

Global Youth Declaration 2026

First International Conference on
Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels

Santa Marta, Colombia April 2026





Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Youth Call to action	2
Why Young People	3
Youth Leadership and Emerging Practices	4-5
Principles for a Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels	6-7
Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependence	9-12
Pillar 2: Transforming Supply and Demand	13-14
Pillar 3: Advancing international cooperation and multilateralism	15-16
Role of Youth in Follow-Up and Implementation	17
Reach out to us	18
Signatures	19-22



Introduction



Dear reader,

In front of you lies the Global Youth Declaration for the First International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels. We commend the organizing countries, Colombia and the Netherlands, for their efforts to bring together a group of countries to discuss a question that, from our perspective as youth, should already have been decisively answered: not whether, but how we are going to transition away from the use of fossil fuels.

As youth from the two organizing countries, we took the lead in coordinating the process that led to this document. Our aim was to bring together young people from across regions, realities and energy systems, and to unite them behind a clear, ambitious and shared message for decision-makers.

Youth from both the Global North and Global South, from fossil-dependent economies and from countries already advancing in the transition, have found common ground in one core principle: the transition away from fossil fuels will only be successful if it is just. This Declaration sets a clear expectation for the level of ambition, equity and accountability that young people around the world demand from this Conference and from the transition ahead.



Youth Call to Action



- We call on states to recognise that a transition away from fossil fuels is fundamentally a human rights imperative. It must protect livelihoods, close gaps in access to clean energy and resources, and address historical harms, not simply swap one extractive model for another. Energy must be treated as a public good and a human right, never a commodity for profit.
- We call on states to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of young people in the decision-making process regarding the transition, its implementation, and the follow-up mechanisms following the conference. Young people must be recognized not only as observers of the commitments made at this Conference, but as active protagonists in their implementation and follow-up.
- We call on states, international institutions and financial actors to recognize that young people are not only inheriting the consequences of today's decisions, but already building the transition through leadership, innovation and intergenerational dialogue. This requires investing in youth-led solutions, ensuring a just redistribution of opportunities for those affected by the phase-out of fossil fuels, and addressing the disproportionate risks young people face, including job displacement, skills gaps and economic uncertainty.
- We call on states and international institutions to co-create transition policies with the communities most affected, including indigenous peoples, frontline communities, women, and children and youth, at every stage from design to evaluation. Those who bear the greatest burden of both fossil fuel harm and poorly designed transitions must be the ones shaping the solutions.
- We call on creditors, Multilateral Development Banks and International Financial Institutions to cancel or restructure the debts that force Global South countries to keep extracting fossil fuels to service foreign-currency obligations. Grants, debt-for-nature swaps and concessional instruments must replace mechanisms that leave no fiscal space for transition. Where debts were accumulated under illegitimate conditions, citizen-led debt audits must be supported as a concrete path to relief.
- We call on states to establish binding agreements on responsible mineral sourcing and to enforce due diligence requirements throughout international supply chains. Communities in whose territories critical minerals are extracted must benefit from and participate in decisions about those resources, including young people from affected territories. A transition that reproduces dependency, environmental destruction and human rights violations, under a green label, is no transition at all.

Youth Call to Action



- We call on states to reject the false narrative that fossil fuel dependence equals energy security. Import dependence creates fiscal vulnerability and exchange rate instability, every year of delay deepens that exposure. True energy security lies in decentralised, community-owned renewable systems that keep resources, revenues and resilience within the communities that need them most.
- We call on states to progressively eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, which disproportionately benefit higher-income households while draining the public resources needed for the transition. These must be replaced with redistributive carbon pricing and targeted cash transfers, with revenues reinvested in renewable energy infrastructure and affordable access ensuring that the end of fossil fuel support becomes the beginning of a fairer and greener economy for all.
- We call on states to guarantee universal access to electricity and clean cooking while establishing progressive limits on excessive consumption. This must include a rapid shift in transport systems by 2035, prioritizing the phase-out of fossil fuel-powered vehicles, investment in accessible public transit and the protection of workers through just reskilling pathways. These transformations must be sustained by embedding climate education and just transition principles across all levels of society, empowering young people as key drivers of change and ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and tools to lead this transition.
- We call on states to urgently reform investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms that allow fossil fuel companies to sue governments for enacting climate policy. As long as ISDS can be weaponised to obstruct the transition and constrain the fiscal space of Global South countries, international investment law works against the planet. These frameworks must be redesigned to protect public interest, not fossil fuel profits.
- We call on states to strengthen and protect emissions trading systems like the ETS from political weakening, and to establish an independent international supervisory body to prevent abuse. Carbon credits must never serve as a substitute for genuine emissions reductions. Progress toward a robust global carbon pricing and trading system, one that holds polluters truly accountable and cannot be gamed, is not optional. It is essential.
- We call on states to ensure that the influence of the fossil fuel industry in climate decision-making is appropriately regulated through strong transparency and conflict-of-interest policies across all levels of governance.

Why Young People?



