

16 Young People File UN Human Rights Complaint On Climate Change

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Youth petitioners take fight for global climate change action to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Today, 16 young people from around the world submitted a groundbreaking legal complaint about climate change with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Their petition shows how five regional leaders and G20 members—Respondents **Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, and Turkey**—have known about the risks of climate change for decades. Despite that knowledge, they are failing to curb emissions, while continuing to promote fossil fuels. The climate crisis was caused and is being perpetuated by the actions and inactions of all states, but without the leadership of the respondents, the global effort to solve the climate crisis cannot succeed.

The youth petitioners are between the ages of eight and 17 and hail from **Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Palau, Marshall Islands, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden, Tunisia**, and the **United States**. Among the petitioners is **Greta Thunberg**, a Swedish student climate activist, who sparked a global youth climate action movement through her *Fridays for Future* school strikes in 2018. Greta is joined by **Alexandria Villaseñor**, a fellow American activist who co-founded the *U.S. Youth Climate Strike*. Alexandria, inspired by Greta, conducted her own Friday climate protests outside of the New York United Nations headquarters. The other petitioners are devoted activists and educators in their home countries.

In making their complaint, the authors narrate the impact climate change has had on their own lives, including brushes with death and loss of neighbors from wildfire or flooding; threats to traditional ways of life such as reindeer herding or fishing; significant health hazards such as dengue fever, malaria and asthma; hardships from drought, air quality and poisoned marine life; and mental anxiety or depression about the present and future.

Ayakha Melithafa a 17-year-old petitioner from South Africa commented, *“People who are older aren’t paying as much attention because they will not be as affected. They don’t take us children seriously, but we want to show them we are serious.”*

The petitioners have gathered in New York to participate in a press conference, hosted by UNICEF, introducing the petition and their demands. They will also be participating in the Global Climate Strike, and various other events surrounding Climate Week, the United Nations Climate Action Summit and UN General Assembly.

“Climate change is not a problem which any country can solve on its own. All the countries must join their hands together to solve this crisis as it is a global issue,” said **Ridhima Pandey, an 11-year-old petitioner from India**.

The complaint was prepared and filed on behalf of the petitioners by the international law firm Hausfeld LLP and the nonprofit environmental public interest law organization Earthjustice. It was filed with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects the human rights of children around the globe. The convention was signed by every country in the world, except for the United States. The five respondent countries have agreed to a communications procedure that gives the Committee the authority to receive legal complaints from children whose rights have been violated.

“Without transformational change in the next decade, the human rights impact of climate change on the Petitioners and more than 2 billion other children will be locked in and irreversible,” said **Michael D. Hausfeld, chairman of Hausfeld**. *“What we all must do now is: talk less, act more.”*

“The climate crisis is a children’s rights crisis,” said **Scott Gilmore, a human rights lawyer at Hausfeld**. *“The current path of global warming will leave today’s children with an unlivable world.”*

“Earthjustice is proud to present the message of these inspiring young people in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child,” said **Ramin Pejan an Earthjustice staff attorney who is co-counsel for the petitioners**. *“Young people from around the world have been speaking up loudly and clearly about the climate crisis. It’s time to take meaningful and urgent action.”*

From the 45 nations signed on the optional protocol, the petition is directed at the biggest climate polluters among the signatories comprising **Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, and Turkey**. The Committee is made up of 18 independent child rights experts. It will determine if the complaint is admissible and if so, will gather responses from the countries named in the complaint. The Committee will then make recommendations to those nations.

The petition calls on states to immediately take binding international cooperative action to limit global warming to the levels identified by science. The petition draws upon expert analysis and personal narratives to demonstrate how the effects of climate change—such as hurricanes, droughts, sea-level rise, the collapse of food systems, and other threats—have violated and will violate each petitioner’s human rights by threatening their physical survival, impairing their physical and psychological development, and harming their health.

Read the petition

Read the Petitioners stories - story one and story two

Read the FAQ about the petition

Read the release online

Background

- The Earth is 1.1°C hotter than before the industrial revolution, and it is approaching tipping points of foreseeable and irreversible catastrophic effects. If the earth reaches 2°C of heating, the exacerbated air pollution alone is forecast to cause 150 million deaths. If the Earth reaches 3-4°C of heating by 2100—which is the current trajectory if states do not make drastic emissions reductions—the impacts of climate change will threaten the lives and welfare of over 2 billion children.
- 1.1°C rise in global average temperature is presently causing devastating heat waves, forest fires, extreme weather patterns, floods, and sea-level rise, infringing upon the human rights of millions of people globally. Projected global warming will lead to an increase in human mortality, food shortages, malnutrition, water scarcity, local fish and species losses, coral reef disappearance, flooding, increased vector-borne disease, and mass displacement and migration, among many other impacts. How severe these impacts become will depend on the extent of warming. The world’s leading economies in the Group of Twenty (G20)— which include the respondents—are responsible for 84% of all global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Not one of the Respondents to the petition is on an emissions pathway to keep heating under 3.0°C much less under 1.5°C. Each has set inadequate emission reduction targets in their Paris Agreement pledges—and then failed to meet even these inadequate goals. For example, if all the world’s governments implemented comparable reductions to **Argentina’s** Paris commitments, it would lead to 3-4°C of global warming by 2100. Comparable reductions to **Brazil’s**

emissions would lead to 2-3°C, *before* President Bolsonaro's rollback of environmental protections that will likely make Brazil's contribution even greater. Comparable emissions to **France** and **Germany**—in many ways are leaders on international climate action—would lead to 3-4°C. Meanwhile, comparable emissions to **Turkey's** rate of emissions would lead to more than 4°C of warming, as it continues to invest in new coal-fired power plants.

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Notes to Editors:

For additional information or to arrange interviews, please contact:

Deborah Schwartz
Media Relations
240 355-8838
deborah@mediarelationsinc.com

About Earthjustice

Earthjustice is the premier nonprofit environmental law organization. We wield the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. We are here because the earth needs a good lawyer.

This material is distributed by Earthjustice and Hausfeld on behalf of Alexandria Villasenor, Carl Smith, Catarina Lorenzo, Chiara Sacchi, Greta Thunberg, Ellen-Anne, Iris Duquesne, Raina Ivanova, Raslene Joubali, Debby Adegbile, Ayakha Melithafa, Ridhima Pandey, Carlos Manuel, Litokne Kabua, David Ackley III, and Ranton Anjain. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.