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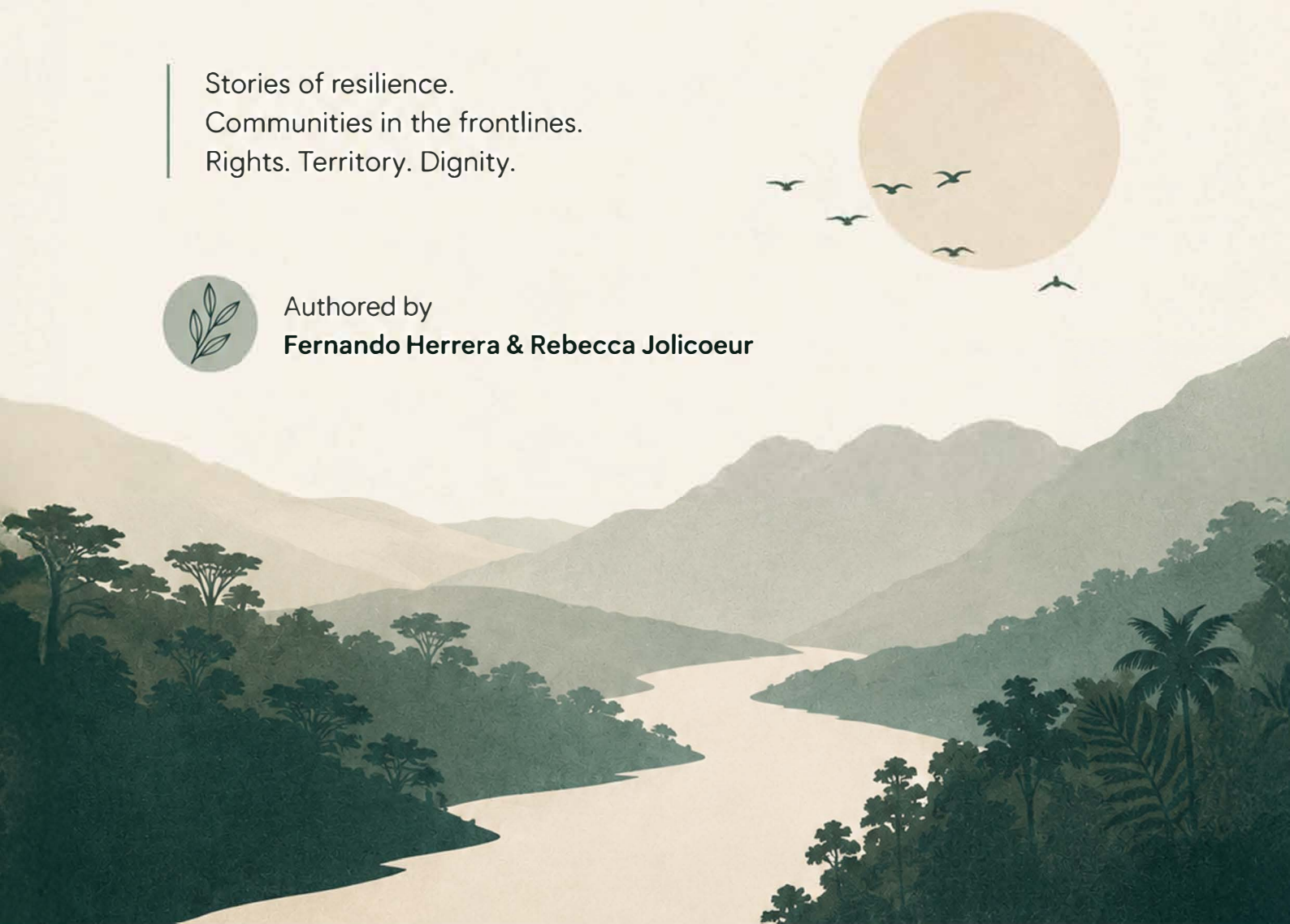
Voices from the Global South

Testimonies from the Climate Emergency

Stories of resilience.
Communities in the frontlines.
Rights. Territory. Dignity.



Authored by
Fernando Herrera & Rebecca Jolicoeur



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About the Authors

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Frontline Voices

"When you set foot on the land and walk it, there is the connection with the forest, the connection with the spirit of the jaguar."

— Eliza Enqueri, Waorani people, Ecuadorian Amazon

"On the coast, people look out for one another, and the sea is not only their home but also their means of livelihood."

—Elderly resident, west coast of Mauritius

"We ask the international community not to see Pacific peoples as symbols of vulnerability, but as partners in building solutions."

— Belyndar Rikimani, Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change

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SECTION A

A. Executive Summary

The climate emergency is not, at its core, an environmental problem awaiting a technical fix. It is a systemic human rights crisis — one that falls hardest on the communities that have contributed least to it. This dossier makes that case by joining the lived testimony of frontline communities to the best available science and to the most recent standards of international law.

Adopting a comparative South–South lens, it examines two contrasting but connected geographies: the Amazon Basin, a continental “climate regulator” whose Indigenous peoples face territorial and cultural erasure as the forest nears an ecological tipping point; and the Small Island Developing States of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific — “ocean states” such as Mauritius whose sovereignty and very habitability are threatened by sea-level rise and the collapse of natural coastal defenses. Through the voices of the Waorani of the Ecuadorian Amazon, of communities across Mauritius and Rodrigues, and of Pacific youth advocacy, it shows how climate change acts as a “threat multiplier,” converting ecological loss into violations of the rights to life, health, water, food, culture, territory, and self-determination.

Central findings

On the frontlines, climate impacts are already dismantling fundamental rights — not as a future risk, but as a present reality documented in the testimonies gathered here, from chronic water scarcity in Rodrigues to the erosion of Waorani territory. The injustice is structural: those bearing the gravest consequences are those least responsible for the crisis. This is a question of justice, not geography.

International law has caught up. Within a single period, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (2024), the International Court of Justice (2025), and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (2025) converged on binding standards: enhanced due diligence anchored in the 1.5 °C benchmark, prevention and cooperation as legal duties, a clean and healthy environment as a precondition for human rights owed *erga omnes*, and the protection of future generations. The decisive gap is now implementation, not recognition — as the Pacific testimony puts it, “listening must ultimately be measured by action rather than statements.”

SECTION B

B. Introduction

1. The Climate Emergency as a Human Rights Crisis

The climate emergency demands a fundamental paradigm shift: it must be moved from the periphery of technical environmentalism into the core of human rights discourse. Oftentimes we have centered on atmospheric metrics—parts per million and Celsius gradients—while obscuring the underlying reality. Reframing climate change as a systemic human rights violation is a necessary shift to hold state and non-state actors responsible for the ecological collapse. A Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) provides mandatory legal pathways for accountability, reparations, and the enforcement of the "polluter pays" principle.

Climate impacts function as lethal "threat multipliers", weaponizing existing socio-economic inequalities to dismantle the foundations of human dignity. In the Amazon, the degradation of the "hydrological engine"—which provides 15% of global freshwater discharge—constitutes a direct assault on the right to life, water, and food for over 350 ethnic groups (WWF, & RedParques, 2014). For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Mauritius, coastal vulnerability is not merely a logistical challenge but an existential threat to statehood. When sea-level rise (SLR) and extreme weather render territories uninhabitable, the right to self-determination and national sovereignty is effectively extinguished. The Global Center on Adaptation (2024) notes that annual disaster costs for SIDS can reach up to 8% of their GDP, yet catastrophic events like Hurricane Maria in Dominica (226% GDP loss) and Hurricane Ivan in Grenada (200% GDP loss) illustrate a trap of permanent vulnerability where traditional development finance is mathematically incapable of ensuring the right to a dignified life.

Furthermore, we must confront the legal gravity of intergenerational equity. Current projections—specifically the loss of 99% of reef-building corals at a 2°C warming scenario (GCA, 2024)—represent a calculated theft of biological heritage from future generations. By dismantling the "natural engineered" defenses of SIDS and the atmospheric regulators of the Amazon, current policy failures are actively stripping future inhabitants of their territorial rights before they are even born. To address these systemic violations, this dossier provides a comparative analysis of two critical, yet distinct, geographical realities.

2. Why the Amazon and Mauritius? A Cross-Regional Comparative Analysis

Strategically, a comparative analysis of the Amazon (a continental "climate regulator") and Mauritius (an "ocean state") is vital for a robust South-South perspective. This cross-regional lens highlights how ecological collapse in one hemisphere mirrors the erosion of sovereignty in the other, linking the "hydrological engine" of the rainforest to the "maritime lungs" of the ocean.

The Territorial and Cultural Integrity of the Amazon Biome

The Amazon is home to 34 million people, including 2.7 million Indigenous people whose existence is protected under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). With 17% of the forest already lost and a looming "tree dieback" threshold of 30-60%, the biome is approaching a tipping point (WWF, & RedParques, 2014). The loss of connectivity in freshwater ecosystems is not merely a biological metric; it represents a path toward cultural erasure. Specifically, for Indigenous groups living in voluntary isolation, forest degradation constitutes a direct infringement of their right to territory and life, as their survival depends entirely on an intact, undisturbed biome (Maretti et al., 2014).

The Existential Sovereign Crisis of Mauritius and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

As "ocean states," SIDS on average control a maritime area 28 times larger than their landmass (GCA, 2024); Mauritius is no exception, yet this vast jurisdiction offers no protection against the physical destruction of its territory. The projected loss of 99% of coral reefs at 2°C warming signifies the destruction of the island's primary natural barrier against sea-level rise and storm surges. Without these reefs, the right to territory becomes impossible to fulfill. Furthermore, the debt crisis and remoteness from international markets (GCA, 2024) create a cycle where Mauritius is forced to borrow to recover from climate shocks, further eroding the state's capacity to protect the fundamental rights of its citizens.

Challenge Area	Amazon Biome (Continental)	Mauritius & SIDS (Ocean)
Primary Physical Threat	Forest loss (17%) & risk of "tree dieback" (30-60%).	Sea-level rise (SLR) and 99% coral reef loss.
Human Rights Infringement	Threat to indigenous people, especially groups in voluntary isolation; cultural erasure.	Loss of national sovereignty and habitable territory.
Socio-Cultural Impact	Dismantling of Indigenous life and traditional knowledge.	Forced displacement of coastal populations; statelessness risk.

(Sources: GCA, 2024; Maretti et al., 2014; WWF, & RedParques, 2014)

3. Purpose and Scope of the Dossier

The Purpose and Scope of this dossier is to analyze the climate emergency not merely as an environmental phenomenon, but as a systemic human rights crisis that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable populations of the Global South. By focusing on the Amazon Basin and the Republic of Mauritius, this document aims to elucidate how climate change acts as a multiplier of existing inequalities, concentrated among communities that have historically contributed the least to global emissions.

The primary objective of this dossier is to amplify the voices of frontline communities through a testimonial approach, integrating lived experiences with rigorous scientific and legal perspectives. It seeks to link environmental degradation directly to the violation of fundamental rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, culture, and territory. For Indigenous peoples in the Amazon, the focus remains on the protection of ancestral lands and the preservation of traditional knowledge as a tool for mitigation. Conversely, in Mauritius, the scope addresses the existential threat posed by sea-level rise and extreme weather events to the sovereignty and survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

This dossier adopts a comparative South-South and interregional lens, highlighting shared patterns of marginalization while contrasting the unique biological and cultural vulnerabilities of a continental rainforest with those of an oceanic island state.

Intended primarily for an academic and educational audience within the Global Campus of Human Rights, this dossier may also serve as a tool for broader dissemination among policymakers, legal practitioners, and civil society. It draws upon the best available science, and incorporates landmark legal standards established by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the International Court of Justice to emphasize the duty of enhanced due diligence and intergenerational justice. Through this multidisciplinary framework, the dossier asserts the rights of current and future generations to a safe, stable, and healthy climate.

