

# An Urgent Call for Climate Mainstreaming

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## World Lawyers' Pledge on Climate Action

The world is facing [climate emergency](#), one of a series of overlapping and mutually reinforcing [environmental crises](#). In 2017, more than 15,000 scientists from 184 countries signed the [World Scientists' Warning to Humanity](#), urging the world to take immediate action against the current trajectory of catastrophic climate change. We, as concerned lawyers, have heard the world scientists' call, and believe it is time for the legal community at large to organize and join the global fight against climate change.

The [World Lawyers' Pledge on Climate Action](#) (the Pledge) is a call from and to the global legal community, urging lawyers of all kinds to incorporate climate responsibility into their professional work and activities. It is *not* primarily addressed to environmental lawyers, nor to academics, but rather, invites *all lawyers* – including practitioners, judges, scholars, civil servants, law students, lawmakers, and all others working in and with the law – to be(come) concomitant “climate lawyers”. By mainstreaming and integrating climate concerns into all areas of law and legal activity, *everyone* (not just designated environmental lawyers) can also be a climate lawyer in their own respective fields. Together, we can initiate, foster, and sustain the structural transformations necessary to avert climate catastrophe, and transition our societies and laws towards a sustainable future.

## Background: The Climate Crisis and the Law

Climate change poses an ever-worsening existential danger to humanity (both living and future generations), and in particular to communities in the Global South and vulnerable groups. Climate change is among the most pressing and serious threats to [human rights](#), such as the [right to life](#) (and in particular life with dignity), health, bodily integrity, adequate water and sanitation, as well as to many other [socio-economic and cultural rights](#). Climate change is also a [multiplier of existing threats to international peace and security](#), and climate-related disasters such as food and water scarcity, sea-level rise, desertification, and extreme weather events will contribute to [humanitarian crises](#) and [forced migration](#) on [scales never seen before](#). These numerous and severe threats inevitably lead to social and political instability, and undermine core values and institutions of law.

In light of these cross-cutting, devastating impacts on humanity, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has repeatedly stressed that [climate change is the defining issue of our time](#), and that it needs to be our utmost priority. A rapid and just transition of our societies towards a sustainable future is vital.

The law is a powerful, yet ambivalent tool to that end. The law can, as it often does at present, amplify and entrench the causes, corporate drivers, and institutional enablers of climate change. But more importantly, the law can also [serve as a vital instrument](#) for structural change at all levels, by providing effective and binding solutions to prevent, mitigate, and manage the climate crisis.

For fundamental legal change, the active engagement of concerned citizens, activists, NGOs, and other [stakeholders](#) is essential in order to demand new norms and better implementation and enforcement of norms. While it is important to call upon our political leaders to take climate action—and to hold them accountable for inaction—lawyers, as those professionally occupied with the law, can and must do more than externalising responsibility for climate governance. Internalising climate responsibility means that we need not only ask ourselves: what can and should *others do?*, but also: what can and should *we* do?

## The Role and Responsibilities of Lawyers

Lawyers are in a position to help realize the full potential of the law as a progressive and transformative force in the climate crisis. As lawyers, we therefore recognize our professional responsibility to guide, assist, support, and promote, to the best of our abilities, such legal efforts at all levels—global, regional, national, and local.

Whereas it may be contrary to the socialisation of many lawyers to involve themselves in issues of a political nature, it must be unequivocally stated that the climate crisis is not an ordinary or partisan political issue. It is an objective and existential threat that cuts across any social, political, ideological, or other strata, interests, allegiances, or grievances. Climate change concerns everyone, everywhere.

The magnitude and urgency of the climate crisis require every one of us to contribute to the monumental task of transitioning to a sustainable society. Climate change is a cross-sectoral problem that calls for cross-sectoral solutions and efforts from all segments of law. Lawyers of all kinds, not just environmental and climate lawyers, are therefore asked to consider, integrate, and apply issues of climate change and climate justice within and throughout their respective areas of activity and expertise.

