CHILDREN & YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS LAB · COP31

Our rights.
Our future.
Our demands.

The policy paper and declaration of children and young people for COP31.

180
children and young people responded

9
languages in the form

400
members in the LAB community

20
demands for COP31

kinder not hilfe

Terre des Hommes International Federation

INTRODUCTION

Who we are and why we are writing

This paper brings together the voices of children and young people about climate and environmental justice, and turns it into a declaration and a set of demands for COP31.

> Climate inaction is not neutral [...] Children and young people are not only victims of climate change; we are rights-holders and active participants whose voices must shape the decisions that determine our future.
>
> GUSTAVO MATEO ALFARO DOMÍNGUEZ, 17, EL SALVADOR

> Our demand is simple: climate justice, climate finance, and a voice for every child.
>
> **Nowshin, 12, Bangladesh**

> We children and young people need a voice in climate decisions. Don't make decisions without our participations!
>
> **Helina Henock, 12, Ethiopia**

> Our future is not a promise you can keep postponing - it is a responsibility you must act on today.
>
> **Fiona Wilke, 16, Germany**

> My demand is to ensure proper funding for climate education, training and to give children a real seat at COP31.
>
> **Emon Gazi, 17, Bangladesh**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Voices of children and young people

At COP31, we are demanding that world leaders protect children and young people from the climate crisis by providing funding for climate education, safe schools, clean water, and green jobs. Governments must include youth in official decision-making, direct financial support to local community projects, and protect mental health as climate disasters grow. Ultimately, true climate justice is impossible without fully protecting children's rights and securing their futures.

Hifza Mumtaz, 16, Pakistan

We demand a secure future for all young people today and all young people to come. And for the decision makers to make the right decisions to ensure that.

Selina Eurich Yildirim, 19, Germany

We do not want promises for the future; we want meaningful change now, because our future is being shaped by the decisions made today.

Nirob Hasan Likhon, 15, Bangladesh

We need clean air, safe drinking water, more trees, less pollution and protection for wildlife. Please listen to children and young people and include us in decisions, because climate change is affecting our present and our future.

Manish, 21, India

We as young people demand that COP31 decision-makers move beyond recognising young people as voices of the future and actively include them in climate decision-making processes today. Governments must prioritise climate justice, protect vulnerable communities and create meaningful opportunities for youth participation in shaping and implementing sustainable climate solutions. Young people must not inherit the consequences of decisions made without their involvement, they deserve a seat at the decision-making table.

Grace M Lungu, 24, Zambia

Stop making decisions about our future without listening to us. Children in coastal Bangladesh are already experiencing cyclones, rising sea levels, salinity, water scarcity, and disruptions to education. We are not just victims of climate change. we are part of the solution.

Noor Ahmad Zidan, 14, Bangladesh

The decisions you make today define the earth we inherit tomorrow. We urge you to move from promises to systemic change: protect our fragile ecosystems, empower youth leadership, and secure a liveable world for generations to come.

Rakhshanda Shamim, 20, India

THE LAB

A community of 400

The Children and Youth Environmental Rights LAB is a community of 400 children and young people from different countries, languages and backgrounds. It exists with the intentional ambition to expand the civic space for children specifically, and to make sure that children's and young people's voices are not only heard in climate and environmental decisions, but shape them. The LAB connects what members live and know in their own communities with the global spaces where policy is made, such as COP31. It is built on three pillars.

01

Learning

Understanding climate, nature and children's rights, so that every member can speak with knowledge.

Capacity building and knowledge sharing sessions are where members build the knowledge to speak with confidence in rooms like COP31.

02

Agency

Turning knowledge into action, influence and real decisions at local, national and global levels.

Members use what they learn to shape policy input, advocacy and the demands in this paper.

03

Belonging

A safe, welcoming community across countries, languages and ages, where every voice counts.

The LAB is a community first: a place to find peers, support and a shared voice.

HOW THIS PAPER WAS MADE

From capacity building to a collective voice

Since August, LAB members have taken part in capacity building and knowledge sharing on climate, environmental rights and the COP process. After this preparation, 180 children and young people completed a multilingual online form.

ONE FORM, NINE LANGUAGES

Members answered in the language they think in.

English · Spanish · Filipino · Portuguese · Urdu · Farsi · Amharic · Hindi · Bangla

WHAT WE HEARD

The ten most repeated themes

Children and young people want more than awareness. They ask for education, resources, a real voice and action that can be checked. Each theme links to the demands that answer it.

01
Climate education & Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)
DEMANDS 02 · 03

02
Climate adaptation & mitigation
DEMANDS 05 · 08 · 09 · 17

03
Climate information & communication
DEMANDS 04 · 15

04
Community-led and local solutions
DEMANDS 01 · 17

05
Climate justice & protection of vulnerable groups
DEMANDS 06 · 07 · 12

06
Water security
DEMANDS 11

07
Child rights & intergenerational equity
DEMANDS 01 · 05 · 20

08
Renewable energy & the fossil-fuel transition
DEMANDS 13

09
Green jobs & skills
DEMANDS 14

10
Nature, forests & biodiversity
DEMANDS 18

OUR DEMANDS

20 demands for COP31

GROUP 1 Voice, learning and plans

01 Give children and young people a real seat at the table
Make child- and youth-led participation routine, accessible and influential in COP31 and national and local climate decisions.

02 Fund climate education and Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)
Provide sustained funding for climate education, training, public participation, access to information and climate justice.

03 Teach climate change in every school
Integrate age-appropriate climate learning across curricula and train teachers, with locally relevant examples.

04 Make climate information accessible and trustworthy
Use plain language, local languages, accessible formats, child- and youth-friendly media and reliable public information.

