

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International's Secretary General, joining student climate strike in March 15 2019 London. Thousands of students from schools, colleges, and universities across the country walked out in to join the second major strike against climate change this year.

“A climate catastrophe is already unfolding. We have only 144 months to stop a climate catastrophe by preventing temperatures from rising above the 1.5 Degree mark. Everyday, governments, companies, insurers, and banks make decisions that worsen the problem. The longer the world waits, the harder it becomes to solve the problem. Let’s accelerate our engagement”

Climate change is a reality for our warming world. And scientists overwhelmingly agree: climate change is caused by people.

Climate change is and will continue to harm all of us unless governments take action. Its effects are likely to be much more pronounced for certain groups – for example, those communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods – as well as those who are generally already vulnerable, disadvantaged and subject to discrimination.

“You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.”

– Greta Thunberg, Climate activist and Founder of Climate School Strike

One of the biggest drivers of climate change by far is our burning of fossil fuels – coal, gas and oil – which has increased the concentration of greenhouse gases – such as carbon dioxide – in our atmosphere. This, coupled with other activities like clearing land for agriculture, is causing the average temperature of our planet to increase. In fact, scientists are as certain of the link between greenhouse gases and global warming as they are of the link between smoking and lung cancer.

This is not a recent conclusion. The scientific community has collected and studied the data on this for decades. Warnings about global warming started making headlines back in the late 1980s.

In Canada, recent examples such as the 2017 and 2018 wildfires in British Columbia and extreme heat waves in eastern Canada are painful evidence of the human rights impacts of climate change at the current global warming level of ‘just’ 1°C above pre-industrial levels.

Rising water temperatures have already affected wild fish sources that Indigenous peoples rely on for food, culture and livelihoods across Canada; and food security and species survival are at further risk from increasing global warming. Diminishing sea ice has affected Indigenous peoples' access to and use of the coastal environment.

Who is responsible for stopping climate change?

National Governments

National Governments have the obligation to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change by taking the most ambitious measures possible to prevent or reduce greenhouse emissions within the shortest possible time-frame. While wealthy states need to lead the way, both internally and through international cooperation, all countries must take all reasonable steps to reduce emissions to the full extent of their abilities.

Governments must also take all necessary steps to help everyone within their jurisdiction to adapt to the foreseeable and unavoidable effects of climate change.

Governments must take steps to tackle climate change as fast and as humanely as possible. In their efforts to address climate change, they must not resort to measures that directly or indirectly violate human rights. For example, conservation areas or renewable energy projects must not be created on the lands of Indigenous peoples without their explicit consent.

Unfortunately, despite the rhetoric, pledges made by Canada to mitigate climate change are completely inadequate. Young people in Quebec, like others in France and the Netherlands, have filed a class action lawsuit against the Canadian government for its failure to establish sufficient climate mitigation targets and measures.

Without significant and sustained action, it is difficult to see how Canada will avoid contributing to catastrophic climate change.

- Canada produces the highest per person greenhouse gas emissions in the G20 and has the G20's highest energy use per capita
- Canada continues to support the expansion of fossil fuels production, especially the Alberta oil sands and related infrastructure (such as pipelines).

- According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Canada provides hundreds of millions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies.
- Mandatory carbon pricing is a step in the right direction but it faces sustained and well-funded corporate resistance and legal challenge from some provinces. It must not disproportionately affect low-income households.

Corporations

Fossil fuel companies¹ have been historically among the most responsible for climate change – and this continues today. Research shows² that just 100 fossil fuel-producing companies are responsible for 71% of global greenhouse gas emissions since 1988.

There is growing evidence³ that major fossil fuel companies have known for decades about the harmful effects of burning fossil fuels and have attempted to suppress that information and block efforts to tackle climate change.

Companies must assess the potential effects of their activities on human rights and put in place measures to prevent negative impacts.



- 1 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/landmark-human-rights-and-climate-change-investigation-could-help-millions-worldwide/>
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>
- 3 <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Smoke-Fumes.pdf>

ACT NOW!

**RESISTANCE
IS A
HUMAN
RIGHT**

AMNESTY

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Please send a short, polite letter supporting these calls for justice to:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Prime Minister's Office
80 Wellington St Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

**Minister for the Environment and Climate Change,
Catherine McKenna**

107 Catherine Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0P4

In the face of this urgent threat to human rights and, in fact, to humanity, it is imperative that Canada adopt the most ambitious measures possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the shortest possible timeframe, both nationally and through international cooperation and assistance.

Please call on Canada to:

- Align federal, provincial and territorial governments emissions reduction targets for 2030 with the imperative to limit the increase of global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Commit and work to end the use of all fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and to shift to 100% renewable energy by 2040, including ending fossil fuel subsidies.

- Ensure that approval of natural resource and other major development projects meet Canada's climate change targets, other environmental and international human rights obligations and that cumulative impacts of such project approvals don't push Canada past the point of no return.
- Ensure federal, provincial and territorial governments identify and pursue alternative energy sources that are less destructive to the climate and which can be pursued with the free, prior and informed consent, and active participation, of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.
- Ensure that all measures to mitigate climate change are consistent with Canada's human rights obligations, including the obligation to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples, and that just transition to a zero-carbon economy does not put at further risk those already facing marginalization and discrimination in Canada.

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