We underscore that the transition away from fossil fuels is an urgent and necessary response to a crisis that directly affects our present and determines the future we will inherit.

Continued dependence on fossil fuels poses significant risks to human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, while undermining public health, ecosystems, and livelihoods for current and future generations. As Elisa Morgera, the UN Special Rapporteur on climate change and human rights, said, “Defossilisation of our whole economies is urgent from a human rights perspective and truly the single most impactful health contribution. It entails prioritising the phase out of fossil fuels, including various forms of financing them, within and beyond the energy sector”¹. The impacts are already being experienced and will disproportionately affect children and youth through increasing climate-related events such as extreme weather, droughts, and sea-level rise².

As the window to secure livable conditions continues to narrow, delays in action place a heavier burden on younger generations and on communities already more vulnerable. This reflects broader global inequalities in which those least responsible for climate change are most affected, underscoring the need for greater collective responsibility. For us, this moment represents an opportunity to confront an environmental debt we did not create but are already bearing and to demand that climate commitments translate into concrete structural action.

We engage in this process because we are not only future leaders but current stakeholders, whose lives, livelihoods and opportunities are already being shaped by climate and energy transition decisions. The scale of these impacts is significant: recent analysis by the World Resources Institute, drawing on International Labor Organization estimates, points to around 66 million people employed directly and indirectly in the oil and gas industry³, a workforce that includes significant numbers of young people in petrostate economies where education systems have long been oriented toward fossil fuel industries. As the global economy transitions away from these sectors, young people face disproportionate risks: job displacement, skills mismatch, increasingly severe climate impacts and economic uncertainty.^{6,7,8}

At the same time, we are not passive recipients of these decisions but active architects of the transition. Rural youth, young people from ethnic communities and young women are already leading solutions from their territories, driving paradigm shifts and bringing lived experience and innovative approaches that must be incorporated into public policy. Our unique position as bridges between past, present and future generations enables us to connect new ideas to those with decision-making power today, while keeping sight of the needs of generations yet to come. **Because the decisions made today will determine the climate, economic opportunities and social security of the next century, meaningful youth participation in spaces such as this Conference is not symbolic, it is a practical requirement for a stable future and a precondition for the credibility and accountability of the transition itself.**

¹ [De-fossilising economies key to course correction on climate change and human rights protection, says UN expert | OHCHR](#)

² United Nations Children's Fund, The climate-changed child: A children's climate risk index supplement, UNICEF, New York, November 2023.

³ [Just transitions in the oil and gas sector | World Resources Institute](#)

⁴ Qaraman Hasan, Raphael J. Heffron, Soran Mohtadi, Brian D. Blankenship, Indra Overland, Johannes Urpelainen, Stepping into the just transition journey: The energy transition in petrostates, Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 113, 202

⁵ [Youth pursuing careers in oil and gas: A deeper dive — Student Energy](#)

⁶ David H. 2014. “Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Inequality among the ‘Other 99 Percent.’” Science 344 (6186): 843–51.

⁷ [Is the Global Workforce Ready for the Energy Transition?](#)

⁸ K. Graham & C.R. Knittel, Assessing the distribution of employment & vulnerability to the energy transition using employment carbon footprints, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. (2024).

Youth Leadership and Emerging Practices



Across regions, we are actively advancing the transition through leadership in policy advocacy, legal action, entrepreneurship and community-based solutions. These efforts demonstrate that youth are not only calling for change, but are already implementing it. A just transition is not only about speed, it is about who decides, who benefits and who has the tools to make the right decisions. At international, national and subnational levels, youth are emerging as peer-leaders taking ownership over the future through an expanding range of concrete actions.

Notable examples include:

Policy and institutional engagement

Youth-led organizations in Colombia and Brazil, like the coordination of the Youth Mutirão, which mapped over 230 youth-led initiatives worldwide⁹, are mobilizing at national and local levels. Institutional mechanisms such as the National Youth Climate Council in Denmark provide direct policy input to the government while strengthening public support for ambitious climate action. In the Netherlands, elected UN youth representatives form part of the country's official delegation to international conferences, while the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains a Youth Advisory Committee with young people from the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa regions to advise on development cooperation policies¹⁰. Youth organizations are also fostering North-South collaboration based on shared responsibilities and complementary capacities

Accountability and governance

We are designing equitable and inclusive digital accountability systems¹¹, leading advocacy campaigns¹² and policy workshops¹³, and using storytelling and social media¹⁴ to decode climate policy for broader audiences. For example, the NDC Equity Tracker, a project by the youth-led organisation Care About Climate, provides youth-led analyses of Nationally Determined Contributions for over 84 countries, covering 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The tracker highlights country commitments on intergenerational equity, gender justice, and civil society inclusion, and offers concrete recommendations for how countries can strengthen their climate pledges^{15,16}. Intergenerational dialogues are ensuring that communities across all sectors understand what is at stake and how to act. Access to information is central to this work, enabling youth to hold governments accountable and bridge the gap between international commitments and local realities.