05 Put children's rights into NDCs and national climate plans
Make NDCs and adaptation plans child-responsive, rights-based, measurable and linked to implementation budgets.

GROUP 2 Finance and protection in crises

06 Deliver climate finance where children face the greatest risks
Increase accessible, predictable finance for vulnerable communities, including child-focused adaptation and resilience.

07 Provide adequate loss and damage support
Ensure climate-vulnerable countries and communities receive timely support for unavoidable losses and damages, especially in coastal communities.

08 Protect children in climate disasters
Invest in early warnings, evacuation plans, safe shelters, emergency services and child-sensitive disaster response.

09 Protect education during climate emergencies
Keep schools safe and learning accessible before, during and after floods, storms, heatwaves and other disasters.

10 Make food systems climate-resilient and protect nutrition
Support climate-resilient agriculture, affordable nutritious food, school meals and protections for children facing food insecurity.

GROUP 3 Equity, water and a fair transition

11 **Guarantee safe water and sanitation**
Prioritise reliable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in climate-vulnerable schools and communities.

12 **Put the most marginalised children first**
Design climate action with and for low-income, rural, Indigenous, displaced and disabled children and other excluded groups.

13 **Make the transition away from fossil fuels fair**
Accelerate a just transition to clean energy while protecting livelihoods, affordability and communities facing change.

14 **Create green skills and decent work pathways**
Fund practical training and pathways into safe, decent green jobs for young people, especially those with fewer opportunities.

15 **Use child-sensitive climate data and science**
Collect disaggregated data on how climate impacts affect children and make findings public in accessible formats.

GROUP 4 Accountability, nature and rights

16 **Track progress transparently**
Set measurable targets, publish regular progress reports and enable children and youth to monitor climate promises.

17 **Invest in local adaptation and community-led solutions**
Make funding accessible for children and young people's projects on community-led adaptation.

18 **Protect nature, forests and biodiversity**
Stop ecosystem destruction and support restoration, tree protection and nature-positive community action.

19 **Strengthen international cooperation and youth exchange**
Enable cross-country learning, accessible platforms, exchanges and partnerships led by children and young people.

20 **Recognise children's environmental rights and intergenerational equity**
Treat a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as essential to children's rights and future generations.

DECLARATION

COP31 Declaration on Children's and Youth Environmental Rights

OPENING · 1 OF 3

We, the children and young people of the world, declare that climate justice is inseparable from our environmental rights, our health, our education, our food and water security, our safety, and our right to shape the decisions that determine our future.

OPENING · 2 OF 3

We are not only among those most affected by the climate and environmental crises; we are rights-holders, knowledge-holders and agents of change. Decisions made today will shape our lives for decades. Our participation must therefore be meaningful, safe, inclusive, accessible and reflected in outcomes – not limited to symbolic consultation.

OPENING · 3 OF 3

We call on Parties and decision-makers at COP31 to put children's rights and intergenerational equity at the heart of climate action. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), adaptation plans and implementation frameworks must identify children's needs, set measurable commitments, allocate resources and report transparently on progress. We call on COP31 Parties to turn these principles into funded, measurable action.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 1 OF 6

We demand sustained funding for climate education and Action for Climate Empowerment; accessible and trustworthy climate science and data; child-sensitive disaster preparedness; protection of schools, food systems and water supplies; and climate finance, including support for loss and damage, that reaches the communities facing the greatest risks.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 2 OF 6

We call for a fair transition away from fossil fuels that expands access to clean energy and decent green livelihoods without deepening inequality. Climate policies must prioritise children facing poverty, displacement, disability, discrimination and other barriers, and must protect nature and biodiversity on which our lives depend.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 3 OF 6

We ask governments to work across borders, listen to children and young people in all their diversity, and create lasting mechanisms for our participation in climate planning, implementation and monitoring. Our knowledge and experiences must inform decisions, budgets and accountability.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 4 OF 6

We call for an end to the hunger, displacement and conflict driven by climate change and environmental degradation, which violate children's rights, keep children out of school and expose girls to child marriage and sexual violence. We ask Parties to fund climate-resilient schools, safe shelters and protection services in communities hit by climate disasters and conflict, so that every girl can learn, stay safe and shape her own future in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 5 OF 6

We demand mental health and psychosocial support for children and young people affected by floods, storms, heatwaves, droughts, displacement and loss. Climate disasters leave lasting fear, grief and stress, and recovery must include our emotional wellbeing as well as rebuilding homes and schools. We ask governments to fund trauma-informed counselling, trained teachers and community support workers, and safe spaces in schools and shelters, so that every child can heal, keep learning and look to the future with hope.

WHAT COP31 MUST DELIVER · 6 OF 6

COP31 must turn commitments into action. We ask Parties to measure progress by whether children are safer, healthier, better informed, able to learn, able to access nutritious food and clean water, and genuinely able to influence decisions. There can be no climate justice without children's environmental rights.

OUR FOUNDATION

Why children's environmental rights matter

Our demands rest on rights that governments have already recognised. We ask Parties at COP31 to act on them.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 12 gives every child the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have those views given due weight.

General Comment No. 26 (2023)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child sets out how children's rights apply to the environment, with a focus on climate change, and calls for children's participation in environmental decisions.

The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Recognised by the UN General Assembly in 2022. With these demands, children and young people ask that it be treated as essential to the rights of children and of future generations.

Intergenerational equity

Decisions made today shape the lives of children and young people. Climate action must therefore empower the interests and agency of children and of future generations.

Children and Youth Environmental Rights LAB

COP31 Policy Paper and Declaration

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