SECTION C

C. Methodology: A Human Rights–Based Framework for Climate Testimonials

1. Ethical Foundations and Intercultural Safeguards

In the context of the global climate emergency, an ethical framework is not merely a procedural checklist but the strategic cornerstone of a human rights–based testimonial dossier. This framework ensures the political and academic legitimacy of the testimonies and, more importantly, protects the fundamental dignity of participants situated on the frontlines of ecological collapse. By establishing rigorous safeguards, we move beyond extractive research toward a model that respects the sovereignty of those whose lived experiences constitute the primary evidence of climate-induced harm.

The benchmark for participation in this study is the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Consent is obtained through culturally appropriate channels—either verbally or in writing—based on the preference of the participant. The protocol explicitly ensures that all participants understand the scope of the project and their absolute right to withdraw at any stage without consequence, reinforcing their autonomy within the research process.

For those involved in environmental defense or residing in contested Indigenous territories, the disclosure of identity poses severe risks. Our "Principle of Non-Harm" is operationalized through strict anonymity and confidentiality measures designed to mitigate threats. Therefore, interviewed people were given the opportunity to participate anonymously for personal reasons. We specifically avoid the documentation of sensitive territorial information that could be weaponized to jeopardize the safety of participants or the security of their lands.

Furthermore, we are committed to returning the final dossier to the participating communities.

2. Testimonial and Interview Design

This project utilizes structured and semi-structured, qualitative interviews to capture the "lived experience" of climate change. This narrative depth provides a strategic contrast to quantitative data, transforming abstract metrics into a compelling human rights dossier that documents the erosion of cultural services and social relations.

Testimonials were translated into English with meticulous care to preserve original metaphors, intent, and cultural nuances, ensuring the authentic voice of the participant is

the primary driver of the narrative. All testimonies are presented as faithfully as possible to the original narratives. Editorial interventions are strictly limited to minimal adjustments for clarity and readability, as well as to measures necessary to protect the safety, privacy, and well-being of participants and their communities. In addition, identifying details relating to third parties, including individuals or corporate actors, have been anonymized or generalized where necessary to avoid potential harm or legal liability. These editorial decisions do not alter the substance or intent of the testimonies.

Participant Typology

To produce a multi-dimensional analysis of climate impact, the methodology defines a specific typology of voices:

- Community Members: Direct witnesses to territorial and ecosystem changes, ranging from coastal erosion in the Pacific to drying seasonality in the Amazon.
- Caregivers and Adults: Individuals providing a "proxy perspective" to document the threats to the rights of children and future generations.
- Professionals: Subject matter experts working alongside communities.
- Public and/or private actors.

In accordance with international human rights standards, children are not interviewed directly. Their experiences of the climate crisis are mediated through adult perspectives to ensure maximum protection while still documenting the intergenerational impact of environmental degradation. Logistical execution relies on a hybrid model of in-person field visits and remote interviews.

These methodological choices ensure that the research operates within real-world constraints while maintaining the rigor necessary to translate situated knowledge into policy-ready evidence.

3. Methodological Scope and Limitations

Rather than seeking universal statistical representation, this testimonial dossier offers deep, localized insights. The study is intentionally qualitative and non-exhaustive. While a small number of testimonies may seem limited by traditional quantitative standards, their value is defined by their ability to capture real-life impacts on community life and assertion of the impacts of climate change in specific geographical zones and people's personal lives.

The research acknowledges the following operational barriers. First, the challenge of translating regional and/or Indigenous languages and dialects into professional English without losing the "voice" of the participants. Second, the logistical difficulty of reaching

the communities. Third, operational constraints that included the broader diplomatic context in the Latin American region.

Recent diplomatic tensions and the interruption of formal relations between Mexico and Peru, as well as between Mexico and Ecuador, posed practical challenges for coordination, travel, and institutional engagement, particularly given that the Latin American component of the project is coordinated by a Mexican researcher. While these circumstances did not prevent the implementation of the project, they required increased reliance on remote methods, local partners, and informal professional networks.

SECTION D

D. Regions of Study

1. The Amazon Region: A Transboundary Socio-Ecological Biome

1.1. The Amazon Biome

The Amazon is the largest continuous tropical rainforest on Earth and one of the most biodiverse regions of the planet. According to the Amazon Network of Georeferenced Socio-Environmental Information (RAISG), it covers approximately 8,470,209 km² and extends across nine countries and territories: Brazil (61.8%), Peru (11.4%), Bolivia (8.4%), Colombia (6.0%), Venezuela (5.6%), Guyana (2.5%), Suriname (1.7%), Ecuador (1.6%), and French Guiana (1.0%) (RAISG, 2020). The region is home to 410 indigenous peoples—82 of which live in voluntary isolation—whose collective territories occupy approximately 27.5% of Amazonia (RAISG, 2020). It also constitutes one of the world's largest biodiversity and carbon repositories and plays a fundamental role in the regulation of the global climate system (Castellanos et al., 2022,).



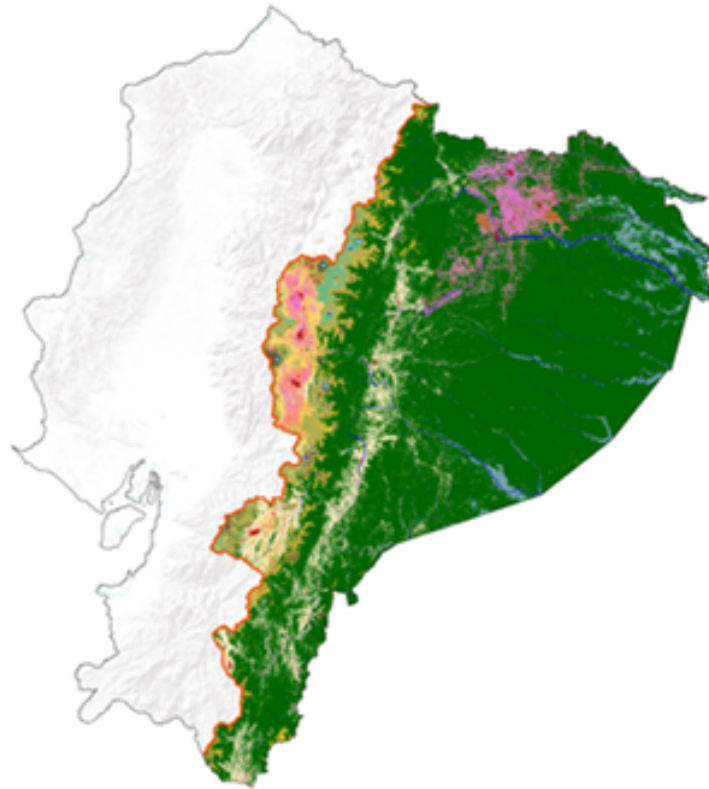
Map 1. The Amazon Biome across South America

Regional map showing the biome boundaries over the nine countries, the Amazon River and its main tributaries, and an inset with the proportional distribution by country. The red line defines the maximum territory of the amazon biome. Source: RAISG (2020), Amazonia Under Pressure, Map 1 (p. 9).

Despite its ecological centrality, the Amazon is undergoing accelerated degradation. Between 1985 and 2018, the biome lost 724,000 km² of natural vegetation—an area similar in size to Chile—and by 2018 it retained only 83.4% of its original cover; additionally, 17% of the region is affected by mining activities (RAISG, 2020). The IPCC reports with high confidence that the Amazon forest is highly vulnerable to drought, and that the unprecedented droughts of 1998, 2005, 2010, and 2015/2016—partly attributed to climate change—caused high tree mortality and momentarily turned pristine forest areas from a carbon sink into a net source of carbon to the atmosphere (Castellanos et al., 2022).

1.2. The Ecuadorian Amazon

The Ecuadorian Amazon, locally known as the Amazonía or Oriente, covers approximately 120,000 km²—43% of Ecuador’s continental and insular terrestrial surface—and comprises the provinces of Sucumbíos, Orellana, Napo, Pastaza, Morona Santiago, and Zamora Chinchipe (Secretaría Técnica de la Circunscripción Territorial Especial Amazónica [ST-CTEA], 2022). The region is home to eleven recognized indigenous nationalities—Achuar, Shuar, Kichwa, Andwa, Sapara, Shiwiar, A’i Kofán, Siona, Siekopai, Quijos, and Waorani—comprising an indigenous population of 132,296 inhabitants organized in 1,183 communities and 23 representative organizations (ST-CTEA, 2022). It also hosts the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples in voluntary isolation, mainly in the Yasuní National Park and surrounding areas (ST-CTEA, 2022). Under Article 57 of the Ecuadorian Constitution, the territories of peoples in voluntary isolation are of “irreducible and intangible ancestral possession,” and all extractive activity within them is forbidden (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008).



Map 2. The Ecuadorian Amazon

This Map highlights the Ecuadorian Amazon, and is available at <https://ecociencia.org/portfolio-item/mapbiomas-amazonia/> (last accessed 31 may 2026), and it's credited to EcoCiencia and MapBiomas Ecuador.

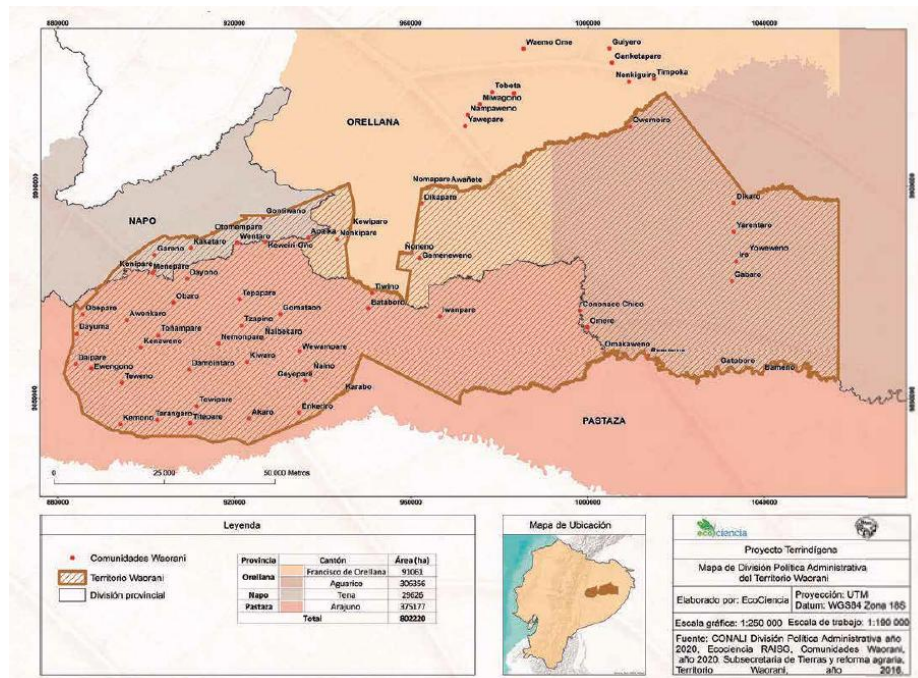
1.3. The Waorani People of Pastaza

The Waorani are one of the indigenous nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon. They speak wao-terero, an isolated language with no demonstrated affiliation to other linguistic groups of the region (Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador [NAWE], 2025, p. 4). Their ancestral territory historically extended over approximately 2,000,000 hectares between the Napo and Curaray rivers, but following first contact in the late 1950s and the subsequent expansion of oil extraction and colono-peasant settlements, it was reduced to approximately 40% of its original extent — a loss of roughly 60% — and the Waorani Territory recognized through título global currently covers about 802,220.20 hectares (NAWE, 2025, pp. 4–5).