Finance and divestment

The Student Energy Solutions Movement, as part of a UN Energy Compact, aims to deploy 10,000 youth-led clean energy projects by 2030, with a fundraising target of \$150 million to support this effort¹⁷. Youth-led divestment campaigns, which began on university campuses in 2011, contributed to a global momentum that saw the total value of assets committed to divestment reach \$2.6 trillion by 2015, and over \$40.5 trillion by 2023.¹⁸

⁹ [Youth movements present COP30 priorities to Conference Presidency](#)

¹⁰ [Youth at Heart Advisory Committee 2025-2026 | Youthatheart](#)

¹¹ [The Green Rising: Mobilizing Youth to Drive Climate Action | UNICEF USA](#)

¹² [The Cancel Coal court win shows youth will stop at nothing to protect the environment — African Climate Alliance](#)

¹³ [How young people are building skills for climate action and a resilient world | UNDP Climate Promise](#)

¹⁴ Shim, D. Personalising climate change—how activists from Fridays for Future visualise climate action on Instagram. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 11, 1073 (2024).


¹⁵ [NDC Equity Tracker — Earth Rising Foundation](#)

¹⁶ [NDC Equity Tracker | NDC Partnership](#)

¹⁷ [PRESS RELEASE: Announcing the Student Energy Solutions Movement – a \\$150 Million Youth-Led United Nations Energy Compact — Student Energy](#)

¹⁸ [Fossil fuel divestment accelerates as pledges pass \\$2 trillion](#)

Youth Leadership and Emerging Practices



Climate litigation

In the United States, 22 young plaintiffs filed *Lighthiser v. Trump*, challenging executive orders to 'unleash' fossil fuel extraction and dismantle clean energy protections on Fifth Amendment grounds, arguing these orders violated their constitutional rights to life and liberty¹⁹. At the international level, the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change successfully petitioned the UN to request an ICJ advisory opinion on states' legal obligations to protect the climate²⁰. In the Netherlands, an organization called Advocates for the Future, a group of young lawyers, are trying to get The Netherlands' biggest emitters such as the Rotterdam Harbor to design and implement a decarbonization plan via the judicial route²¹.

Youth entrepreneurship

In Bangladesh, Cassetex operates a solar-powered battery-swapping network for electric three-wheelers, enabling women micro-entrepreneurs to own and manage swapping stations with an ambition to create 200,000 women-led micro-energy enterprises across the country²². In Uganda²³ ClimaVault deploys AI-optimized solar systems for smallholder farmers, reducing diesel dependence while strengthening food security. Additionally, Youth4Climate has supported 25 youth-led projects focused on sustainable energy. In Africa, 15 energy initiatives have reached 300,000 people and created 400 jobs, featuring projects like Emergi Liberia's electric vehicle fleet and Zimbabwe's solar kiosks powering 2,000 homes. Simultaneously, in Latin America a portfolio of 23 projects, including Colombia's BATx, which repurposes EV batteries for storage, and Chile's EcoTurbo, cutting firewood use by 50%, is set to benefit over 40,000 people and create 200 green jobs.²⁴

Community-based solutions

In Colombia, young people are advancing agroecology and regenerative agriculture, promoting short supply chains and leading capacity-building processes that combine innovation with traditional and ancestral knowledge. Through initiatives such as the LabCampesino in Sumapaz and the national agroecology movement led by grassroots organisations including youth, these local approaches have successfully been brought into policy spaces culminating in Colombia's first national agroecology policy in 2024²⁵.

¹⁹[20Youth Sue Donald Trump Over Executive Orders That Escalate Climate Crisis | Public Justice](#)

²⁰[Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change | Champions of the Earth](#)

²¹[Advocates for the Future - We advocate for the Future!](#)

²²[Empowering Women to be Energy Entrepreneurs Does Not Only Improve Their Lives but Also Their Communities.](#)

²³[ClimaVault Africa - VC4A](#)

²⁴Youth4Climate Secretariat. (2025). Youth4Climate: 100 projects catalogue. United Nations Development Programme. [Solutions Catalogue 100 Projects: From Ideas to Impact | United Nations Development Programme](#)

²⁵[Colombia strengthens its commitment to agroecology - Swissaid](#)

Principles for a Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

As young people, we identify the following principles and approaches that must guide States in the design and implementation of fossil fuel phase-out measures. The transition away from fossil fuels must be fair and equitable, recognizing that it directly reshapes livelihoods, access to resources and social structures. Energy and food must be treated as a public good and a human right, not a commodity for profit. A just transition cannot limit itself to changing energy sources while preserving the economic and political dominance of large industries; it requires a fundamental transformation of the energy and economic models that drive overreliance on extractive processes. At the same time, we must promote a transition toward sustainable food systems, where the traditional knowledge of communities is at the center

Leaving no one behind

Solutions must close structural gaps in access to resources, clean energy and emerging technologies, and must be co-developed with all stakeholders and adapted to regional realities. Proactive investment in reskilling, social protection and locally adapted transition pathways is essential, particularly in regions where economies and education systems remain tied to fossil fuel industries.

