
**PETITION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
SECRETARY-GENERAL
TO DECLARE A CLIMATE
EMERGENCY AND MOBILIZE A
COMPREHENSIVE UN RESPONSE**

CHIARA SACCHI (Argentina);
RANTON ANJAIN AND LITOKNE KABUA (Marshall Islands);
GRETA THUNBERG (Sweden);
CATARINA LORENZO (Brazil);
IRIS DUQUESNE (France);
RAINA IVANOVA (Germany);
RIDHIMA PANDEY (India);
DEBORAH ADEGBILE (Nigeria);
CARLOS MANUEL (Palau);
AYAKHA MELITHAFA (South Africa);
RASLEN JBEILI (Tunisia);
CARL SMITH AND ALEXANDRIA VILLASEÑOR (USA)

10 November 2021

To the Honorable António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

“The climate crisis is a child rights crisis”– UNICEF¹

1. We, the undersigned petitioners, are youth from around the globe. We have spent our childhood trying to send a message to the adult world: time is running out. But despite decades of warnings, the international community continues to delay treating the climate crisis as the emergency it is.
2. Delay means that today, according to UNICEF, roughly 1 billion children—almost half of the world’s 2.2 billion children—live in countries that are at “extremely high-risk” of climate disasters threatening their lives, health, education, and culture.² Delay means that more than 99% of the world’s children are exposed to at least one environmental threat, including heatwaves, extreme storms, flooding, drought, vector-borne diseases, as well as air pollution and lead poisoning exacerbated by climate degradation.³ 2020 was the hottest year on record, but delay will make it one of the coolest years of the rest of our lives.
3. In September 2019, we came to New York to speak at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York. There, petitioner Greta Thunberg asked, “How dare you?” But the world’s leaders still dare to ignore the science and delay decarbonizing the planet.
4. In September 2019, we also filed a human rights case before the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the “CRC” or “committee”) against five G20 members and major emitters—Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, and Turkey—urging those states to reduce emissions on a pathway to limit global warming to 1.5°C. When we filed our case, global warming had reached 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. Earlier this month, the committee dismissed our case. The committee recognized that states have an obligation under human rights law to protect children outside their borders from the harmful effects of their greenhouse gas emissions. The committee also recognized that our lives and our health are at risk and that there is an undeniable causal link between states’ emissions and the threats we face. But the committee held that it could

¹ The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2021 (“UNICEF CCRI”), <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

² *Ibid.* at 13.

³ *Ibid.* at 11.

not hear our case until we had filed legal cases in the courts of each respondent country, lost those cases, and exhausted all appeals.

5. In the two years it took the committee to consider our claims, global warming reached 1.2°C. How much higher will it have reached several years from now, when we will have finally exhausted appeals in five national courts? Many of us will no longer be children by the time our case could be heard by the committee. Many of us—especially those from small island states and indigenous communities—fear we will have become climate refugees by that time. We have no time to wait.
6. Mr. Secretary-General, on 12 December 2020, you called on “leaders worldwide to declare a State of Climate Emergency in their countries until carbon neutrality is reached.”⁴ Too many have failed to respond.
7. On November 1, 2021, at the COP26 World Leaders Summit, you declared that you stand with the “climate action army—led by young people.”⁵ We hope that in standing with us, you will use all your institutional powers to act with us.
8. We respectfully call on you and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to declare a systemwide, Level 3 climate emergency at the United Nations.
9. The United Nations was formed to protect international peace and security, to “save succeeding generations,” and to “promote social progress and better standards of life.”⁶ A decade ago, your predecessor Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, declared to the Security Council that climate change “is a threat to international peace and security.”⁷ Four years ago, the General Assembly recognized in Resolution 72/219 that climate change is the greatest threat to children today, requiring international coordination and cooperation at all levels to protect “the global climate for the well-being of present and future generations of humankind.”⁸

⁴ Secretary-General’s remarks at the Climate Ambition Summit, December 20, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-12-12/secretary-generals-remarks-the-climate-ambition-summit-bilingual-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english-version>.

