



November 7, 2022

TO: Austin Mayor and City Council Members

RE: UN COP27: AIA attends the 2022 United Nations Conference on Climate Change to Support the U.S. Commitment to Scaling up Climate Action and Globally Putting the World on a Path to Reach Net-Zero Emissions by 2050

Dear Mayor Adler and Austin City Council Members,

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) wishes to take this opportunity to note that the opening day of the 2022 United Nations Conference on Climate Change begins today in Egypt to uphold the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted by the U.S. and 195 other countries. This legally binding international treaty on climate change has spurred a worldwide effort to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, and preferably below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

AIA's members, consisting of more than 94,000 architecture professionals, work at the leading edge of a \$1.6 trillion U.S. construction industry that promotes commerce and drives consumer confidence. However, we are also stepping forward to address the needs of our planet and our communities. AIA seeks meaningful policies and is committed to a better and more inclusive built environment that will sustain a healthy world.

AIA applauds the commitment made by the United States last year at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to make that event the turning point in global efforts to address the global climate crisis. At COP27, we look forward to the United States scaling up action at home and abroad to put the world on a path to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. AIA stands ready to help the U.S. achieve these emissions reduction targets.

To effectively achieve this ambitious goal, we must promote a global exchange of expertise among all parties in the building sector, including national, state, and local governments; private industry participants, such as architects, commercial real estate developers, institutional building owners, engineers, building scientists, construction companies, and building product manufacturers; and nongovernmental civic leaders. AIA is already heavily engaged in those conversations.

In 2021, AIA was granted nongovernmental organization (NGO) observer status by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and sent six delegates to the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), an annual gathering of world leaders who are parties to the UNFCCC, in Glasgow, Scotland. In 2022, AIA's delegation to COP27 in Sharm El Sheik, Egypt, is increasing to eight people as we work to emphasize the importance of the built environment in [three critical areas](#).

The building industry technologies that will get us to decarbonize at scale and in time are within our reach. However, they are not yet widely available in the private commercial building industry. Zero-carbon steel and concrete, carbon capture and storage technologies, decentralized building-integrated renewable energy, and “smart” technologies that allow buildings to generate and distribute power are far from the mainstream. Many such technologies do not even exist yet. The world’s governments need to spur investment in research and development of these technologies to make them viable and available for both new construction and deep-energy retrofits of existing buildings.

Architects need to actively help shape, support, and coordinate rigorous and meaningful international definitions of “net zero” as they apply to the design, construction, use, and deconstruction of buildings. Architects can support research, development, and specification to integrate breakthrough technologies into our design thinking and show the impact on our communities, businesses, and health.

Let us not forget that the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from buildings is indirect emissions from the off-site generation of electricity, but according to the 2019 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction, only 80 countries have or are developing building energy codes. Architects demonstrate the value of building and energy codes to communities and advocate for the adoption of attainable standards around the globe.

The building sector must also urgently improve resilience in the face of increasingly frequent and severe weather events. The damage greenhouse gas emissions have caused to our climate is already being felt in communities across the United States and across the globe, and it is often felt hardest by those communities with the fewest resources to dedicate to rebuilding or prevention. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report was unmistakable; even if emissions were eliminated immediately, the current warming trends would continue until mid-century, and with it more severe storms, droughts, heat waves, and other threats to human life. We must address pre-disaster mitigation with the same urgency as climate change mitigation. Simultaneously improving the energy efficiency and resilience of global building stock is an international imperative.

Very importantly, AIA wishes to urge you to continue our country’s commitment to and acceleration of policies and technological advances that help us get this work done. If you support the U.S. COP commitments, AIA applauds you for your service and help. We hope that you can support future investments in our climate.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like additional information on what AIA is doing on climate. In the meantime, you can find more information here on AIA’s Climate Action Plan, <https://www.aia.org/resources/6307290-climate-action-plan>.

Sincerely,

Camille Jobe, AIA
AIA Austin President 2022

Ingrid Spencer
Executive Director, AIA Austin

Dan Hart, FAIA, PE
AIA President, 2022

Lakisha Woods, CAE
Executive Vice-President & CEO, AIA