Meaningful and active participation

The just transition must be co-created with all actors, including indigenous peoples, local organizations, academia, NGOs and the private sector, across all stages of public policy: from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Frontline communities must shape solutions, given their direct experience of the harms of both fossil fuel dependence and poorly designed green transitions.

Intergenerational approach

The meaningful inclusion of younger generations and local youth is essential at all stages of public policy. We bring lived experience and innovative perspectives that must be incorporated into decision-making rather than dismissed or underestimated.

Community-centered approach

The transition must recognize the autonomy and governance systems of peoples and fully respect free, prior and informed consent. Land rights must be protected to prevent displacement due to transition-related extraction. Investments in energy infrastructure, batteries and data centers must not result in the dispossession of Afro-descendant communities, indigenous peoples or smallholder farmers preventing new forms of green extractivism²⁶. Communities such as Cuninico^{27,28} and La Oroya^{29,30} in Peru, where populations live with toxic metals in their blood as a consequence of extractive industries, illustrate that a just transition must address the full spectrum of historical and ongoing harms.

²⁶Cambou D, Buhmann K. (2025). Indigenous Peoples, Business, and the Struggles for Justice in the Green Transition: Towards a Rights-Based Approach to Just Transitions. *Business and Human Rights Journal*. 10(1):147-171.

²⁷ Ulfe, M. E., & Vergara, R. (2022). Measuring incommensurability: compensations in judicial processes of oil spills in Northern Peruvian Amazon. *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, 5(1).

²⁸ [Oil spills expose indigenous communities to toxic metals - UPI.com](#)

²⁹ [La Oroya v. Peru: Historic Precedent on Human Rights and the Environment - Earthjustice](#)

³⁰ [Historic Court Decision Puts Big Polluters on Notice in Latin America - Earthjustice](#)

Principles for a Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels



Intercultural approach:

A just transition must respect the rights of indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural and local communities through recognition of their autonomy, knowledge systems, governance structures and cosmovisions. As the green economy expands through growing demand for critical minerals, strong global safeguards must be established to protect human rights, labor standards and environmental integrity throughout supply chains preventing the reproduction of extractive patterns and green colonialism under a different name.

Gender-based approach

Women are disproportionately affected by energy poverty and environmental degradation, which increase exposure to gender-based violence and health risks^{31,32,33}. Approximately 2.9 million people die prematurely each year from diseases caused by household air pollution from unclean cooking fuels³⁴, and in Chad 42% of households reported incidents of gender-based violence during firewood collection over a six-month period³⁵. Transition policies must ensure women's meaningful leadership in designing and implementing solutions, with attention to awareness, cultural adaptation and local context, while formally recognizing the contributions of young women in biodiversity protection, seed sovereignty and water stewardship across all levels of governance.

International support and economic diversification

Achieving a just transition requires dedicated international support for countries whose economies rely heavily on fossil fuel revenues. Access to transition finance, economic diversification and capacity-building are essential so that Global South countries can shift toward sustainable economic models without bearing a disproportionate share of transition costs, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities^{36,37,38}.

³¹ Elizabeth K. Kirkwood, Gayani Gunawardhana, Grace Moller, Camille Raynes-Greenow. (2025) Gender gaps in energy policies: Examining the integration of women in energy policies across the Asia Pacific region, Energy Strategy Reviews

³² Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Analytical study on gender-responsive climate action for the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of women (2019)

³³ Anjum G, Aziz M. Climate change and gendered vulnerability: A systematic review of women's health. Womens Health (Lond). (2025)

³⁴ [Household air pollution](#)

³⁵ [OPEC Fund Clean Cooking Report 2024](#)

³⁶ [Climate changing the financial system | United Nations Development Programme](#)

³⁷ [Climate Finance | United Nations Development Programme](#)

³⁸ [How Much Climate Finance Flows from MDBs? | World Resources Institute](#)

Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependence Barriers

Structural Economic and fossil fuel debt-driven dependence

Economic dependence on fossil fuels is deeply rooted in structural, political and fiscal dynamics³⁹. In the Global South, hydrocarbon revenues play a central role in public finances creating cycles that make diversification difficult⁴⁰. In economies such as Colombia's, where fossil fuels account for more than half of export revenues, declining global demand generates compounding vulnerabilities: falling export income, currency instability, deteriorating trade balances and rising fiscal deficits, precisely when external financing is most needed for the transition⁴¹. These dynamics are further entrenched by structural debt trap mechanisms: the need to repeatedly take out new loans at above-market interest rates to service existing debts compounded by additional borrowing following climate disasters leaves no fiscal space for climate action or essential public services^{42,43}. Local currency volatility and the obligation to repay in foreign currencies force Global South countries to rely on fossil fuel exports to accumulate the reserves needed to service their debts, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of extractive dependence, insufficient revenues and accelerating environmental destruction^{44,45,46,47}.

