Text 89 REFUSING TO FLY HAS LOST ME MY JOB AS A CLIMATE RESEARCHER. IT’S A PRICE WORTH PAYING

Two weeks ago, my employer presented me with a stark ultimatum: return to my offices in Kiel, Germany, within five days, or lose my job. I am a climate researcher and since March 2023, I have been completing vital fieldwork into the social impact of climate change almost 24,000 kilometers away, on the island of Bougainville off the coast of Papua New Guinea. […]

The urgency of their request to return meant I would have to jump on a plane if I was to meet the deadline; but for me, this was not an option. I have been practising conscientious objection to flying for more than 10 years. My employer has supported me on a “slow trip” in the past. I do not boycott flying altogether, but I will only catch a plane when no other alternative exists. […]

Many people have asked why it is so important for me to travel as low-carbon as possible. I have three reasons. First, I want to be consistent with my moral commitment to avoid flying. Aviation is the biggest contributor to climate change of all forms of transport. […] A trip by plane from Papua New Guinea to Germany produces, in 32 hours, 5.3 tonnes of CO2 per passenger. Slow travel produces approximately 12 times less. […]

Second, I promised all the 1,800 participants in my research in Bougainville that I would return low-carbon. I want to keep my promise. […]

Finally, and most importantly, I hope my case might put a little crack into the wall of “selfishness, greed, and apathy”, which, in the words of a climate lawyer, is the main hindrance to stopping runaway climate change. […]

I am not the type of person who likes telling others what to do. But I would like to invite people to shift the boundaries of what is considered normal within their own sphere of action. According to Oxfam, the richest 10% in the world produce over half of emissions. Ninety companies are responsible for 63% of the world’s historic CO2 emissions. Worldwide, flying remains the prerogative of the elite.

At the time of writing, I am waiting to embark on a cargo ship on the first leg of my low-carbon journey to Europe. When I arrive in Europe in about 45 days, I will be jobless. If, on my way, I manage to persuade people that our planet is seriously endangered and that radical, extraordinary action is needed, losing my job will have been a price worth paying.

Adapted from The Guardian October 2023 (442 words)