Approximately 87 Waorani communities are currently settled between the Waorani Territory and the Yasuní National Park, each with its own normative and organizational structure, in coherence with the NAWÉ Statute (NAWE, 2025, p. 6). At the provincial level, the NAWÉ operates through three filial organizations: the Organización de la

Nacionalidad Waorani de Napo (ONWAN), the Organización de la Nacionalidad Waorani de Orellana (ONWO), and the Organización Waorani de Pastaza (OWAP) (NAWE, 2025).

The testimonies compiled in this dossier were gathered with members of the Waorani communities of Pastaza, whose direct experience of the forest, of climate variability, and of the cumulative impacts of extractive activities provides a situated perspective from which to read the State obligations identified in the previous section.



Map 3. Waorani Territory in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Map showing the Waorani Territory across Pastaza, Napo, and Orellana, with Waorani communities, the Tagaeri-Taromenane Intangible Zone (ZITT), the Yasuní National Park, and the principal road and river systems. Source: NAWE (2025), *Estrategia de monitoreo de presiones socioambientales de la Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador*, Mapa 1 (pp. 4–5). Cartographic elaboration by Fundación EcoCiencia.

1.4. Climate Impacts on the Amazon

The Amazon is among the regions of the world most exposed to the compound impacts of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports with high confidence that the Amazon forest is highly vulnerable to drought, and that the combination of anthropogenic land-use change and climate change has increased the vulnerability of terrestrial ecosystems to extreme climatic events and fires (Castellanos et al., 2022). For Northwestern South America—the sub-region that includes Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru—significant increases in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes and heatwaves are projected, and the region is identified as one of the most vulnerable in

terms of well-being and health; regions dependent on glacier runoff and on rainfall seasonality are particularly exposed (Castellanos et al., 2022).

For the Ecuadorian Amazon specifically, official information from the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology documents a 1% reduction in precipitation and a 0.9°C increase in mean temperature during 1960–2010 (Ministerio del Ambiente, 2017, cited in ST-CTEA, 2022). National projections indicate that, if current trends continue, mean temperature will increase by at least 0.5°C to 1°C by 2040 and by no less than 2°C by the end of the century across most of the continental territory, with even larger increases expected in the Amazon region (Ministerio del Ambiente, 2019, cited in ST-CTEA, 2022). By 2035, the hydrographic demarcations of Napo (29.4%) and Pastaza (28.3%) are projected to face the most acute water deficits (CISPDR, 2016, cited in ST-CTEA, 2022).

For peoples such as the Waorani, whose livelihoods, food security, and cultural practices are inseparable from forest ecosystems and seasonal cycles, these projected changes translate into specific forms of vulnerability that compound the pre-existing pressures of extractivism, deforestation, and territorial fragmentation—making visible the relevance of the State obligations identified in the previous section as analytical lenses through which to read the testimonies presented in the following chapters.

2. Mauritius

2.1. Overview of the Republic of Mauritius

Mauritius is a small island developing state (SIDS) located in the Indian Ocean off the southeastern coast of Africa. The Republic of Mauritius comprises the main Island Mauritius and five outer islands Rodrigues, Agaléga, Tromelin, Chagos Archipelago and St. Brandon, as well as numerous smaller islets and atolls. The total land area of the Republic of Mauritius is 2040 km² and its marine exclusive economic zone of the country is about 2 million km² (Republic of Mauritius, 1999). With a population of 1,241,856 (Statistics Mauritius, 2025) living on main island Mauritius and two outer islands Rodrigues and Agalega, the country is renowned for its cultural diversity, democratic governance, and dynamic economy driven by tourism, textiles, financial services, and information technology. Its rich history of migration and settlement has shaped a society where multiple languages, religions, and traditions coexist harmoniously.

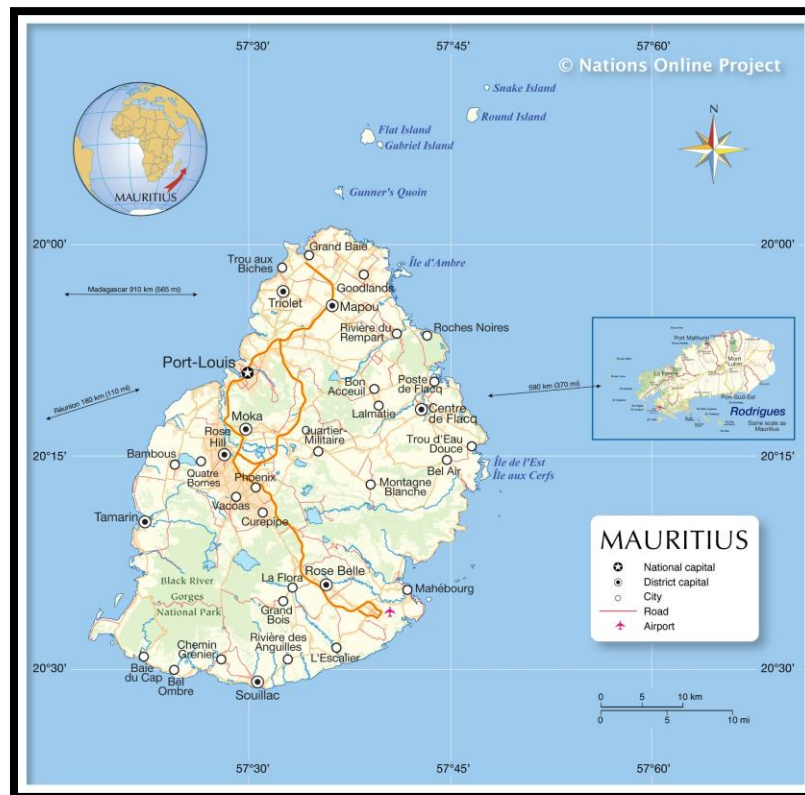
2.2. Environment Context and Vulnerabilities

Mauritius and Rodrigues lie on the fringes of the southern tropical zone, unaffected by the presence of large continental landmasses. Their climate is predominantly maritime and temperate, with the warm season running from November through April and the cooler

season from June to September. The months of May and October mark transitional periods, during which weather patterns tend to fluctuate (Republic of Mauritius, 1999).

Agalega, though geographically distinct and more remote, shares this tropical maritime climate. However, its smaller size and isolation make it more exposed to seasonal extremes and cyclonic activity. Rainfall patterns can be more irregular, and the limited infrastructure on the islands heightens their vulnerability to climate impacts. (Climates to Travel, n.d.)

Mauritius is home to unique ecosystems, including coral reefs, lagoons, and endemic species that contribute to its global reputation as a biodiversity hotspot. However, as a SIDS, Mauritius is highly vulnerable environmental pressures including “climate change, coastal erosion, and water management, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, invasive species, marine pollution, waste management, sustainable land use”. (UNDP, n.d.; World Bank, 2021)



Map 4. Mauritius and Rodrigues

Political map of Mauritius, showing the island of Rodrigues, the national capital Port Louis, district capitals, major cities and towns, and main roads. Source: Nations Online Project (n.d.). <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Mauritius-map.htm>

SECTION E

E. Testimonies

Introduction

The following section presents testimonies collected. These testimonies seek to document personal and community experiences related to environmental change, territorial challenges, and the broader impacts of the climate emergency in vulnerable regions of the Global South. The interviews were conducted using flexible and context-sensitive methodologies in order to accommodate the realities, preferences, and accessibility needs of participants.

The testimonies collected in this section reflect the personal experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the participants themselves, expressed in their own words and shared in good faith. They do not constitute statements of fact by the authors, and any references to governments, public authorities, institutions, organizations, companies, or individuals represent the participants' own accounts and views. They do not reflect any finding, criticism, or endorsement by the authors or by the project's partner institutions, none of which has independently verified the individual claims contained in these testimonies. Each testimony is reproduced with the informed consent of the participant, with the aim of documenting lived experiences from a human rights perspective.

1. "Without Territory, We Are Nothing": A People's Defense of Land and Life — Testimony of Tania Caiga.

Member of the Waorani community of Pastaza, Ecuador¹

TANIA CAIGA

For thousands of years, we were the sole guardians of our ancestral territory, and the spear represented our law, our authority, and our connection with the spirits and memory of our people.

¹ The testimony was collected on March 6, 2026, through a combination of telephone conversation and written exchanges via WhatsApp. This approach was adopted in order to accommodate the participant's availability and communication preferences as a member of the Waorani community of Pastaza.

Due to logistical and connectivity limitations, informed consent was obtained orally prior to the interview. The consent and the whole interview recording has been securely archived by the research team.

The interview questions and responses were edited with the participant's consent for clarity, readability, and organizational purposes, without altering the meaning or substance of the testimony provided. Questions and answers pertaining informed consent, and personal information were not transcribed.

Since contact with the outside world, diseases and deception were brought into our territories. Today, the organization of our people seeks to build our own self-government in order to defend our lives.

FERNANDO HERRERA

What is the relationship between the Waorani people and the territory where they live?

TANIA CAIGA

For the Waorani people, the territory is very important. We have lived there for a very long time. Our grandparents left this territory to us, and today we continue protecting and preserving it.

FERNANDO HERRERA

When you think about the territory, what is the most important thing it gives to the community? Does the forest or the rivers have a special meaning for you and for the community?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes. For me, the territory means everything. Without territory, we are nothing. Through the territory we have trees, rivers, waterfalls, animals, fruits — we have everything. Without territory, we would cease to exist as a people. That is why we have always defended it, and why we continue to defend it today for our children and future generations.

FERNANDO HERRERA

So, in a way, the existence of the Waorani people is directly connected to the territory. Without territory, there would be no Waorani people. Is that so?

TANIA CAIGA

That's right. There would be no Waorani people, and there would also be no forest.

FERNANDO HERRERA

What kinds of activities sustain the community? For example, hunting, agriculture, fishing — how do people obtain food and resources from the territory?

TANIA CAIGA

In the territory, people mainly rely on hunting and the resources that nature provides. Life in the community is closely connected to the land. In the city, things are different — people depend more on services and money. In our communities, we still have medicinal plants, food, and many things that come directly from the territory. That is why our connection to the land is so important. Our territory remains clean and free from contamination.

FERNANDO HERRERA

You have lived your whole life in Waorani territory. Over the years, have you noticed changes in the climate, the forest, or the rivers? For example, changes in rainfall, heat, animals, or crops?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes, everything has changed a lot. Before, the climate was different. In past years there was more sun, but now there is much more rain. The climate in the territory has changed. This year there has been heavy rainfall, and when the rains become very strong, the rivers rise and carry away the food and crops of many families.

FERNANDO HERRERA

How does the Waorani community explain these changes? In your opinion, what has caused these changes in the territory and in the climate?

TANIA CAIGA

Before, there were no external economic activities in these areas. Now they are in nearby territories and communities, and because of that the climate has changed. [I think that] these activities have affected the territory. All of this has changed the climate. Before, things were not like this, but now everything is different.

FERNANDO HERRERA

So, in your view, these activities are one of the causes of the environmental changes that the community is experiencing — for example, greater contamination and changes in the climate. How have the Waorani people responded to these changes? What have communities done to adapt and continue sustaining life in the territory?

TANIA CAIGA

Many Waorani people say that we no longer want external economic activities in our territories because everything has changed as a result. That is why people continue

defending the territory very strongly. We believe that things could become even worse in the future. Many people have participated in marches and demonstrations because of what is happening in our lands. Life is no longer the way it used to be, and many families feel sadness and deep concern.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Have traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, or farming also been affected by these changes? For example, are there fewer animals now or other changes of that kind?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes. Sometimes when people plant bananas, the crops die. Fish also disappear when rivers become polluted. Some external economic activities contaminate the rivers, and Waorani families suffer because of this.