Energy vulnerability and capacity constraint in SIDS and LDCs

Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries face a compounding dimension of this challenge. As major energy importers, they are acutely vulnerable to price shocks that destabilize critical infrastructure, including health and education systems, and trigger complete blackouts. The renewable energy technologies delivered to these communities are frequently obsolete, lack battery storage and come without the capacity-building support needed to maintain and operate them effectively^{48,49}.

³⁹Diego Mesa Puyo, Augustus J Panton, Tarun Sridhar, Martin Stuermer, Christoph Ungerer, and Alice Tianbo Zhang. "Key Challenges Faced by Fossil Fuel Exporters during the Energy Transition", Staff Climate Notes 2024, 001 (2024),

⁴⁰ World Bank. 2021. The Changing Wealth of Nations 2021: Managing Assets for the Future.

⁴¹ Diego Mesa Puyo, Augustus J Panton, Tarun Sridhar, Martin Stuermer, Christoph Ungerer, and Alice Tianbo Zhang. "Key Challenges Faced by Fossil Fuel Exporters during the Energy Transition", Staff Climate Notes 2024, 001 (2024)

⁴² Jensen, L. (2022). Avoiding 'Too Little Too Late' on International Debt Relief. UNDP Global Policy Network

⁴³ [Debt | World Bank Group](#)

⁴⁴ [The Growing Debt Burdens of Global South Countries: Standing in the Way of Climate and Development Goals - CEPR](#)

⁴⁵ [Debt relief must break dependence on fossil fuel exports](#)

⁴⁶ [Neocolonial Debt Traps Are Forcing Poorer Countries To Rely On Fossil Fuels : Rozenberg Quarterly](#)

⁴⁷ Jensen, L. (2022). Avoiding 'Too Little Too Late' on International Debt Relief. UNDP Global Policy Network

⁴⁸ [Renewable Energy Solutions Build Resilience in Island Nations | RTI](#)

⁴⁹ [Obstacles to effective energy aid for small island developing states | SEI](#)

Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependence Barriers

Unsustainable consumption patterns and resource dependence

The challenges are further compounded by the unsustainability of current consumption patterns and the raw materials the transition itself requires. The extraction of critical minerals increasingly risks replicating the harms of fossil fuels: generating new dependency, environmental degradation and human rights violations, particularly in the Global South⁵⁰. Geopolitical instability linked to fossil fuel dependence further exposes lower-income groups to price volatility and energy insecurity. Delaying the transition deepens all of these vulnerabilities, forfeiting opportunities in emerging green value chains and ceding strategic investments to countries that act earlier^{51,52}

Inequitable transition and regulatory safeguards

Finally, the transition is not inherently just. Renewable energy initiatives can themselves generate negative human rights impacts if not implemented according to appropriate standards, particularly for workers, indigenous peoples, small-scale agricultural farmers, women and children^{53,54}. Regulatory frameworks continue to allow fossil fuel projects to remain financially viable, with the insurance sector, a key enabler of new fossil fuel projects, operating without clear phase-out obligations, thereby sustaining investment flows into fossil fuel activities⁵⁵. Without systematic safeguards, a change in energy source may perpetuate or deepen existing inequalities rather than redress them.

⁵⁰ Paikene Mangani, Ghulam Dastgir Khan, Naseer Ahmad, Sustainable governance, conflict and environmental justice in critical mineral extraction in Latin America and Africa, Peace and Sustainability, Volume 1, Issue 3, 2025

⁵¹ [Fossil fuels Continue to Drive Global Instability, Conflict, and Economic Insecurity - 350](#)

⁵² [Energy Sovereignty in the Age of Shocks: From Dependence to Resilience - EMEA](#)

⁵³ [Blog: Integrating human rights into renewable energy transition | Commonwealth](#)

⁵⁴ [Human rights are the path towards a just and sustainable energy transition says UN expert | OHCHR](#)

⁵⁵ [Insurers withdraw cover for climate risks while backing increased fossil fuel production, industry must act to support 1.5°C climate target after 50 years of failure - Insure Our Future Global](#)

Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependence Solutions



Transforming climate finance architecture

Addressing these barriers requires a fundamental transformation of the climate finance architecture. Instruments that do not increase debt burdens including grants, highly concessional loans with adequate grace periods, debt-for-nature swaps and nature-based bonds must be scaled up and prioritized. Multilateral Development Banks and International Financial Institutions must significantly reduce or eliminate surcharge policies and loosen conditionalities in ways that respect national economic sovereignty. To reduce reliance on fossil fuel revenues for debt servicing, MDBs and regulators must intervene to de-risk local currency volatility and act as first-loss capital enabling Global South countries to attract diversified investment and reduce exposure to external monetary shocks^{56,57,58}. International financing must be genuinely additional, complementing rather than replacing domestic efforts, with transparent and verifiable impact

Debt relief and accountability through citizen debt audits

Where debts have been accumulated under illegitimate or legally questionable conditions, citizen debt audits offer a concrete pathway to fiscal relief. By researching the conditions, purposes and legal basis of national debts with government cooperation to ensure access to financial information these audits can produce legal evidence enabling the repudiation of illegitimate obligations and freeing fiscal space for just transition investments. Ecuador repurchased over 90% of the outstanding debt through a sovereign buyback at 35 cents on the dollar, saving approximately \$7 billion in total, demonstrating the transformative potential of this approach⁵⁹.

