

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**\*\*For immediate release\*\***

**The World's Youth Hail Historic Climate Ruling by World Court**

THE HAGUE, 23 JULY, 2025.— The International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its long-awaited advisory opinion regarding the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change, making clear that States and major polluters have a duty to protect people and take effective action to safeguard the climate system.

This is a turning point for frontline communities everywhere. The world's top court has made it clear: polluting countries are legally bound to cut their emissions and compensate those already suffering the consequences. Climate justice is no longer optional.

The groundbreaking advisory opinion was conceived in 2019 by law students from The University of the South Pacific, which inspired the world's youth to demand State support for the UN request and meaningful participation in the Court's proceedings. Through the campaign, Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC) and World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ) have united over 1,500 organisations and secured the UN adoption of the advisory opinion request.

PISFCC and WYCJ celebrate this milestone as a collective achievement and a foundation for continued progress. We encourage all States, communities, and young people to build on this momentum and to transform the Court's guidance into lasting change.

**Key Findings from the Advisory Opinion:** In its advisory opinion, the ICJ confirmed that:

- **International Law Demands More Than Voluntary Action:** Simply following the Paris Agreement is not enough. The Court says that States have obligations under relevant areas of international law, including human rights, environmental law, and relevant treaty commitments, which must be implemented together and harmoniously.
- **Clear Legal Duties:** The Court confirms that States and major and historical polluters have a clear legal obligation to cut emissions, prevent serious harm, and work together to protect those most at risk, both within their borders and beyond. This duty applies to fossil fuel consumption, extraction, expansion, and subsidies, or a lack of adequate regulation, and extends to States that are not a party to climate change treaties and private entities that operate within their jurisdiction
- **Best Available Science as the Standard:** The Court recognises that decisions must be guided by the best available science, especially reports from the IPCC. The Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit is the legal reference point for determining sufficient ambition, action, and responsibility. The decision confirms that "business as usual" is no longer acceptable: States that fail to act, allow high emissions, or ignore the science can now be held internationally accountable.
- **Human Rights and Climate Justice Go Hand in Hand:** Governments are required to protect people's rights to life, health, a healthy environment, and self-determination. Special attention is required for Indigenous Peoples, Small Island Developing States, youth, and

future generations. The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a precondition to respect, protect and fulfill all other human rights.

- **Accountability and Remedies:** The Court affirms that States with high historical and current emissions have heightened obligations to remedy climate harm, including through reparations, support, and regulation of private actors. The Court makes clear that States can be held responsible for both what they do and what they fail to do. Ceasing conduct causing climate harm might require revoking all administrative measures and policies contributing to such damage.

### **Quotes:**

“Today the world’s smallest countries have made history. The ICJ’s decision brings us closer to a world where governments can no longer turn a blind eye to their legal responsibilities. It affirms a simple truth of climate justice: those who did the least to fuel this crisis deserve protection, reparations, and a future. This ruling is a lifeline for Pacific communities on the frontline.” - Vishal Prasad, Director, Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change.

“This moment shows how youth and Global South communities have the power to shape international law and seek reparation for damage done.” - Nicole Ponce, Global Advocacy Lead, World’s Youth for Climate Justice.

“International courts around the world have spoken loud and clear: climate harms must be avoided and reparations must be paid where damages have been caused. The alignment amongst these international courts demonstrates a unified understanding that the climate crisis threatens fundamental human rights. This consensus strengthens the foundation for ambitious climate action and provides a powerful mandate for governments to protect human rights from the adverse effects of climate change.” - Jule Schnakenberg, Executive Director, World’s Youth For Climate Justice.

“The Pacific has shown what’s possible when governments lead with courage and unity to protect people and the planet. Now, the world’s highest court has confirmed what the youth and frontline communities have long demanded: bold climate action rooted in justice. The ICJ’s ruling is a powerful signal that the law is on our side. It must now guide not only courtrooms, but climate negotiations and policy decisions worldwide. The ICJ’s opinion is more than a legal milestone—it’s a call to action, and we’re ready to keep building this momentum together.” - Cynthia Houniui, President, Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change.

“Pacific island states and students, the youth movement, and the global majority that aligned behind them have given the world a master class in advocacy for climate justice. This day marks a win for people over polluters. In affirming that those calling to phase out fossil fuels and make polluters pay have the law on their side, the ICJ ruling is a springboard for ambitious climate action and effective climate accountability.” - Nikki Reisch, Climate and Energy Program Director, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL).

### **Background:**

The advisory proceedings garnered record-breaking participation, with more than 96 States and 11 international organisations participating. Last December, Indigenous peoples and youth demanded climate justice from the world's highest Court, including addresses by PISFCC and WYCJ.

The process was accompanied by the People's Assembly, held in The Hague, where community leaders, Indigenous Peoples, youth activists, and witnesses affected by climate change from around the world gathered to share their stories, resistance, and collective demands for justice. Their testimonies, documented in the [People's Petition](#), urge the ICJ to ground its reasoning in lived realities: the right to a healthy environment, the survival of cultures and homelands, and the dignity and remedy owed to all people threatened by climate-related harm.

This growing legal consensus is reflected in recent developments: just weeks ago, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued Advisory Opinion 32/25, underscoring that States have a binding obligation to prevent irreversible harm to the climate system and to adopt enhanced due diligence to protect human rights from the risks posed by the climate emergency. Earlier in 2024, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) confirmed that greenhouse gas emissions are a form of marine pollution under the Convention on the Law of the Sea, and clarified that States must prevent, reduce, and control the adverse effects of climate change on the ocean. Together, these opinions establish that States face clear and enforceable duties to address the climate crisis across multiple areas of international law.

As youth and frontline communities, we affirm that the ICJ's decision must serve as a catalyst for much-needed political will to tackle humanity's biggest challenge.

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