FERNANDO HERRERA

You mentioned that the community is worried about the future of the territory. Could you tell me more about these concerns? How do people feel about the future of the Waorani people and the territory?

TANIA CAIGA

People are very worried. Before, there were no major problems. Hunting was nearby, fishing was nearby, and food was close to the community. But now people ask themselves what will happen in the future to our children and grandchildren. That is why the Waorani nationality continues defending the territory — because we fear that in the future there may no longer be fish or enough food. We want to continue protecting and caring for our territory. These problems especially affect women, many of whom depend on making handicrafts to support their children's education and health needs.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Has the health of the community also been affected by these changes? You mentioned that women are especially affected. What about children?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes, women are affected. Before, women did not suffer as much from illnesses such as cancer or kidney problems, but now these diseases are becoming more common. Children are also becoming sick more often, especially with malaria and respiratory illnesses such as the flu. Before it was not like this, but now children are affected much more frequently.

Because of this contamination, we want to continue protecting the territory and helping women and children.

FERNANDO HERRERA

What is the relationship like between the Waorani people and the government? Does the government or the provincial authorities provide support in these situations?

TANIA CAIGA

In reality, the government does very little for us. There is not enough education or healthcare in our territory. Waorani families live deep in the forest, very far away, and usually only communities closer to urban areas receive some benefits. Many Waorani women are sick, and many children do not have proper access to education. Because of this, we have developed our own forms of education, teaching our culture, songs, dances, and handicrafts to children in the communities.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Have some members of the community had to leave the territory and move to cities or other places?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes, many people have left, especially because of the lack of education opportunities and healthcare. Some have moved to industrialized areas. The Waorani people live across three provinces: Pastaza, Napo, and Orellana. In Napo and Orellana there are external economic activities, while Pastaza remains one of the few territories that is still relatively free from contamination (pollution) and outside activity. Some people have moved to cities so their children and grandchildren can access education or job opportunities.

FERNANDO HERRERA

When people leave the territory, what kinds of work do they usually do?

TANIA CAIGA

Some work in the industrial sector, and some work in cities as teachers, cooks, or in lodges and tourism-related jobs.

FERNANDO HERRERA

If you could send a message to people who do not live in the Amazon, what would you want them to understand about the importance of protecting the forest and the territory?

TANIA CAIGA

As a Waorani leader and as a member of the Waorani people, my message is that we need support to defend our territory. We do not want industrial activities in our lands. We want to protect our food, our medicine, our history, and everything our grandparents left for us. If external economic activities continue to affect our forests, many things will be destroyed. We ask people to support us, to stand with Waorani families, and to help defend the future generations that will continue living in this territory.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Is there anything else you would like people to know?

TANIA CAIGA

As part of the Waorani Organization of Pastaza (OWAP), I always want to speak about food sovereignty. Our food, our water, our waterfalls, our forest medicines — everything we have — remains in the hands of the Waorani people, but also in the hands of those who can support and stand with the Waorani communities of Pastaza. We ask people to continue supporting us and to continue sharing this publication so others can know that we are protecting our territory.

When we see what is happening to other peoples and communities, we see much suffering, especially in the cities, where many children do not have enough food. In contrast, we still have our territory and our forest, which continue sustaining us. Without territory, we are nothing. It is the root and the legacy left to us by our grandparents. They also left us the jaguar — a symbol that watched over and protected every corner of the territory, defending it from those who wished to harm it.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Is there any way people can support the organization?

TANIA CAIGA

Yes. The organization has Facebook and YouTube² accounts, and we are planning to open an Instagram account soon so people can learn more and support the Waorani family.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your testimony. It has been an honor speaking with you.

TANIA CAIGA

Thank you very much as well.

2. "The Trees Cannot Raise Their Voice": Ancestral Knowledge and the Living Forest — Testimony of Eliza Enqueri.

Member of the Waorani community of Pastaza, Ecuador³

FERNANDO HERRERA

To start, would you tell me what life is like in the Waorani community? What does the community do, and what does it depend on to feed itself, to care for people's health, and to keep its traditions alive?

ELIZA ENQUERI

The women, the men, the children, and the mothers of the Waorani people live in a healthy, free territory. We women, above all, make handicrafts, and while we work on them we sing together with the Pikenani, the wise elders. That is how they pass the knowledge of our songs on to us. And in our life together — when we share, when we travel, when we are out in the forest — a Pikenani always teaches us to value our medicinal plants, how to use them, and how to pass that knowledge on to our children and to the new generations.

² The links to Organización Waorani de Pastaza's social media are the following: <https://www.facebook.com/Waorani/> and <https://www.youtube.com/@OwapComunicacion/videos>

³ The testimony was collected on June 6, 2026, via telephone conversation. This approach was adopted in order to accommodate the participant's availability and communication preferences as a member of the Waorani community of Pastaza.

Due to logistical and connectivity limitations, informed consent was obtained orally prior to the interview. The consent and the whole interview recording has been securely archived by the research team.

The interview questions and responses were edited with the participant's consent for clarity, readability, and organizational purposes, without altering the meaning or substance of the testimony provided. Questions and answers pertaining informed consent, and personal information were not transcribed.

It is part of a process we must begin learning as small children and keep learning at every stage of life, as we grow.

Most of the Waorani people live out in the forest, where our territory holds many resources. We can go to the river and bathe freely, without contamination; we can fish, and the fish we catch we bring home to prepare, to eat, and to share with the family. The river is clean: we bathe in it and we drink from that same water. The men, for their part, go hunting. To hunt, a man passes on the knowledge of how to prepare and how to go out hunting. Not all men are hunters; only some, because the bravest boys are chosen. The men teach the young boys, and they must also watch over the forest so that strangers do not come in. From the time we are very small, the Pikenani teach us how to survive in the territory.

Today we still live by gathering fruit, by hunting, and by teaching all our traditions. For example, when you go to the garden plot, the women teach you how to plant, how to choose a good spot so it bears good fruit, which we then harvest, bring home, and eat. There are many forest fruits that are good to eat, that give you strength and give you life. That is how we live in the territory. Our grandparents always teach us that this forest is ours, because they have defended it generation after generation.

We live in a healthy place, without contamination, far from the Western world. The forest is beautiful: a place where we can live without so much noise, without commotion. It is like a sacred place, where you refresh your mind, where you can be free without anyone forcing you to do things. You have the freedom to go out into the forest, to visit the sacred places: the carved caves, the lagoons, the waterfalls. You go and you find giant trees. You see an immense territory; you climb the mountain, you look out into the distance and you say: “Wow, that is the free territory, without contamination, where you can walk, live, laugh, play, and learn from the Pikenani.”

And always, along the way, a Pikenani teaches you to sing and teaches you not to get lost in the forest. He teaches you to break a little stick, a branch, and says: “This is your GPS.” You break a branch, and when you have walked far and do not know how to get back, you remember the broken branch you left, and you find your way. That is how you can walk five or eight kilometers and still return through the forest.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Very interesting. One question: Who are the Pikenani? I imagine the Pikenani are the wise elders of the community.

ELIZA ENQUERI

The Pikenani are the elders, the ones who know the forest: wise women and men of the forest.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Thank you. You tell me the territory is very clean, that you fish, that you bathe in the river, that everything is free of pollution. I wanted to ask whether, in your lifetime or in recent years, you have noticed changes in the climate, in the rains, in the rivers; whether there have been droughts, whether the forest has changed, or whether the animals have changed. Have you noticed this, or has everything stayed the same?

ELIZA ENQUERI

Before, when I was growing up with my grandfather, I felt there were many animals all around where I lived. But these days there is a great deal of incursion into our territories: neighboring people, the Kichwa, come in to hunt in our territory, because the boundary of the Waorani territory lies close to the Kichwa's. I see that they hunt a great deal, and you think that if they keep hunting and strangers keep coming in, we are going to keep losing. Yes, you can see a decline in the animals. Where I live they are still there, because my community is somewhat remote compared with the rest.

FERNANDO HERRERA

And in the case of the rivers or the rains: has there been more rain or less? Over the years, has there been more drought; has the river dried up or dropped in level?

ELIZA ENQUERI

I feel the river has dropped a little. My grandparents used to tell me that before, the river was not dry; it carried plenty of water — when you looked at it, a canoe could pass without getting stuck. But now they say the river keeps dropping lower and lower, because the fish are running out. That is what my grandparents have told me. We also feel a pressure — not from all the communities, but from some. Although most want to do things right, there is one community that wants to engage in external economic activities. Seeing these things, and like a blow coming from outsiders, I notice that this past year it has not rained much in the Waorani territory. You begin to wonder... Because I grew up in the forest from that time, I was very small, and I feel it no longer rains the way it used to. It seems as though it was the dry season all the time, and it should not be that way, because normally it ought to rain. When I was a girl there were many storms and the rains that fell were stronger; now I realize it rains less, and you start to wonder: could something be happening to the territory?

FERNANDO HERRERA

That is exactly what I wanted to ask you. In your own view, or in the community, how do you explain these changes — more or less rain, the river dropping? How do you explain it? What is happening with the territory?

ELIZA ENQUERI

My grandparents used to tell me that every year, every season, the climate keeps changing, that it never goes back to being the same as in earlier years. I notice it too: every year or two it changes, it is no longer as it was, people no longer live as they did. I feel like everything is changing. That is why, when you stop to think about what will happen in the territory five years from now, it is worrying. It worries me that we could also lose the jaguars and the tapirs, because they too protect the forest. In the territory it is not only us human beings who exist there are the plants, the animals, the jaguar. Each time a jaguar is killed, I feel it is also a loss for the protection of the territory.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Of course. And these concerns you describe — how things have changed, how life in the territory is changing — do you think they affect, for example, mothers and small children? This worries about what is going to happen, about what life will be like in five or ten years: do you think it affects small children more, or the mothers and fathers who have young children?

ELIZA ENQUERI

When I was a girl, honestly, I did not think about the things that would affect the future. But now that I am a mother and have a daughter, yes, it worries me what will happen over time. More than worrying, it is about putting things on the table and realizing that it is time for us — the women, together with the men and the community — to begin to fight, to keep fighting for our forest, because this forest is the life that sustains us. We do not want outsiders coming in to hunt, nor coming in to carry out external economic activities in our territory. Now is the time for the women and the community to raise our voices, and for those voices to be heard by the government.

FERNANDO HERRERA

You mentioned at the beginning, and again just now, the relationship with the government; you told me there are hearings. What is that relationship like? What does the

government do, or fail to do, in the face of these changes the territory and the communities are going through?

ELIZA ENQUERI

The government wants to extract the resources from our territory. But the government must respect our self-determination, because we belong to the territory: it must listen to us and respect our decisions. A Pikenani mandate says that our territory is not for sale, because our territory is life. We will go on resisting, and we will go on raising our voices as women, because the river is important to us: from it we eat, we drink, we fish, and we live. The government keeps threatening, keeps saying it will exploit our territory; that is why we, as the people of Pastaza, will go on protecting it, because it is our territory and because it is life. That is what we will keep doing.

FERNANDO HERRERA

With all these changes, and everything happening in the territory, have some people from the community had to leave the territory to go and live elsewhere?