Sustainable resource governance and equitable transition implementation

Binding agreements on responsible mineral sourcing, circular economy approaches and the diversification of value chains, including due diligence requirements in international trade agreements, are essential to ensure communities benefit from and participate in decisions about resources extracted from their territories^{60,61}. A credible transition must also commit to reducing overall energy consumption, not only improving efficiency, ensuring this reduction is distributed fairly. Renewable energy delivery to vulnerable communities, particularly SIDS and LDCs, must include battery storage and hands-on capacity-building to ensure communities can maintain and benefit from these systems over the long term.

⁵⁶ [How Multilateral Development Banks' local currency lending can reduce the debt burden in the Global South](#)

⁵⁷ [6 Ways Multilateral Development Banks Can Unlock Financial Resources for Low-Income Countries | Center on International Cooperation](#)

⁵⁸ [Mobilizing Private Investment in Climate Solutions: De-risking Strategies of Multilateral Development Banks | World Resources Institute](#)

⁵⁹ [8. 2008, Ecuador buys back its own debt after audit](#)

⁶⁰ [OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas | Global Mercury Partnership](#)

⁶¹ [Regional snapshots on building a responsible mineral supply chain - ClimateWorks Foundation](#)

Pillar 1: Overcoming Economic Dependence Solutions



Strengthening financial regulation and phasing out fossil fuel finance

On the regulatory side, gaps that continue to allow fossil fuel projects to remain financially viable must be closed. The insurance sector must be required to fully exit coal underwriting and adopt clear time-bound phase-out plans for oil and gas, while being incentivized to de-risk and scale clean energy investments. Similar requirements must be extended to banking and other financial actors to ensure systemic coherence^{62,63,64,65}. States must conduct human rights impact assessments before any transition measure and maintain continuous monitoring throughout, ensuring that incentives for renewable energy never come at the expense of lowering human rights standards.

Inclusive, rights-based and intergenerational transition governance

Across all of these approaches, a gender-responsive, human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights-based framework must be centered. This includes co-developing training programs that enable these groups to participate meaningfully in the energy transition, establishing community and national-level principles for implementation and ensuring appropriate and balanced representation in decision-making bodies for younger generations

⁶² [Insurers withdraw cover for climate risks while backing increased fossil fuel production, industry must act to support 1.5°C climate target after 50 years of failure - Insure Our Future Global Banking on](#)

⁶³ [Banking on Climate Chaos 2025 - Banking on Climate Chaos](#)

⁶⁴ Rickman, J., Falkenberg, M., Kothari, S. et al. The challenge of phasing-out fossil fuel finance in the banking sector. Nat Commun 15, 7881 (2024).

⁶⁵ [With new coal uninsurable, insurers start to move on oil and gas - Insure Our Future Global](#)

Pillar 2: Transforming Supply and Demand

Barriers

Mismatch between climate commitments and fossil fuel production

The gap between climate commitments and production realities remains a critical obstacle. Governments are currently planning to produce approximately 120% more fossil fuels by 2030 than is consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C: a fundamental inconsistency that undermines the credibility of international commitments⁶⁶. Despite the growth of renewable energy, fossil fuel use continues to rise in many contexts as growing energy demand is still largely met through conventional sources⁶⁷. As long as fossil fuels remain readily available and financially supported through subsidies, reliance on them will persist.

Distorted energy narratives and unequal economic burdens

The prevailing narrative that fossil fuels guarantee energy security is misleading: import dependence creates fiscal and exchange rate vulnerabilities, not stability^{68,69}. Fossil fuel subsidies, reaching up to 7-13% of GDP in some Global South countries, disproportionately^{70,71} benefit higher-income households while draining resources that could fund the transition. For the Global South, every year of delay deepens fiscal exposure, drains scarce foreign exchange on fuel imports and forfeits opportunities in emerging green economies. Deep inequalities in energy consumption further compound these imbalances: while the Global South consumes on average around 40 GJ per capita, the Global North exceeds 90 to 100 GJ reflecting a system where the burden of restraint falls disproportionately on those who contributed least to the crisis⁷².

Structural and behavioral lock-in in transport and consumption systems

Transportation systems represent a particularly entrenched dimension of this challenge: across cities, islands and rural areas alike, the majority of the world depends on fossil fuel-powered vehicles, with infrastructure and incentive structures that actively discourage the shift to sustainable alternatives⁷³. Underlying all of these dynamics is a deeper cultural and institutional barrier: without widespread climate literacy and behavior change, the social conditions necessary for a sustained transition cannot take hold. Government employees, educational institutions and communities remain insufficiently equipped to understand, advocate for and implement just transition solutions⁷⁴.