## Climate Mainstreaming in Action

Simply put, climate concerns must be mainstreamed throughout the law. Wherever relevant, climate change must be at the forefront of law and inform its background. Wherever relevant, legal work should take full account of, be centred on, and flanked by climate considerations.

Climate mainstreaming can occur in all areas of law and legal activity. There are many ways in which lawyers can integrate climate responsibility into their work and keep the climate issue on the legal agenda in their respective fields.

*Legal educators* can highlight the connections between climate issues and the various subjects they teach. *Law students* – the next generation of lawyers – are entitled to demand an education that equips them with the tools to act in an increasingly climate crisis-stricken world. *Legal practitioners* can integrate climate considerations into their contentious and non-contentious work, and assist people in the pursuit of climate justice. *Judges* are entrusted with upholding (and updating) the law and human rights in the context of the climate crisis, and have played and can continue to play a crucial role in driving legal

change toward more stringent climate action. *Lawmakers* and *civil servants* ought to work towards achieving a just transition to a sustainable society, and can enact, implement, and enforce a more ambitious framework for climate governance. *Legal scholars* can furnish the conceptual tools that facilitate the translation of abstract climate goals into concrete legal practice. Lastly, *everyone* can work towards reducing their individual and institutional carbon footprint, e.g., by shifting to plant-based catering, non-plane travel whenever possible, or using renewable and clean energy sources for offices.

## We Are All Climate Lawyers

The Pledge is a collaborative initiative that lives through individual lawyers committing to climate responsibility, to the best of their abilities.

The Pledge has garnered support from a group of leading lawyers around the world, who are committed to incorporating climate concerns throughout their professional life in the manners outlined above. These [Lead Signatories](#) reflect both occupational and geographical diversity, and feature (in alphabetical order): Prof [Bruce Ackerman](#) (Professor of Law and Political Science, USA); Dr [Fatou Bensouda](#) (former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and former Minister of Justice of The Gambia); Dr [Lalit Bhasin](#) (practicing lawyer and President of the Society of Indian Law Firms); Dr [David R. Boyd](#) (UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment); [Chunghwan Choi](#) (practicing lawyer and President of [LAWASIA](#) – The Law Association for Asia and the Pacific); [Martyn Day](#) (practicing lawyer, UK); Judge [Eduardo Ferrer Mac-Gregor Poisot](#) (Inter-American Court of Human Rights); [Idayat Hassan](#) (Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development, Nigeria); [Donald W. Kaniaru](#) (practicing lawyer, Kenya); Judge Prof [Helen Keller](#) (Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and former judge at the European Court of Human Rights); [Viviana Krsticevic](#) (Executive Director of the Center for Justice and International Law, Americas); [Antonio Oposa Jr](#) (Normandy Chair for Peace); Prof [Anne Peters](#) (Director of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Germany); Prof [Paulo Sérgio Pinto de Albuquerque](#) (Professor of Law, Portugal, and former Judge at the European Court of Human Rights); Prof [Flavia Piovesan](#) (Vice-President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights); [Caleb Pollard](#) (President of the [Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change](#)); Prof [Christina Voigt](#) (Professor of Law, Norway).

The Pledge is now open to all who wish to become individual or institutional signatories. All lawyers – anyone working with or through the law – are invited to [sign the Pledge](#), and thereby (re)affirm their commitment to incorporating climate responsibility into their vocation. The hope is that a critical mass of lawyers, law associations, and legal institutions will sign, and more importantly, embody the spirit of the Pledge. For what we need in the climate crisis – and what the Pledge seeks to cultivate among lawyers – is a stronger sense of (individual, collective, and institutional) agency, responsibility, and solidarity. Together, and by mobilising the tools of our shared vocation, we can make a difference.

*This blog post has also been published on [EJIL:Talk!](#) & [Völkerrechtsblog](#).*

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