ELIZA ENQUERI

The Waorani territory spans three provinces: Pastaza, Napo, and Orellana. Some Waorani who lived in Pastaza have gone to live in Orellana, and some who lived in Orellana have come back to Pastaza. But most of the families have left for the city. One reason is that in my community we have no education: there is no school, no high school. The governments have told us they will provide a dignified education, but I do not believe it, because it never comes. Seeing that reality, I think our own education has been about keeping our mother tongue, our culture, and our identity, and strengthening them; that we have never lost. That is our own education, and we will keep it alive, even though the government does not make it easy to study. Many families want their children to prepare for a better future, and so they have taken them from the territory to the city, because inside the communities there is no education.

FERNANDO HERRERA

You told me that as a girl you learned Spanish, but also that often there is no access to schools in the territory. Can you tell me more about this? What is the children's education like? If there are no schools and they send them somewhere else, what is the community's own education like — Waorani education?

ELIZA ENQUERI

What I told you before was about my community, where there is no school. But the Waorani Organization of Pastaza has promoted our own education in the communities. At

present, the Waorani territory of Pastaza covers 35 communities, and about five have already begun to instill the knowledge of our own education, because we want the children to know both worlds: neither denying the Western world, nor denying the knowledge we have had since we were very small, the knowledge our grandparents and our parents taught us. To bring the two together. People often say that going back to our own education is “the Stone Age,” but it is not so: we want to strengthen our own education and not lose our language, our culture, our knowledge, or the wisdom of the ancestors, of the grandparents, of the Pikenani. We want to keep building in both worlds — the Western world and the Waorani world — and to chart a path so that, over time, it is not lost and is strengthened in every community. That is the goal.

FERNANDO HERRERA

When there are hearings, or cases that must be brought before the courts, how do you go about it? Are there organizations that support you? How can the Waorani organization bring its cases, or its defense, before the tribunals and the judges?

ELIZA ENQUERI

To bring a case to the Constitutional Court, we first organize from within the territory to hear the mandate of the Pikenani and of the communities in an assembly, and there it is decided that the process will move forward. Then, in the realm of the Western world, we look for lawyers and for organizations or NGOs willing to support the defense of the territory and of our collective rights. Many organizations get involved, to take part in the amicus and to help in the process before the Constitutional Court. There the voice of the Pikenani is raised; the communities and the organizations come together and carry the case, always accompanied by the Pikenani, never leaving them out, because they are the principal plaintiffs. We bring that process before the Constitutional Court so that it will be heard, so that the Court reads what is written and respects what the Waorani people have already written and decided.

FERNANDO HERRERA

In the interview I did with your colleague Tania Caiga, she told me — and I have seen it too — that the Waorani organization has a YouTube channel, Facebook, social media. How did that idea come about? What is it for? Do you want the case to be known? Why set up these tools, like Facebook or YouTube?

ELIZA ENQUERI

All of this serves to make the Waorani case visible to the world, because it needs to be made known both to the outside world and within. First it is made known to the Waorani

people, and when the Waorani people say yes, we can let the world know what is happening in our territory. We want the world — people, society, the public — to join the Waorani case more closely, so we can keep resisting, strengthen our organizations, and bring together a group of people who support the Waorani communities of Pastaza. That is what we are doing.

FERNANDO HERRERA

And those of us who do not live there, who live in other countries — or even people in Ecuador who live outside the territory — what can we do to support the Waorani community and other communities like yours?

ELIZA ENQUERI

To share. That is what matters: to share. Even if they are not under the same roof as the Waorani, to feel the same feeling for the Waorani people, to come together and support, to make us visible and raise our voices so the world will hear them. There are also small organizations and individuals who have given financial support to the Waorani communities of Pastaza, because there are many communities and there is need. That is how we are: sharing, in unity, working and helping one another.

FERNANDO HERRERA

I am going to go back a little to the subject of health in the Waorani territory. I imagine there must be traditional medicine, ancestral knowledge, but are there also government medical clinics, or not? What is health care like in the community?

ELIZA ENQUERI

In the communities we usually rely on ancestral medicine, because we have no health post — neither a Type A nor a Type B center. In some of the larger communities in Pastaza there are health posts, but only in a couple of them. In the rest, a medical brigade comes every three months: it stays one day and leaves. Most of the communities live by taking traditional, natural medicine, because they have already learned it. Sometimes a medical brigade is needed, above all in emergencies. When there is a snakebite, for example, it is hard for the person to recover quickly, because lately there have been many venomous snakes in the territory. Sometimes people die in the territory.

It is hard to get someone out of the territory and into the city, because there are no medical centers. That is why it is hard to talk about health. The communities have always complained that there is no medical care. It is a serious situation, because it is also far away and there are not enough resources to cover the expenses of every family. For that reason, the women make handicrafts to sell, and with that they build up some income to

support their families; when they go to the city, they buy a little medicine — not much, but it helps. That is how they get by in the territory. But above all, it is important that many families know the medicines of the forest. That is why it is so important to instill that knowledge and pass it on, so it is not forgotten and is kept alive.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Very good. If you could send a message to those of us who do not live in the Amazon, or who have never visited it, would you like to tell us something about what Waorani life is like, or anything else you would like to say?

ELIZA ENQUERI

Yes. It is important that people come and see. If you do not know that territory, if you do not live it, you can still express it through what you feel: even from far away, you can say, “I am going to support the forest,” because that territory is life. The territory is the lungs of the world; without it we cannot have clean air to breathe. That is why it is important always to remember the Indigenous peoples, the Waorani people too, because the forest is where we feed ourselves, where there is life. It is important that the world make the Waorani territory visible and join in protecting this forest, generation after generation.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Do you think that if people could go to the territory and come to know it, they would care more about protecting it, or understand better why this territory must be kept?

ELIZA ENQUERI

Yes, it is very important. Hearing about it is one thing; feeling it is another. When you set foot on the land and walk it, there is a connection with the forest, a connection with the spirit of the jaguar; that is what makes a human being connect with the Earth. You begin to feel that the forest needs us. The trees cannot raise their voice; that is why we human beings must raise it for them and say: “Look, we need to care for the forest, we need to keep protecting it, because it is life.”

FERNANDO HERRERA

Very good. I do not know if you would like to add anything else; I think those would be all my questions. Is there anything more you would like to tell us?

ELIZA ENQUERI

Yes, there is one important thing. As I told you at the beginning, the women, the Pikenani, and the children are always guided by our song, because it connects us with the forest. The connection with the earth connects us with the air and with life. That is why it matters... May I sing my song? It is short.

FERNANDO HERRERA

Please, by all means. I am listening.

ELIZA ENQUERI

[Sings in wao terero] [Click the jaguar to listen to the song]



What I am saying is that this forest is the forest of our ancestors; the forest for the generation to come. People like me are caring for the forest, the forest our grandparents cared for. Now it belongs to us, and we must go on caring for it, generation after generation. Thank you very much.

3. An Afternoon Without Water: What Appears Shocking to Others Is Now the Forced Routine of the people of Baladirou, Rodrigues: Testimonies of a community enduring Chronic Water Scarcity

The water problem in Rodrigues is nothing new. However, in recent years, it has become more acute due to various weather and climate changes: it is raining less and less, and cyclones now bring no rain and no longer cause precipitation. The village's population has grown, and the water supply pipes have fallen into disrepair.

Over time, we have tried to adapt by reusing materials such as old fridges or buying jerrycans when we could afford them, installing rainwater harvesting systems and drawing water from natural springs. But this is becoming increasingly difficult, as supplies are no longer reliable, our cisterns are failing due to long periods without rain, and the natural springs are disappearing or drying up very quickly as temperatures rise and the number of people relying on them increases.

In the past, water was supplied at fixed intervals, for example every month, and during drier periods, every 1.5 or even 2 months. It is now April 2026, and the last time we received a water supply was last year. We now find ourselves with few options, faced with declining purchasing power and increasingly severe shortages. We pool our resources with neighbours to buy water tanks, but when the shortage affects the whole island (during periods of drought), even that is not possible. We then have to search for the few natural sources in neighbouring villages or stay temporarily with relatives in other parts of the

island to save a little water. This severe shortage is having an increasingly drastic impact on us.

In Rodrigues, many people make their living from farming and livestock rearing. Culturally, there is a strong emphasis on food self-sufficiency, as we produce a large proportion of what we consume, whether to feed our families or simply to make ends meet. Baladirou is no exception. However, with the increasing water shortage, we are having to turn to other forms of work or keep fewer livestock and farm smaller plots of land. As for family vegetable gardens and small-scale livestock farming, we are being forced to abandon these activities. This has a significant impact on our household budgets, as income from farming and livestock rearing is decreasing or disappearing altogether. Added to this is the fact that a larger proportion of our budget is now spent on water supply and associated costs, particularly the purchase of water tanks, jerrycans and bottles of drinking water. We often find ourselves unable to make ends meet and have to give up on many plans for business ventures, building projects, travel or home improvements. Our daily activities are also affected: work, study and leisure. We sometimes have to limit our outings to save water; we no longer use the washing machine; and we temporarily stop using our indoor toilets in favour of latrines.

These shortages also have an impact on our health. The rainwater we collect – or which the government sometimes distributes to us during severe shortages – is not safe to drink. We do our best to purify it, for example by boiling it or adding products such as bleach, but we lack experience and sometimes put our own health and that of our children at risk. It is extremely difficult for us, particularly for those with young children or babies, and for large families. It is also difficult for young people thinking about their future and that of the village: many plan to leave once they reach adulthood, albeit reluctantly, but the decision has often already been made.

Today, the relationship between the villagers and the authorities responsible for the water supply has broken down. In the event of a shortage, residents are often resigned to turning to the relevant authorities. In the past, the officials responsible for water distribution were close to the community and ensured that people were informed of distribution days and were present to collect as much water as possible. This is no longer the case today.

For us, the solution would be to restructure the water supply and pipework system so that water is distributed fairly. Furthermore, during heavy rainfall, the island lacks retention systems and the water ends up in the ocean. We therefore need to invest more in the construction of dams and reservoirs, and not rely solely on desalinated water. We also need to set up more schemes to support vulnerable people and the middle classes in building or purchasing water tanks, as well as providing water collection points in each village. Polypipe water mains are laid at ground level, exposing the population to safety risks and increasing the likelihood of incidents such as contamination and damage,

thereby causing leaks and supply disruptions. All these initiatives are essential to address the challenges posed by climate change and ensure the equitable distribution of water.

4. Intersectionality of Climate Crisis, Anxiety, Stigmatization, Discrimination, and Violence: Testimonies from LGBTQIA+ Youth Stacy and Ginger Mary, Young Queer Alliance

STACY

The major environmental and climatic changes I have observed in recent years are cyclones and heavy rainfall. During periods of natural disasters, we often experience power cuts. Unfortunately, my neighbourhood lacks adequate infrastructure, such as a proper drainage system, to protect us from the effects of climate change.

The climate and environmental crisis is having a significant impact on my mental health. For example, if one day my home were to be damaged by a cyclone or another natural disaster, it would be difficult for me to find new accommodation, as I am part of the LGBTQIA+ community. In an emergency, I always turn to formal and informal LGBTQIA+ solidarity networks rather than to the government, non-governmental organisations or my family, as it is safer. I have always been afraid of being attacked or discriminated against by emergency services, law enforcement officers (for example, local council staff or staff at shelters) or religious organisations.

I live in a housing estate, a neighbourhood described as dangerous and often stigmatised. I think the authorities will be unwilling to come to the aid of those living in housing estates and will prioritise those they consider ‘worthy’ of being helped. I often live alone; I am a young woman from the LGBTQIA+ community and I do not feel safe around the police, who might attack me. In fact, I am more afraid of the police than I am of climate change.

