

YOUTH LED CLIMATE ACTION INFLUENCES KEY INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROCEEDING

☆ YOUTH CASE STUDY: Amnesty International Nepal

SUMMARY

As a result of impressive youth advocacy efforts led by World Youth for Climate Justice and supported by Amnesty Nepal, the Nepalese government presented a written submission to the International Court of Justice in March 2024. This submission, regarding “[International

Legal] Obligations of States with Respect to Climate Change”, will inform the court’s decision on States’ obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to provide reparations to states affected by climate change.

DESCRIPTION

On 29 March 2023, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted a resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding “[International Legal] Obligations of States with Respect to Climate Change”. The ICJ then invited UN member States to submit written responses on the topic. The case focuses on the following:

- States’ obligations to ensure the protection of the climate and the environment from greenhouse gas emissions;
- Legal consequences for States which have damaged the climate and the environment due to greenhouse gas emissions;
- Obligations/reparations to less developed and developing States such as Small Island Developing States;
- Obligations owed to present and future generations.



Although ICJ advisory opinions are non-binding, they lay down legal principles that shape international law and influence diplomatic efforts globally. In August 2023, Amnesty Nepal sent a letter to Nepal's Minister of Foreign Affairs urging the submission of a written response from Nepal. In October of the same year the entity hosted a discussion involving youth, lawyers, government officials, and Amnesty Nepal members to kickstart debate and advocacy on the issue. Government officials who attended the event became key contacts for subsequent advocacy efforts.

Amnesty Nepal joined forces with **World Youth for Climate Justice**, a global youth group whose Nepal representative is a long-time Amnesty member. World Youth for Climate Justice and Amnesty Nepal together mobilised 25 young people to

support advocacy on the issue. The young people carried out research and provided a draft document for the government's written submission. The group, consisting mainly of lawyers and law students along with young people from other university faculties, working on a voluntary basis, produced an evidence-based submission promoting human rights and climate justice. The document was intersectional, justice-friendly and youth-friendly.

In the process, they met the Foreign Secretary, senior staff at the Foreign Ministry, the Attorney General, a retired justice of the Supreme Court, the Director General of the Climate Change Management Division, the Secretary of the Forest and Environment Ministry, and the Secretary of the Ministry of Law and Justice.



IMPACT

The government submitted its written statement to the ICJ in March 2024, retaining many components of the document provided by the youth team (the submission happened after the stipulated deadline, but the ICJ nevertheless accepted the statement). Following on from the written submission, the Nepalese government presented oral arguments on 9 December 2024, which included suggestions from the youth team. The submission and oral statement

will inform the decision of the ICJ on States' obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to provide reparations to States affected by climate change.

The efforts consolidated the relationships and engagement between youth representatives, Amnesty Nepal and government authorities. These connections and working relationships will continue to be mobilised to support human rights in the future.

TIPS AND TRICKS

- **Youth leadership can bring fresh perspectives and creative solutions to challenges, and organisations like Amnesty should facilitate and create space for this.** While the initial proposal to form a research team came from a collaborative discussion between Amnesty Nepal and World Youth for Climate Justice, the young people took the lead in team formation, task division, and research. Amnesty Nepal facilitated logistics, including meeting venues, refreshments, and expert consultations. This approach empowered the young people and fostered a strong sense of ownership over the advocacy activities and the cause.
- **Attitudes towards youth activism and the recognition of youth as changemakers is still evolving and a lot has to be done to foster greater acceptance, respect, and support for youth-led initiatives and youth participation in decision-making processes.** It may be necessary to search for entry points and allies within the government who are supportive of youth engagement. Given that not everyone is receptive to youth involvement, we have to be prepared to seek out those who are more open to it and work to change attitudes of those who are less receptive.
- **Climate action mobilises young people and is a key area for youth participation and youth leadership in activism.** Many young people have a strong interest in climate action. For Amnesty International, supporting youth climate action can be a way to engage more young people, strengthen youth participation and incorporate more youth perspectives into our work.