⁶⁶ [Governments plan to produce double the fossil fuels in 2030 than the 1.5°C warming limit allows](#)

⁶⁷ [Renewables soar, but fossil fuels continue to rise as global electricity demand hits record levels](#)

⁶⁸ [Seven Ways Fossil Fuel Subsidies Undermine Energy Security | International Institute for Sustainable Development](#)

⁶⁹ [Energy Security in an insecure world | Ember](#)

⁷⁰ [Fossil Fuel Subsidies](#)

⁷¹ [The Unequal Benefits of Fuel Subsidies Revisited: Evidence for Developing Countries; by David Coady, Valentina Flamini, and Louis Sears; IMF Working Paper WP/15/250; November 2015](#)

⁷² [2Charted: The Countries Using the Most Energy per Capita](#)

⁷³ [What is sustainable transport and what role does it play in tackling climate change? | UNDP Climate Promise](#)

⁷⁴ [Fostering green skills to accelerate climate literacy | BCG](#)

Pillar 2: Transforming Supply and Demand Solutions

Legally binding fossil fuel phase-out and decentralized renewable expansion

This conference must mark a turning point by establishing legally binding timelines for the fossil fuel phase-out, an immediate halt to new exploration and a global moratorium on new coal power plants, in line with IPCC guidance. Concrete plans for the gradual closure of existing production and infrastructure must accompany these commitments. Renewable energy must be recognized as the true foundation of energy security and sovereignty, requiring investment in robust and decentralized energy networks, including mini-grids, solar systems and community-owned renewable energy projects, with particular attention to energy access in vulnerable regions and strengthening local ownership. The Blue Lake Rancheria community in California, whose community-owned energy system enabled them to support neighboring communities during one of the state's worst wildfires, demonstrates the resilience that local energy ownership can provide⁷⁵. Accelerating access to clean cooking, with attention to health, gender equality and deforestation, is equally essential.

Equitable subsidy reform and demand-side redistribution

Fossil fuel subsidies must be progressively replaced with fairer mechanisms, including targeted cash transfers, progressive energy tariffs and redistributive carbon pricing, with revenues reinvested in renewable energy, infrastructure and affordable access⁷⁶. Aviation and shipping must be fully included within emissions budgets and their tax advantages eliminated⁷⁷. Transforming demand requires simultaneously raising consumption floors to ensure universal access to electricity and clean cooking, while establishing progressive limits where consumption is excessive. The energy transition must serve as a tool for redistribution, ensuring that those who have contributed most to the crisis bear a proportionally greater share of the responsibility for addressing it.

Transforming transport systems and enabling a just mobility transition

By 2035, in countries with the necessary capacities, transportation should be transformed by financially incentivizing cities and states to enforce a ban on fossil fuel-powered vehicles, including public transportation, while providing workers and industry sufficient time to transfer skills. This must be accompanied by investment in rapid transit infrastructure, free or reduced fares funded through redirected fossil fuel subsidies and public awareness campaigns on the safety and accessibility of public transportation. Shifting how communities move can trigger demand reductions across the energy sector while fostering more resilient, equitable and people-centered cities with democratic benefits including cleaner air, lower costs and greater energy security shared by all⁷⁸.

Embedding climate education and societal transformation

Sustaining these transformations over the long term requires embedding climate education and just transition principles across all levels of society⁷⁹. All education systems should integrate a climate curriculum by 2030, while all government employees should receive regular training on climate science and just transition principles beginning in 2027, with direct application to outreach, infrastructure investment and public policy. The most durable and just energy transition must ultimately be built from the ground up, community by community, informed citizen by informed citizen.

⁷⁵ [Blue Lake Rancheria tribe's microgrid helped neighboring communities during PG&E shut-offs – The Press Democrat](#)

⁷⁶ [Just transition, how to cut emissions without deepening inequality](#)

⁷⁷ [Greening international aviation post COVID-19 \(EN\)](#)

⁷⁸ Winkler L, Pearce D, Nelson J, Babacan O. The effect of sustainable mobility transition policies on cumulative urban transport emissions and energy demand. Nat Commun. 2023

⁷⁹ Sufyan Droubi, Arthur Galamba, Fernando Lannes Fernandes, Amanda André de Mendonça, Raphael J. Heffron, Transforming education for the just transition, Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 100, 2023

Pillar 3: Advancing international cooperation and multilateralism

Barriers

Outdated and ineffective global climate governance structures

International climate governance remains structurally inadequate to meet the scale of the crisis. Existing UNFCCC frameworks reflect outdated distributions of responsibility that no longer correspond to contemporary global socio-economic realities limiting the capacity to operationalize the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities in a meaningful way. Formal spaces for youth engagement within these processes frequently lack transparency, meaningful feedback and clear pathways to influence outcomes, reinforcing perceptions of tokenistic participation that erode trust in multilateral processes. No formal multilateral mechanisms exist to coordinate, monitor and support an equitable global phase-out of fossil fuels, leaving implementation fragmented and accountability gaps unaddressed. At the same time, we see a threatening rise of undermining climate science in (international) policy spaces.