This sense of insecurity and mental distress is rooted in the experiences of people in the LGBTQIA+ community who face various forms of violence and discrimination, as well as in the persistent inequalities faced by this community in Mauritius. The fact that I cannot enjoy my rights on an equal footing with other citizens reinforces this feeling. This is what must form the very foundation of climate justice: the equal enjoyment of rights, as well as the guarantee that emergency services, assistance measures and support mechanisms treat us fairly. Resources must be distributed fairly so that everyone can cope with environmental disasters and feel truly protected.

Resources must be distributed fairly so that everyone can cope with environmental disasters and feel genuinely protected. That is why it is important for the state to put measures in place to ensure that every citizen is aware of the laws and policies relating to climate change and the environmental crisis, and has access to information on the

procedures to follow in the event of a natural disaster, as well as to the services put in place so that everyone can be protected and assert their rights in the event of abuse.

GINGER MARY

The visible signs of climate change are heavy rainfall, cyclones and heatwaves. These natural events, which are becoming increasingly intense, are heightening my sense of insecurity, particularly regarding my home. Although my neighbourhood has the necessary infrastructure to cope with climate change, if an emergency evacuation were to take place tomorrow, I would be very worried about having to rely on emergency and support services, particularly the idea of seeking refuge in a centre, as these often lack space and suitable facilities.

Furthermore, having already experienced discrimination from support services such as certain NGOs or doctors, I live in constant fear of going through that again. When faced with extreme weather, or in the event of discrimination, or even eco-anxiety, I prefer to rely on formal networks and the LGBTQIA+ solidarity community, which welcomes me, supports me through psychological counselling and helps me to rebuild my life.

This is why marginalised or low-income communities – who are the most vulnerable to natural disasters and global warming – must be at the heart of initiatives promoting climate justice. Concrete, swift and inclusive measures are needed to tackle climate change, such as adequate healthcare, the distribution of food parcels and financial assistance.

5. From Despair to Solidarity: Testimony of an Elderly Resident on the West Coast of Mauritius. A. Baboo.

I have been living on the west coast of Mauritius for 20 years. Having grown up in the city, I first settled in Rivière Noire, then moved to La Gaulette and, now, given my age, I have moved in with my relatives in Flic en Flac. Life in the city and on the coast is very different. On the coast, people look out for one another, and the sea is not only their home but also their means of livelihood. We depend on the sea to live and survive: it is our own personal lottery. A well-preserved sea and coastline are a true treasure, essential to our future as a community.

However, faced with the growing effects of climate change that we are experiencing on the Mauritian coast – notably rising temperatures, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding and increasingly erratic rainfall – life is becoming ever more difficult for me and for the people in the community. Our homes are regularly flooded by rising sea levels. During heavy rainfall, the road leading to our neighbourhood becomes submerged within minutes, making travel on foot or by car very dangerous and sometimes impossible.

As the cost of living rises, a large proportion of my Basic Retirement Pension is spent on maintaining my home and paying my annual rent. I am a widow and, as the lease is in my late husband's name – although I have started the process of transferring it to my name – I am not the owner and my rights to this plot of land are limited. Furthermore, with frequent heatwaves, at my age and with my health problems, I always have to go out accompanied by someone or take a taxi rather than use public transport. My outings are therefore often limited to my medical appointments, as the rest of the family are working.

All of this causes stress and anxiety and takes a toll on my health, as it often leads to a rise in my blood pressure, to the point where I have to take medication. Unfortunately, we receive very little support from the government to tackle the climate crisis and save our homes. Some, like me, can temporarily stay with family, but others have to fend for themselves and rely on community solidarity.

Faced with the authorities' lack of involvement, we have had to adapt by buying stones to try to stem the rising waters and protect our homes by building walls. However, these initiatives are not always welcomed by the State, which considers them illegal. Indeed, the aid offered by the government is not universal and is concentrated in specific villages. For example, in neighbouring villages such as Case Noyale, the government has taken steps to control rising water levels, but only in specific localised areas. One gets the impression that these measures are being implemented because they benefit tourists more than they do Mauritians.

I doubt the authorities will take steps to improve the situation, as they seem to prioritise their political agenda over the urgent concerns of local residents. Despite the difficulties and the uncertainty of the situation, I persevere by drawing strength from the wonderful things that God accomplishes. That is what keeps me going.

6. Science, Education, Community Action: The Marine Discovery Centre's Recipe for Marine Conservation and Climate Knowledge – Insights from Marine Discovery Centre- Attitude Foundation

Attitude Hotels views tourism as a powerful catalyst for positive change, driving a mission-led approach that goes far beyond traditional CSR. The Marine Discovery Centre was established as part of Attitude Hotels' long-term commitment to linking tourism with marine conservation, through the Attitude Foundation. The Marine Discovery Centre is the flagship of this commitment: a hub where scientific research, education, and hospitality converge to create a new, sustainable standard for island tourism.

Scientific Monitoring of Marine Species and Habitats

The Marine Discovery Centre builds its ecological databases using standardised scientific protocols adapted to the Mauritian context. Monitoring efforts focus on whales, sea turtles, and coral reefs, combining field observations with collaborative partnerships.

For whales and sea turtles, the Centre uses photo-identification methods including sea turtle photo-ID through TORSOOI alongside boat-based surveys, lagoon patrols, and contributions from diving centres and whale conservation groups.

Coral reef monitoring follows simplified but recognised frameworks inspired by Eye on the Reef (GBRMPA) participatory monitoring system and “Be a Marine Biologist” approaches. These methods are rapid, indicator-based, and accessible to non-experts while remaining scientifically robust. They draw on long-term monitoring logic from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and use standardised categories to assess reef health.

Key parameters recorded include:

- broad coral cover categories
- bleaching intensity
- coral disease presence
- crown-of-thorns starfish sightings
- signs of cyclone damage, sedimentation, or pollution

How These Data Support Climate Change Analysis

Although monitoring is still recent, repeated observations will gradually it is essential for building the long-term data baselines that Mauritius currently lacks. Over time, these datasets will help track:

- Identify shifts in species distribution and seasonal patterns.
- Track the impact of warming waters and extreme weather events on reef health.
- Establish early warning signs of ecosystem stress.

Early insights already show confirmed sea turtle presence across multiple lagoon areas, emerging habitat-use patterns, and initial observations of coral stress. These results are important first steps in building baseline ecological knowledge for Mauritius.

Transforming field observations into reliable climate data is a complex task. Mauritius still lacks long-term baseline data, and many observations come from citizen science, which naturally varies. Local events like cyclones or pollution can blur climate signals, and the Centre does not yet have regular access to environmental measurements such as water temperature or pH. To turn these observations into reliable climate indicators, the Centre

needs multi-year datasets, consistent monitoring, environmental parameters recorded over time, and more detailed information on species populations.

Strengthening links between ecological and climate data is a key priority for the coming years.

Awareness, Education, and Climate Fresk

The Centre also plays a key role in climate education. Many participants initially struggle to connect global climate change with local marine impacts, and misconceptions about causes and consequences, especially regarding oceans are common.

When these links are revealed, reactions are strong: people feel surprised, engaged, and motivated to act, especially when learning is grounded in practical examples and field experiences.

Passive presentations tend to be less effective, while interactive and participatory formats create deeper understanding and emotional connection.

To ensure inclusivity, the Climate Fresk was translated into Kreol Morisien. This translation removes language barriers and allows participants to engage more confidently, leading to stronger comprehension and personal ownership of climate issues.

A Unique Role in Building Climate Resilience

By combining education, community and hands-on conservation engagement, the Marine Discovery Centre helps shift mindsets and encourage behavioural change. Its work reaches local communities, school groups, and international visitors, fostering a more informed, responsible and resilient society capable of protecting marine and coastal ecosystems in a changing climate.

7. The crisis was already present, but he anticipated it: Organic farming as a strategy for climate resilience – Testimony of Clivens, a planter from Baie du Tombeau

Higher temperatures mean that the seasonal transition from summer to winter seems to last much longer. In the face of climate change, I turned to organic and natural methods when I began my journey in farming. Consequently, despite the weather instability the country is facing, our vegetables, fruit and plants adapt more easily to these changes and thrive as they should.

However, we are not immune to new plant diseases, such as leaf miners and scale insects, or to the rise in pest populations such as rats. To tackle this, I have tried to use solutions that are not harmful to nature, such as applying Persian lilac to all my plants from a very young age, to prevent the spread of disease throughout the crop.

I have been using organic and natural methods for several years, and this has enabled me to manage the effects of climate change. For example, in hot weather, diseases do not spread, even though I never use pesticides or insecticides, and earthworms come to the surface during periods of intense heat.

This has enabled me to minimise crop losses, which has a positive impact on my income. We harvest the expected quantity and quality, which increases our revenue; there are no losses due to damage that would otherwise force us to throw away our fruit and vegetables. The result is a more stable crop.

As a farmer, I have always been concerned to see most producers using chemicals to boost their crops and bring forward the harvest. Consumer health is at stake: we are seeing an increase in the number of illnesses linked to these non-organic vegetables, as well as soil degradation caused by the use of pesticides. Organic farming is not only essential for consumer health, but also for the preservation of the land.

8. Confronting Climate Reality Through Awareness and Engagement: A Student's Experience with Growing Impacts – J. Labonté,

Climate change is an issue that is increasingly affecting my daily life and that of those around me. Over the years, I have noticed that temperatures have risen and that the weather is much less predictable than it used to be. On some days, the heat is very hard to bear, whilst at other times, heavy rain falls suddenly and causes flooding.

As a student, this is difficult to cope with on a day-to-day basis. Often, my school supplies get damaged by the rain, as do my shoes. In Mauritius, many areas lack suitable infrastructure, and the classrooms themselves do not always meet the needs of pupils or the wider population when faced with unstable weather conditions. These shortcomings increase the risks to our safety and also affect our learning. During periods of intense heat, I often feel tired and find it very difficult to concentrate in class. Sudden downpours cause flooding and put us in danger when we have to make our way home.

With heavy rainfall becoming increasingly unpredictable, the Ministry is sometimes forced to declare school holidays for pupils in order to minimise risks, resulting in online lessons or, at times, no lessons at all. This delays progress through the curriculum, as extra effort is required to complete the academic year, and catching up becomes increasingly difficult. Furthermore, this widens inequalities, particularly for students from vulnerable families who cannot always afford electricity, or for those with learning difficulties.

These extreme weather conditions show that climate change is not just a distant problem, but a reality that affects our daily lives, our environment and our community. These experiences have sparked an interest in me to better understand this phenomenon and the

importance of protecting the environment through small actions in my own way: reducing waste, recycling, saving water and electricity, and looking after nature. Although no single person can solve this problem on their own, the small actions of each and every one of us can make a difference. That is why it is essential that we take action now to preserve our planet for future generations.

9. Environmental Justice in Mauritius: Narratives and Struggles – Insights from Eco-Sud

Eco-Sud is a Mauritian environmental NGO that has become a leading voice for environmental justice on the island. Founded on the principle that nature itself must be recognized as a stakeholder, Eco-Sud works to protect fragile ecosystems, advocate for stronger environmental laws, and empower communities to build resilience against climate change. Through grassroots mobilization, legal action, and conservation projects such as coral reef restoration and coastal protection, the organization has played a decisive role in safeguarding Mauritius' biodiversity

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What role does Eco-Sud play in defending the environment and citizens' environmental rights?

ECO-SUD

Eco-Sud monitors developments, mobilises support, advocates and, where necessary, takes legal action to defend the environment and citizens' environmental rights. Since its inception, the organisation has been active both on the ground, working with communities, and within institutional frameworks, to ensure that environmental protection is recognised not only as an ecological issue, but also as a matter of fundamental rights, social justice and the public interest.