⁵ UN Secretary-General: COP26 Must Keep 1.5 Degrees Celsius Goal Alive, Nov. 1, 2021, <https://unfccc.int/news/un-secretary-general-cop26-must-keep-15-degrees-celsius-goal-alive>

⁶ United Nations Charter, Preamble, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble>.

⁷ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Remarks to the Security Council on the Impact of Climate Change on International Peace and Security, 20 July 2011, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2011-07-20/remarks-security-council-impact-climate-change-international-peace>.

⁸ General Assembly resolution 72/219, Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind, A/RES/72/219 (20 December 2017), available at <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/219>.

10. In August 2021, you said that the latest IPCC Working Group 1 report is a “code red for humanity” and that “we must act decisively now to keep 1.5°C alive.”⁹ This requires emergency action.
11. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, your office and the IASC mobilized a UN Comprehensive Response to this global health crisis and activated a UN Crisis Management Team. We commend you for that action. The climate emergency—which threatens every person on the planet into the foreseeable future—is at least as serious and urgent a threat as a global pandemic and similarly requires immediate international action.
12. For this reason, we encourage you, the IASC, and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to mobilize a UN Comprehensive Response to the Climate Emergency and to activate a crisis management team to oversee immediate and comprehensive global action on climate. This action will build on the Group of Experts you have established for non-state actors’ climate pledges. While all UN efforts are welcomed, the UN must demonstrate that all its components and agencies are united in declaring a code red climate emergency.
13. A UN Comprehensive Response to the Climate Emergency is necessary because climate action must not stop at state borders: international human rights law requires states to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions that have transboundary effects. As the CRC held in our case:

In accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, as reflected in the Paris Agreement, the Committee finds that the collective nature of the causation of climate change does not absolve the State party of its individual responsibility that may derive from the harm that the emissions originating within its territory may cause to children, whatever their location.¹⁰

14. A UN Comprehensive Response to the Climate Emergency is also necessary to address the fundamental inequities of climate change. The burden of climate change falls disproportionately on those with the least power to stop it: children and developing nations. The countries that emit the least face the greatest risks. UNICEF has identified 33 countries as “extremely high risk” for children due to threats from climate change.¹¹ Those countries contain half the world’s

⁹ Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report ‘Code Red for Humanity’, Stressing ‘Irrefutable’ Evidence of Human Influence, Aug. 9, 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm>.

¹⁰ *Sacchi et al. v. Turkey*, Decision on Admissibility, CRC/C/88/D/108/2019, 22 September 2021, Para. 9.10.

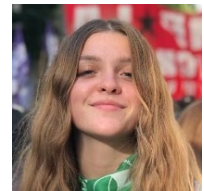
¹¹ UNICEF CCRI at 79, Table 1.

children, including two of these petitioners, but are collectively responsible for only nine percent of CO₂ emissions.¹² The ten highest emitting countries account for nearly 70% of global emissions, but only one, India, is ranked as “extremely high-risk.”¹³ As General Assembly Resolution 46/182 recognized, the “international community should adequately assist developing countries in strengthening their capacity in disaster prevention and mitigation.”

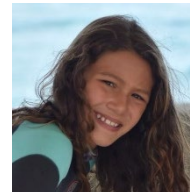
15. Finally, a UN Comprehensive Response to the Climate Emergency is necessary to demonstrate to the youth of the world that the UN has not abandoned us to a grim future. The UN Charter promises to protect succeeding generations. That promise will not be kept if the international community does not do all within its power to avert a climate disaster.

The Petitioners

16. **Chiara Sacchi (Argentina).** Chiara is from Haedo, Argentina, which lies along the outskirts of Buenos Aires. She recently took part in a global project called “Terra Madre,” which seeks to protect and support small-scale food producers. She was 17 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



17. **Catarina Lorenzo (Brazil).** Catarina from Salvador, Brazil, located in Brazil’s northeastern state of Bahia. Catarina is an aspiring professional surfer and spends a lot of time on Brazil’s beaches. She is very passionate about protecting Brazil’s trees and forests. She was 12 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



18. **Iris Duquesne (France).** Iris is from Bordeaux, France, which lies along France’s southeastern coast. Since moving to California earlier this year, Iris has become an avid surfer and is dedicated to raising awareness about climate change. She was 16 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



¹² *Ibid.* at 91

¹³ *Ibid.* at 79, 91.