Fragmented and inequitable carbon markets and accountability gaps

International carbon markets, including existing mechanisms such as REDD+, have proven insufficient and in some cases actively harmful to local communities, failing to provide adequate safeguards for human rights and Indigenous land rights⁸⁰. Carbon pricing mechanisms remain fragmented, vulnerable to weakening and susceptible to abuse, including the offsetting of emissions through carbon credits that allow polluters to avoid genuine accountability. The influence of the fossil fuel industry compounds these failures: without robust conflict-of-interest policies and transparency requirements for lobbying activities, private interests continue to shape climate negotiations at national and multilateral levels, enabling greenwashing and disproportionate influence that undermines the ambition and integrity of climate commitments.

Restrictive financial systems and exclusion from decision-making

International investment frameworks, like investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms, continue to obstruct the energy transition, while international financial flows and debt structures constrain the fiscal space of countries, particularly in the Global South, limiting their ability to transition without exacerbating inequality or deepening dependency⁸¹. Women, youth and marginalized groups who are disproportionately affected by energy poverty meanwhile remain excluded from the decision-making processes that shape their futures.

⁸⁰Osborne, T., Cifuentes, S., Dev, L. et al. Climate justice, forests, and Indigenous Peoples: toward an alternative to REDD + for the Amazon. *Climatic Change* 177, 128 (2024).

⁸¹ISD, Ciel en ClientEarth, Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) Mechanisms and the Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment, (2023).

Pillar 3: Advancing international cooperation and multilateralism

Solutions

Reforming global climate governance and strengthening accountability

Strengthening international climate governance requires reforming existing UNFCCC structures by broadening the contributor base and updating the distribution of responsibilities between Global North and Global South in line with current financial and technical capacities. The ICJ Advisory Opinion, which confirms that states have binding legal obligations to address climate change and uphold human rights, must be implemented in a concrete and operational manner, serving as a foundation for strengthening international agreements, clarifying accountability and driving more ambitious and just climate action. Dedicated formal multilateral mechanisms must be developed to coordinate, monitor and support an equitable global fossil fuel phase-out, with structured roles for youth in monitoring and reporting, and clearer feedback loops to track how youth inputs are considered and integrated into outcomes.

Reforming carbon markets and ensuring enforceable safeguards

Carbon markets must be reformed with clear and enforceable safeguards on human rights and Indigenous land rights, with recognition of collective land rights, guarantees of self-determination and prioritization of Indigenous-led initiatives. Carbon pricing mechanisms such as the ETS must be strengthened and protected from weakening, with progress toward a global carbon pricing system that accounts for local contexts. A strong and independent international supervisory body must be established to prevent abuse, including the offsetting of emissions through carbon credits, and ensure that polluters bear genuine accountability. International investment frameworks, including ISDS mechanisms, must be reformed to remove barriers to the transition, and international cooperation on the circular economy must be recognized as an integral component of it.

Limiting fossil fuel industry influence and reforming financial power structures

The influence of the fossil fuel industry must be structurally limited through mandatory transparency requirements and robust conflict-of-interest policies across all levels of climate governance, drawing on approaches developed for the tobacco industry under the WHO FCTC alongside dedicated structural funding for civil society organizations, youth and local initiatives to create a level playing field. International financial flows, debt structures and investment frameworks must be reformed to ensure that countries, particularly in the Global South, have the fiscal space to transition without exacerbating inequality or dependency, while explicitly supporting youth-led initiatives and meaningful youth participation in just transition planning and implementation.

Embedding human rights and inclusive decision-making in the just transition

A just transition requires placing human rights at its center: access to clean and affordable energy must be recognized as a human right, women and marginalized groups must be recognized as active rights holders and structurally included in decision-making from the design phase onward, human rights defenders must be protected through the implementation of treatments as Escazú, and mandatory human rights impact assessments must be ensured for all transition-related measures.



Role of Youth in Follow-Up and Implementation

Youth engagement is not rooted in idealism alone: We bring pragmatic perspectives that recognize the transition as a technical and gradual process requiring careful management of energy security, grid stability, and national economies. This makes us no peripheral voices, but essential actors in designing transitions that are both ambitious and grounded in reality. Achieving this level of engagement requires sustained investment in our capacities and the establishment of formal and binding mechanisms for youth representation, with dedicated funding and long-term support structures. Frontline communities must be connected and resourced to collaborate effectively, ensuring their voices are genuinely represented in the solutions that shape their futures. We are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between global processes and local realities, and that bridge must be built, not merely promised.





Reach out to us

We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to, supported, and endorsed this Global Youth Declaration. Your voices, insights, and commitment are essential in driving forward a just and sustainable future.

We warmly invite others who resonate with this declaration to join us, whether by signing, collaborating, or engaging in dialogue. This is a collective effort, and your contribution matters.

For further information, collaboration, or to become involved, please feel free to reach out. Contact one of us below

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