This role was particularly evident in the legal battle waged in the Pointe d'Esny case, which went all the way to the Privy Council, which confirmed the importance of the right of citizens and civil society organisations to take action to defend the environment. This decision represented a major step forward for access to environmental justice in Mauritius, strengthening the legitimacy of citizens and NGOs to challenge decisions likely to affect sensitive ecosystems.

Eco-Sud is also involved in advocacy for the recognition of the rights of nature, the protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), reform of the environmental legal framework, as well as issues relating to public access to the coastline, environmental impact assessments, marine conservation, agroecology and climate justice.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How does Eco-Sud work with public institutions, scientists and communities, and why are these partnerships essential to your work?

ECO-SUD

Eco-Sud works with a range of stakeholders: public institutions, academics, local communities, NGOs, fishermen, members of the public, technical partners and donors. This approach is essential because environmental issues cannot be tackled by a single institution or sector alone.

With public institutions, Eco-Sud takes part in consultations, submits recommendations and participates in committees with the relevant ministries. For example, since 2017, Eco-Sud has been advocating on the draft ESA Bill and contributing to discussions on the revision of the environmental framework, notably the Environment Act 2024 and the ESA Bill.

Together with our scientific team and academic partners, Eco-Sud seeks to improve the quality of the data used in environmental decision-making. Public policies and conservation projects must be based on scientific evidence, field data and a rigorous understanding of ecosystems. This collaboration is particularly important in areas such as coral restoration, marine conservation, coastal erosion and the impacts of climate change.

Eco-Sud works with communities, drawing on their lived experiences. Local residents, fishermen, farmers, women, young people, vulnerable individuals and coastal users possess knowledge of their local area that is important to take into account.

These partnerships are essential as they enable three forms of knowledge to be brought together: institutional knowledge, scientific knowledge and community knowledge. Without this complementarity, environmental policies risk being technically incomplete, socially unjust or difficult to implement on the ground.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What are the main obstacles currently limiting Eco-Sud's work in protecting the environment and defending citizens' rights?

ECO-SUD

Several obstacles still limit the work of environmental organisations in Mauritius. The first is access to information. In many cases, technical documents, studies, scientific data, permits, lease conditions or the justifications for public decisions are not readily available.

This limits the ability of citizens and NGOs to understand, analyse and challenge certain decisions.

The second obstacle relates to procedures. The timeframes for responding to administrative decisions are often short, the procedures are complex, and citizens do not always have the legal or technical means necessary to participate effectively.

The third obstacle is that of resources. Environmental campaigns require time and significant legal, scientific, technical and financial expertise. Developers or economic actors often have far greater resources at their disposal than NGOs or the affected communities.

The fourth obstacle relates to institutional cooperation. Even where forums for dialogue exist, public participation is sometimes merely a formality rather than a genuine part of the decision-making process. Consultations often take place late in the process, when the broad outlines have already been decided.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Based on your observations in the field, what are the most visible climate impacts in Mauritius today?

ECO-SUD

On the ground, the most visible climate impacts relate to biodiversity loss, coastal erosion, heatwaves, periods of drought, water stress, flooding and the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems.

Coastal erosion is a particular cause for concern. Between now and 2050 and 2100, several regions and coastal infrastructure will be at risk (according to the BRGM study on Mauritius), and coastal communities are already witnessing rapid changes to their environment.

At sea, coral reefs are under multiple pressures: warming waters, bleaching, pollution, coastal development, poor water quality, and tourism or economic pressures. Yet reefs protect coastlines, harbour biodiversity and support the livelihoods of many communities.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How do climate-related hazards and extreme events affect local communities and biodiversity?

ECO-SUD

Extreme weather events affect local communities in very unequal ways. People living in substandard housing, low-income households, older people, people with disabilities, those with chronic illnesses, fishermen, day labourers, small-scale farmers and people dependent on social or health services are often the most vulnerable.

For example, during heavy rainfall, floods or cyclones, some communities face loss of income, difficulties in getting around, service disruptions, problems accessing healthcare, health risks and property damage. Climate-related crises can also exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to health, food, water, housing and mobility.

The impacts on biodiversity are also significant. Coral reefs are affected by warming and bleaching events. Wetlands, mangroves, seagrass beds and beaches play a vital role in protecting coastlines, but are being undermined by development and pressure on land. On land, drought, temperature changes, invasive species and habitat fragmentation are affecting ecosystems and local species.

These impacts show that the climate crisis is not just an environmental issue. It is also a social, health, economic and territorial crisis.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How do you assess the legal framework for environmental protection in Mauritius today?

ECO-SUD

Mauritius has an environmental legal framework, comprising laws, EIA procedures, licensing mechanisms, institutions and legislation that recognise the importance of environmental protection. The entry into force of the Environment Act 2024 and its ongoing revision present an opportunity to further strengthen this framework. In Mauritius, we have also recognised the crime of ecocide within the legal framework.

However, the main problem often lies in the practical application of the legislation. A law may be ambitious, but it loses its effectiveness if it is not applied transparently, consistently and rigorously.

The Mauritian legal framework remains too focused on project authorisation rather than on damage prevention, ecological planning, public participation and the effective protection of ecosystems. We must shift from an approach centred on the administrative management of impacts to one centred on protection, precaution and environmental justice.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What are the main limitations or weaknesses of this framework?

ECO-SUD

The main limitations relate, first and foremost, to environmental impact assessments. All too often, EIAs are treated as technical documents produced by project developers, whereas they should be rigorous tools for independent assessment, transparency and public decision-making.

There are also weaknesses in the assessment of cumulative impacts. Individual projects are often examined in isolation, whilst ecosystems face a build-up of pressures: hotels, roads, embankments, pollution, water abstraction, tourist activities, erosion and climate change.

Protection of ESA areas also remains inadequate. Mauritius needs a strong legal framework to identify, protect and restore ecologically sensitive areas. Advocacy for the ESA Bill remains central, as without clear legal protection, these areas continue to be vulnerable to land-use and economic pressures.

Access to information, public participation and access to justice remain major challenges. Citizens must be able to understand decisions, access documents, participate meaningfully and challenge decisions when the environment or their rights are threatened.

Finally, Mauritian law must adapt to contemporary challenges: the rights of nature, climate justice, nature-based solutions and the rights of future generations.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Which legal reforms do you consider urgent or a priority?

ECO-SUD

Several reforms are a priority.

Firstly, the recognition of the rights of nature within the constitutional framework. Such recognition would enable us to move away from a view in which nature is regarded solely as an economic resource, and to recognise ecosystems as having intrinsic value and a right to existence, regeneration and protection.

Secondly, the adoption of a robust legal framework for ESAs. Mauritius must identify, protect and restore its ecologically sensitive areas, with clear mechanisms for monitoring, sanctions and the ability to challenge development projects.

Thirdly, reform of the EIA system. The independence of assessments must be strengthened, and cumulative impacts, climate risks, social impacts, human rights and

project alternatives must be incorporated. Public consultations must take place early enough to have a genuine influence on the decision.

Fourthly, the explicit integration of environmental justice, access to information and public participation into the Environment Act.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How would you define environmental justice in the Mauritian context?

ECO-SUD

In the Mauritian context, environmental justice means that environmental protection must go hand in hand with the protection of citizens' rights, particularly those of the communities most exposed to ecological and climate-related risks.

Environmental justice also concerns access to resources, information, public participation and access to legal remedies. Citizens must be able to know what is being decided, understand the impacts, participate before decisions are taken, and challenge them when their rights or their environment are threatened.

Environmental justice therefore involves rebalancing the power dynamics between citizens, institutions and economic actors, so that the environment is governed as a common good.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What messages would you like to convey in this feature?

ECO-SUD

Protecting the environment is essential to our safety, our health, our economy and our collective future.

The second message is that citizens must be placed at the heart of environmental decision-making. Communities are not merely beneficiaries or people to be consulted at the end of a process; they are key players in environmental governance.

Finally, we wish to emphasise that the legal and advocacy campaigns led by Eco-Sud are not merely about isolated cases. They raise a fundamental question: what kind of society do we want to build? A model in which nature is exploited to the point of exhaustion, or a model in which ecosystems, communities and future generations are genuinely protected for the benefit of everyone.

10. Nothing is spared: endangered flora and fauna – Testimony of Dr Vikash Tatayah Chief Executive Officer of Mauritian Wildlife Foundation

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has been working for over forty years. Our activities span three main islands: Mauritius, Rodrigues and Saint Brandon, as well as several islets such as Île Ronde and Île aux Aigrettes. Since its inception, the organisation has been committed to the conservation of endemic and threatened species, to educating and raising awareness amongst communities, and to supporting the development of public policies relating to the environment.

Today, climate-related challenges are numerous and complex. Among these, invasive species pose a major threat. In Rodrigues, *Acacia nilotica* and *lantana* cause serious problems, whilst introduced species such as the musk rat and iguanas disrupt the ecological balance. In Mauritius, the illegal trade has encouraged the arrival of exotic animals such as parrots and snakes kept as pets. Other introductions have directly harmed agriculture, such as certain species of ladybirds imported with plants, which have proved to be invasive and harmful. But the threats do not end there: deforestation and development projects are further weakening ecosystems that are already vulnerable. More than 90 per cent of the original forest has disappeared, considerably reducing the island's resilience to the effects of climate change.

In addition to these environmental pressures, there are institutional and socio-economic obstacles. Bureaucratic delays and overlapping remits complicate the implementation of projects. Laws exist, but their enforcement remains inadequate. The conservation sector suffers from a shortage of human resources, exacerbated by the brain drain. Public funding for the environment is not always allocated where it is most needed. Finally, cooperation from the private sector remains limited, often driven by the pursuit of profit rather than the protection of biodiversity.

In response to these challenges, the Foundation has identified three priorities. The first is conservation, with projects to eradicate invasive species and restore forests. Practices have evolved: where rodenticides were once used to control rodents or chemical pesticides to tackle invasive plants, nature-based solutions are now favoured. The second priority is education and awareness-raising.

On Rodrigues Island, the programmes are aimed at students and the local community, whilst in Mauritius, through the 'Connecting with Nature' project, which is designed to help students strengthen their connection with biodiversity, and the 'Anou Protez Nou Bann Zil' project, which targets boaters and tourism operators to raise awareness of the impacts of littering, trampling and fires on islets, as well as a collaboration with the Council of Religions to mobilise religious leaders around the protection of nature and life.

The third priority is advocacy with the government and the private sector to promote biodiversity-friendly policies and development projects. The aim is to prioritise ‘social profit’ and social entrepreneurship rather than financial gain alone.

The government, the private sector and the public are all essential stakeholders. The government holds legislative power and signs international conventions. The private sector owns a large proportion of the land where conservation efforts take place. As for the public, they hold the state accountable for their right to live in a healthy environment. And environmental awareness is growing: the Wakashio oil spill mobilised more than 100,000 people onto the streets of Port-Louis, and construction projects have been halted thanks to action by local communities.

Among the Foundation’s flagship projects, the Île Ronde project is a prime example of this momentum. Intensive restoration work has been carried out there: reforestation, weed control, the reintroduction of turtles, and the establishment of quarantine zones to limit invasive species. The results are clear to see: an increase in seabird populations, a reduction in illegal intrusions, and the spread of endemic species. Building on this success, the Foundation has decided to replicate this approach with the Mainland Island project, which aims to create ‘conservation islands’ within the larger islands. The project began on Île aux Aigrettes (26 hectares) and was then extended to Île Ronde, which is ten times larger. Today, the aim is to work on even larger areas to strengthen ecological resilience.

11. Mauritius at the Crossroads: Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Community Knowledge –Insights from Marie Stéphanie Perrine, Consultant in Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity and doctoral researcher at the Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

In your view, what are the most visible impacts of climate change on Mauritian biodiversity today, particularly in coastal areas and terrestrial ecosystems?

