

World's Youth for Climate Justice: Taking Climate Change to the World's Highest Court

On 7th December 2023, World's Youth for Climate Justice had the honor of receiving the Youth Carnegie Peace Prize at the Peace Palace for "its dedicated efforts in fighting climate change by means of international law and for advocating climate justice" (Carnegie Foundation, 2023).

The impacts of climate change disproportionately affect young people and vulnerable communities worldwide. An increase in extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, heat waves, more frequent floods, wildfires, and drought, can lead to food insecurity and increased displacement. These factors foster conflict and threaten the rights and livelihoods of future generations. Despite these threats, a large gap remains between the required and current climate action to limit global warming.

Climate justice entails recognizing this existing and increasing unequal distribution of burdens and taking action to mitigate them. An Advisory Opinion (AO) from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) can clarify States' obligations regarding human rights and climate change and strengthen the human rights-based response to the climate crisis, evoking more ambitious climate action.

Friday 22nd March 2024 marked a historic step in the journey toward climate justice. Over 80 States and authorized intergovernmental organizations submitted their written statements on questions that seek to clarify the obligations of States under International Law to address the adverse impacts of climate change. These written statements will shape the final Advisory Opinion, representing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to contribute to the development of international law in the context of the climate crisis.

Background

World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ) is the global sister organization of the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC), founded in 2019 by 27 law students, calling for the historic UN request for an Advisory Opinion (AO) on climate change and human rights from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

On 29th March 2023, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the historic resolution, responding to the call of young people and the leadership of Vanuatu to request an ICJ AO, showing the significance of this global youth-led climate justice initiative and its support worldwide.

With the first climate change ICJ AO currently pending, WYCJ seeks to clarify state obligations to protect the rights of present and future generations from climate change and make global progress toward intergenerational equity and climate justice; arguments contained in their [Youth Climate Justice Handbook](#). The Handbook, co-written by PISFCC and a team of international lawyers, includes state-of-the-art legal arguments on climate justice, tailored to the questions posed to the ICJ. Written from the youth's perspective, the

Legal Memorandum from the Handbook facilitated a guiding process for States to include the voices of young people in their written submissions to the world's highest court.

Moving Forward, Toward Climate Justice

The ceremony at the Peace Palace held special significance for WYCJ, as it was held in the Great Hall of Justice. This is the courtroom of the International Court of Justice where the ICJ Advisory Opinion hearings will take place later this year. Leading up to this oral phase, World's Youth for Climate Justice aims to rally support at international conferences, organising workshops, and bolster the campaign on social media to translate the proceedings to a wider non-legal public. WYCJ will make the ICJ AO hearings more accessible as well by covering the arguments made in the Court, so that more people worldwide learn about the case that can have a large impact on the climate action that will be taken in the next decades.

In the meantime, World's Youth for Climate Justice also uses its influence in other advisory proceedings on climate change. The organisation campaigned for a progressive advisory opinion from the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, where campaigners of WYCJ covered the hearings and had the opportunity of sharing the Youth Climate Justice Handbook. Also, a different team of campaigners from Latin America and around the world have been invited to submit two briefs before the advisory proceedings on climate change and human rights before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Moving forward, WYCJ will continue to encourage States to engage with this historic case at the ICJ and deliver a progressive interpretation of their obligations. Together with PISFCC, the youth initiative strives to bring the voices of youth to the world's highest Court and urges States to drive global progress toward intergenerational equity and climate justice.

References:

Carnegie Foundation. (2023, 8 December). *World's Youth for Climate Justice received Youth Carnegie Peace Prize | Peace Palace*. Vredespaleis.nl.
<https://www.vredespaleis.nl/worlds-youth-for-climate-justice-received-youth-carnegie-peace-prize/?lang=en>