19. **Raina Ivanova (Germany).** Raina lives in Germany’s northern city of Hamburg. Raina’s favorite subjects in school are geography and philosophy. She participates in “Fridays for the Future,” foregoing school on Fridays in an effort to bring awareness and spark action to combat climate change. She was 15 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



20. **Ridhima Pandey (India).** Ridhima is from Haridwar, India. Ridhima is passionate about protecting India’s forests. In 2017, at just nine-years-old, Ridhima sued the Indian government for failing to take adequate action to tackle climate change. She was 11 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



21. **Ranton Anjain (Marshall Islands).** Ranton is from Ebeye Island, Marshall Islands. Ranton now attends high school on Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia but used to go fishing on Ebeye every day. Ranton began participating in the Heirs to Our Oceans programs in 2018 and is now an advocate on climate issues with local leaders. He was 17 when he filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



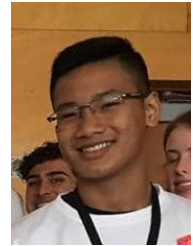
22. **Litokne Kabua (Marshall Islands).** Litokne is from Ebeye Island, Marshall Islands. He understands the importance of the ocean to the Marshallese, and has studied coral health on his island as part of a summer camp through Heirs to Our Oceans. When Litokne grows up, he wants to work for his government to encourage the government to become more active in fighting climate change. He was 16 when he filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



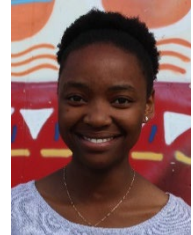
23. **Deborah (“Debby”) Morayo Adegbile (Nigeria).** Debby is from Lagos, along Nigeria’s southwestern coast. Debby wants to be a lawyer when she grows up and has joined Heirs to Our Oceans to learn more about the changing climate and advocate against plastic pollution. She was 12 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



24. **Carlos Manuel (Palau).** Carlos is originally from the Philippines, now living on Koror, Palau. Five years ago, Carlos started an Heirs to Our Ocean chapter at his school, educating his peers about ocean health and the impacts of climate change. He was 17 when he filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



25. **Ayakha Melithafa (South Africa).** Ayakha lives in Eerste River on the outskirts of Cape Town in the Western Cape province of South Africa. She is a dedicated climate activist, taking part in Project 90 by 2030 YouLead initiative and acts as a recruitment official for the African Climate Alliance. She was 17 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



26. **Greta Thunberg (Sweden).** Greta is a climate activist who began the global ‘Skolstrejk for Klimatet’ (School Strike for Climate) when she began protesting outside of the Swedish Parliament in August 2018. Greta has inspired hundreds of thousands of other children and adults around the world to speak up and urge world leaders to take action to combat the climate crisis. She was 16 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



27. **Raslen Jbeli (Tunisia).** Raslen is from Tabarka, Tunisia, located along Tunisia’s northern coast. He participates in the Access Program, a school program that allows him to research climate change and other environmental issues affecting Tabarka. He was 17 when he filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



28. **Alexandria Villaseñor (USA).** Alexandria is a climate activist who grew up in Davis, California and moved to New York City in the fall of 2018. Alexandria began school striking for the climate outside the United Nations on December 14, 2018, inspiring thousands of others. She also launched her own youth-led nonprofit, Earthuprising.org. She was 14 when she filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



29. **Carl Smith (USA).** Carl is from Akiak, Alaska. As a member of the Indigenous Yupiaq tribe, Carl grew up learning the traditional hunting, fishing, and cultural practices that have shaped his community for thousands of years. Carl is speaking out about climate change because Akiak is changing as temperatures rise and Carl fears that the Yupiaq way of life will disappear. He was 17 when he filed the petition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



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This petition is submitted with the assistance of *pro bono* counsel at Hausfeld LLP (US), Hausfeld & Co LLP (UK), and Earthjustice (USA), who are retained as legal representatives of the petitioners, through their parents and legal guardians.

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