



Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah (below) is the founder and trustee of the Ella Roberta Foundation, which campaigns for the right to clean air in memory of her daughter, Ella (left)

'ELLA'S DEATH WILL END UP SAVING MILLIONS OF LIVES'



IMAGES: ROSAMUND ADOO-KISSI-DEBRAH; PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

● Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah died on February 15, 2013 from a severe asthma attack. She is, to date, the only person to have air pollution listed as their official cause of death, attributed to the high levels of pollutants in Lewisham, South London, where the nine-year-old's family lived.

"As her mother, all I want is to have my daughter back, but I know she won't come back, and the fact is that Ella's death will end up saving millions of lives," Ella's mother Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah tells *The Big Issue*.

According to figures released in 2022, around 97 per cent of addresses in the UK are surrounded by unsafe levels of air pollution, and nearly 40,000 people die prematurely from its effects every year.

Initially, Adoo-Kissi-Debrah had no idea Ella's death had been caused by air pollution. But after years of fighting for an inquest into her daughter's death, she finally was given answers in December 2020 about what had happened to her. Adoo-Kissi-Debrah has been fighting tooth and nail ever since for better air quality in Lewisham and across the country, in honour of her daughter. "I don't want another mother to experience the same tragedy," she says.

Currently, she is working hard to get the Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill, also known as Ella's Law, passed through the House of Commons. The bill will have its second reading on February 24, just one week after the 10th anniversary of Ella's death.

If passed, the bill will require clean air to be achieved in England and Wales within five years, and public bodies would have to review and monitor pollution limits. A commission would also be established to scrutinise the government on clean air.

When asked how it feels to have her daughter become the poster child for air pollution, Adoo-Kissi-Debrah says: "It keeps her name alive. It could've been that she died and it was the end of the story. But she would have liked everyone knowing who she was."

She says she dreaded the anniversary of her daughter's death, especially as 10 years is a big milestone: "You never expect your child to die before you. But I have to be strong for my other children too."

Currently, Adoo-Kissi-Debrah is seeking to speak to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on the subject of air pollution, but has not yet had a response.

"If I could, I would rather spend more time raising awareness with the public, talking to them about the impacts of air pollution on their health rather than having

this whole back-and-forth with the government, trying to get them to listen to me or the scientists who know about it," she says.

"The science is very clear – if it wasn't for illegal levels of air pollution in Lewisham, Ella would have lived. She would never have got asthma and she wouldn't have died that night because air pollution that night was the highest it had been."

There are a number of ways to combat air pollution, but it won't be easy and it won't happen without widespread political support.

"Things need to change. We've got one of the most expensive public transport systems in the world when what we need is cheap, reliable public transport," says Adoo-Kissi-Debrah.

"I simply do not see public transport as the government's priority but it should be." She is adamant that she doesn't care about party politics. For her, it's about the science that shows how harmful air pollution is to people's health and the environment.

"They should do what's required. It shouldn't take the likes of me and other people to bring in clean air for everyone."

Adoo-Kissi-Debrah is 50/50 about whether Ella's Law will pass through the House of Commons. "We are so close," she says. "But the government needs to feel like people really care about this issue so they feel compelled to do something about it."

That's why she is organising an event on February 15, featuring art, music and speeches, to call for clean air for everyone. She says, "We want as many people to come along as possible and to help us fight for clean air. People think they have no power, but they do. Nothing will change if we don't make ourselves heard."

Adoo-Kissi-Debrah sounds resigned at times, especially when she talks about where she stands in the grand scheme of things – after all, she is just one person. But she is also filled with hope that her campaigning will all be worth it in the end, and is pleased that those efforts are increasingly being recognised.

She says: "There were many things that people thought we couldn't achieve. One thing we campaigned for in the past was to move up the target to get rid of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030 – 10 years earlier than planned. It was a slow and painful process, but it happened."

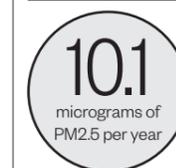
"And now, with Ella's Law passing through the House of Lords and being debated in the Commons, there is every chance we can make sure no other child dies from it."

@micheletheil

A global perspective

Air pollution is responsible for between 28,000 and 36,000 premature deaths in the UK each year, and an estimated seven million worldwide. With over 30 million cars on UK roads, transport accounts for nearly a quarter of the nation's overall emissions. Air pollution is measured in micrograms of particles, called PM2.5. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) recommended limit is five micrograms (5mcg) per year.

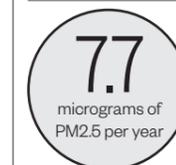
UK



According to State of Global Air, the UK averages 10.1mcg of PM2.5 per year. This is twice the WHO

recommended limit but many areas across the country average significantly higher levels of PM2.5. A report published by climate organisation Friends of the Earth in October 2022 found 97 per cent of neighbourhoods in England and Wales are between one and two times more polluted than WHO guidelines.

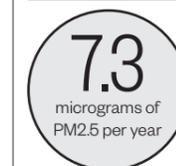
USA



Air pollution levels in the United States were lower than the UK's in 2019, averaging 7.7mcg a year.

But a report by the American Lung Association in 2021 found 135 million Americans live with polluted air. The EPA estimates the US spends around \$65 billion (£54 million) a year on cleaning the air, most of which comes from burning fossil fuels for energy production and cars.

Scandinavian average

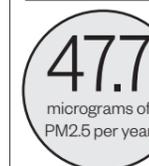


All Scandinavian countries have relatively low levels of air pollution – though all are higher than the WHO's recommended limits.

Denmark averages 9.8mcg of PM2.5 per year, mainly from wood-burning stoves and boilers, vehicles, ships,

and energy production. Norway averages 6.6mcg per year, but is aiming to reduce this significantly by getting rid of fossil fuels. Oslo achieved the world's highest concentration of electric cars in 2020 and is working to make all public transport fossil-free by 2025. Sweden has the lowest air pollution levels of all three Scandinavian countries. It averages 5.6mcg of PM2.5 per year.

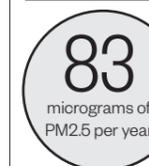
China



China averaged 47.7mcg of PM2.5 in 2019, nearly 10 times the WHO recommended limit. China has

made significant progress in reducing air pollution in the last decade – in fact, air pollution in 2019 saw a 20 per cent decrease from PM2.5 levels in 2014.

India



India has the highest levels of air pollution in the world, averaging 83mcg of PM2.5 per year in

2019. According to Bloomberg, over 90 per cent of India's population live in areas where pollution levels are high – "coal-fired power plants, factories, and vehicles are among the major sources of pollution". Nearly two million people in India are estimated to have died in 2019 as a result of air pollution, while in 2020, India had nine of the planet's 10 most polluted cities.

SOURCE: STATEOFGLOBALAIR.ORG