your government has not only upheld plans to drill for oil in the Arctic, but doubled down by announcing a 24<sup>th</sup> licensing round. This happened only months after Norway signed the Paris Agreement and paid lip service to the moral imperative of our time: keeping the climate within a safe threshold of 1.5°C. For years, scientists have warned governments that climate stability is unattainable unless most of the world's remaining fossil fuels are left in the ground. Those democracies that have benefited most from fossil fuel production must be the first to rise to the challenge. Coal, tar sands and Arctic oil must be the first resources left untouched in a rapidly warming world.

A recent report by Oil Change International shows how there is simply no room for new fossil fuel exploitation within humanity's remaining carbon budget. As a scientist, I understand that the worst climate consequences will not be on the timescale of the current electoral cycle, but we risk unleashing catastrophic climate events within the lifetimes of your children. I will not mince words, Mrs. Solberg. Your government's actions are utterly at odds with the scientific consensus that underpins the Paris Agreement. Norway appears hell-bent on sabotaging the treaty before it has even come into effect.

Fortunately, there may be a way to block the actions of what many are beginning to consider a climate rogue state. Over the past few years, I have been in touch with Norwegian lawyers and climate activists who are making the case that large-scale oil production in the Arctic is unconstitutional

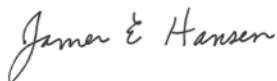
# THE EARTH INSTITUTE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

according to Norwegian law. In Oslo over the next few days, I'll be meeting with friends, allies and young people who are filing a law suit to stop the 23<sup>rd</sup> licensing round based on Article 112 of the Norwegian Constitution. Article 112 states that "Every person has a right to an environment that is conducive to health and to a natural environment whose productivity and diversity are maintained. Natural resources should be managed on the basis of comprehensive long-term considerations whereby this right will be safeguarded for future generations as well."

Few nations have codified rights of future generations in such a powerful, binding way. And few nations show such blatant disregard for these rights. Norway's own per capita fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions exceed those of Sweden by about 70 percent and Norway's fossil fuel production is about 20 times its own use. This excess production yields a tidy revenue stream, but makes Norway a disproportionate source of global climate change.

Article 112 further states that: "Citizens are entitled to information on the state of the natural environment and on the effects of any encroachment on nature that is planned or carried out." Your government has failed to provide this information to Norwegian citizens, thus undermining the legitimacy of the Arctic oil rush over which you preside. During the next few days, I will do my best to convey to the Norwegian public the folly of Arctic oil exploration. Getting the information out is a prime objective of the lawsuit now being filed by a broad movement of Norwegian citizens. They will have my wholehearted support.

Dr. James E. Hansen



Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions  
Columbia University