Stéphanie Perrine

The impacts are now clearly observable in both marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Coral reefs are experiencing increasingly frequent bleaching events, whilst seagrass beds and mangroves are being affected by rising sea levels and more intense extreme weather events. On land, prolonged droughts, changes in rainfall patterns and invasive alien species are exacerbating the degradation of native forests, which are already highly fragmented. These changes are jeopardising essential ecosystem services, including coastal protection, water supply and food security.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How are the outlying islands (Rodrigues, Agalega, St Brandon) integrated into national biodiversity and climate change adaptation strategies, given their specific ecological vulnerabilities?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

National policies are increasingly recognising the specific vulnerabilities of the outlying islands, but their integration remains uneven. Rodrigues enjoys institutional autonomy that allows for certain strategies tailored to the local context, whilst Agalega and St Brandon remain relatively undocumented. A more territorially-focused approach is needed to take account of the specific ecological, social and economic realities of each island, as well as their limited institutional capacities.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Which ecosystems or species are considered priorities in national adaptation strategies?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

At present, national strategies give particular priority to coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, wetlands, native forests and critically endangered endemic species. These ecosystems play a fundamental role in disaster risk reduction, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and the maintenance of community livelihoods.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How do local communities perceive changes in biodiversity and the climate over recent years?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

For several decades, local communities have been observing profound changes in their environment, such as less predictable seasons, reduced rainfall, increasingly scarce water resources, falling crop yields, the decline of certain species, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Farmers, fishermen and older people possess a rich environmental memory, based on intergenerational observations, which helps to document the long-term evolution of ecosystems. Despite its value, this knowledge is often marginalised in public policy and planning processes, where scientific knowledge is generally regarded as more legitimate. Even more concerning is that local knowledge is still not sufficiently taken into account in climate decision-making and planning processes, even though it constitutes a valuable source of information for

strengthening adaptation strategies that are more firmly rooted in the realities on the ground.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What are the main challenges encountered in implementing conservation and adaptation policies in Mauritius?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

The main challenges relate to institutional fragmentation, limited financial resources, a lack of cross-sectoral coordination, data constraints, and insufficient monitoring of outcomes. Policies sometimes remain sector-specific, even though climate impacts are multidimensional. There is also a continuing need to build the capacity of local authorities and communities to ensure more effective implementation.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How do national policies incorporate local experiences and knowledge into climate planning?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

Efforts are being made through public consultations and certain participatory projects. However, local knowledge is often drawn upon on an ad hoc basis rather than being treated as a genuine source of knowledge integrated into decision-making processes. Greater recognition of traditional and local knowledge would help to improve the relevance and acceptability of climate policies.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What role do Mauritian NGOs play in protecting biodiversity and adapting to climate change?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

NGOs play a vital role in ecological restoration, raising awareness, applied research, the conservation of endangered species and community capacity-building. They also act as a link between communities, researchers and public authorities, whilst trialling innovative solutions that can be replicated on a larger scale.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How does the private sector (tourism, property, energy, agriculture) contribute, or how could it contribute more, to ecological resilience?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

The private sector can contribute more by incorporating climate risks into its investments, developing nature-based infrastructure, reducing its ecological footprint and supporting conservation financing mechanisms. Tourism, in particular, benefits directly from healthy ecosystems and therefore has a vested interest in investing in their preservation. Public-private partnerships offer significant potential for accelerating resilience.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What kinds of successful collaborations between institutions, NGOs and communities could serve as inspiring examples for my project?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

Mangrove restoration programmes, community-led conservation initiatives, coral reef restoration projects and integrated coastal zone management approaches are good examples. In Rodrigues in particular, several initiatives demonstrate that strong local governance, combined with community knowledge and technical support from institutions and NGOs, can produce sustainable results. Recommendations for my project

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Are there any geographical areas, communities or pilot projects that you would recommend documenting as a priority?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

I would recommend documenting Rodrigues, due to its high vulnerability to drought, water shortages and changes in livelihoods. Fishing communities, farmers and women involved in water management are key stakeholders. It would also be relevant to include the coastal communities of Mauritius facing losses and damage linked to flooding, coastal erosion and rising sea levels.

REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What key messages do you think should be highlighted to raise awareness amongst the Mauritian and international public?

STÉPHANIA PERRINE

Climate change is already a reality experienced on a daily basis by communities in Mauritius. Biodiversity is not merely a matter of nature conservation, as it forms the basis of food security, access to water, livelihoods, health and economic resilience. The most sustainable solutions are based on a combination of scientific knowledge and local wisdom, as well as inclusive governance that places the most vulnerable communities at the centre. Small island states are not merely vulnerable territories. They are also laboratories of innovation and resilience, whose experiences can inspire climate policies on a global scale.

SECTION F

F. From the Frontlines to the World Court: A Conversation with Belyndar Rikimani.

Belyndar Rikimani is a climate advocate from the Solomon Islands and the Campaigns and Research Lead of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC), a youth-led organization and 2025 Right Livelihood Laureates, founded by Pacific law students to advance climate justice through international law. A law graduate of the University of the South Pacific, she has been part of PISFCC since 2019.

PISFCC gained international recognition for spearheading the global campaign that led the United Nations General Assembly to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the obligations of States in respect of climate change. Through coalition-building with governments, civil society organizations, and young advocates worldwide, the organization played a pivotal role in one of the most significant developments in international climate law in recent years.

In this interview⁴, Belyndar reflects on the lived realities of Pacific island communities facing the climate emergency, the importance of climate justice from the perspective of Small Island Developing States, and the transformative potential of international law in addressing one of the defining challenges of our time.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

From your perspective, how is the climate emergency currently affecting the daily lives and future prospects of Pacific island communities?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

Climate change is not a distant threat for Pacific Island communities; it is a present reality reshaping everyday life. Across the region, communities are experiencing stronger cyclones, accelerating coastal erosion, sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion into freshwater

⁴ This testimony was collected in writing on June 30 2026, through a structured set of questions shared with the participant. This approach was adopted in order to accommodate the participant's availability and communication preferences. Informed consent for the publication of this testimony and for attribution by name was obtained prior to the interview. The participant's written responses are reproduced as provided, without any alteration to their meaning or substance; only the formatting was standardized, and source-reference markers included by the participant were omitted for readability.

aquifers, declining fisheries, and growing food insecurity. These are not isolated environmental changes. They directly affect homes, gardens, roads, schools, health, and the ability of families and communities to remain safely in place.

For many Pacific communities, the effects are felt in the ordinary rhythms of life. A damaged coastline can mean losing access to fishing grounds or burial sites. Salty water entering wells can mean mothers and children spending more time and effort securing safe drinking water. Unpredictable rainfall and warming oceans can reduce crop yields and disrupt both subsistence farming and small-scale livelihoods. When these pressures accumulate, they reshape where people can live, how they sustain themselves, and how secure they feel about the future.

The impacts are also profoundly cultural and social. In Pacific societies, land and sea are not only resources; they are part of identity, memory, belonging, and responsibility across generations. As climate impacts intensify, they threaten the continuity of cultural practices tied to place, including traditional food gathering, fishing, community ceremonies, and the transmission of knowledge from elders to younger generations. When land is lost or altered, it is not only physical territory that is affected, but also stories, ancestral connection, and collective identity.

For Pacific peoples, then, the climate crisis is not only about environmental degradation. It is about the survival of ecosystems, the protection of livelihoods, and the future of cultures, identities, and nationhood itself. It is a challenge that reaches into the most intimate and enduring aspects of community life, raising urgent questions about resilience, justice, and the right of Pacific peoples to remain secure on their own lands and in their own homelands.

These impacts alter where people can live, how they earn a livelihood, and whether cultural practices tied to land and sea can continue. For Pacific peoples, the climate crisis therefore threatens ecosystems as well as the continuity of cultures, identities, and nationhood.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Many communities in the Global South contribute the least to climate change while facing some of its most severe consequences. How is this reality experienced or discussed within Pacific communities?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

This imbalance is deeply understood across the Pacific. Our countries have contributed only a tiny fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet we are among those experiencing the earliest and most severe impacts of climate change.

This imbalance is deeply understood across the Pacific because it is visible in both history and lived experience. Pacific Island countries have contributed only a very small share of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet they are among the first and hardest hit by climate impacts. This reality has made it clear that climate change is not just a technical or environmental issue; it is a question of fairness, responsibility, and justice.

For many Pacific peoples, the injustice lies in the fact that communities who did the least to cause the crisis are now carrying some of its heaviest consequences. While Pacific nations have worked with limited resources to protect their people, lands, and oceans, the forces driving the crisis have largely been shaped elsewhere, through patterns of industrialisation and fossil fuel dependence that were never equally shared. This has created a strong sense that the burden of response should not fall disproportionately on those already facing the greatest vulnerability.

Within Pacific communities, this understanding has strengthened calls for accountability from those with the greatest historical emissions and the greatest capacity to act. It has also reinforced the importance of international cooperation, climate finance, adaptation support, and legal responsibility. These calls are not made as appeals for sympathy, but as demands rooted in justice and in the principle that those who have contributed most to the crisis must do more to address it.

For Pacific peoples, climate justice means that responsibility must match harm. It means recognising that the climate emergency is not only about changing weather patterns, but about correcting deep inequalities in power, development, and protection. It also means insisting that the international system respond in a way that is fair, credible, and accountable to the communities who are least responsible and most affected.

That disparity has strengthened a collective understanding that climate change is fundamentally a question of justice, not simply geography. Within Pacific communities, there is a growing call for accountability, international cooperation, and legal responsibility from those with the greatest historical emissions and capacity to act.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

In your experience, what are some of the social, cultural, or emotional impacts that environmental changes are having on island communities beyond the physical effects alone?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

Environmental change affects Pacific communities in ways that go far beyond damage to roads, homes, or income. It reaches into the social and cultural fabric of everyday life, disrupting the practices, relationships, and sources of identity that hold communities

together. When land is eroded, coastlines retreat, or families are forced to move, the loss is not only physical. It can mean the weakening of customary ways of life, the interruption of traditional fishing and farming practices, and the gradual erosion of the knowledge that elders pass on to younger generations.

In Pacific societies, land and ocean are inseparable from memory, belonging, and responsibility. Sacred sites, burial grounds, customary lands, and places used for ceremony and collective gathering are not just locations; they are part of the living history of a people. When these places are damaged or lost, communities may experience grief that is both personal and collective. The loss is often felt across generations, because it affects not only what people can use today, but also what they can inherit, remember, and continue into the future.

There is also a significant emotional burden carried by Pacific young people. Many grow up knowing that they are inheriting a crisis they did not create, while also feeling the pressure to speak, organise, and advocate for stronger action. This can create anxiety, frustration, and at times a sense of uncertainty about the future. Yet this same experience has also inspired purpose and solidarity. Young people across the Pacific are increasingly turning their concern into leadership, using their voices to defend their communities and insist that the future of Pacific peoples must not be defined by loss alone.

At the same time, these challenges have strengthened resilience and collective commitment. Communities continue to adapt, support one another, and protect the values that matter most: people, culture, dignity, and connection to the ocean and land. In this way, the climate crisis is also revealing the strength of Pacific communities and the determination to safeguard identity and heritage for future generations.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change played a historic role in advancing the ICJ advisory opinion initiative. Could you share what motivated this effort and what it represents for Pacific peoples?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

PISFCC was founded on a simple but powerful conviction: international law should not remain detached from the realities faced by communities on the frontlines of climate change. For Pacific peoples, the climate crisis is not an abstract policy debate. It is a lived experience shaped by displacement, environmental loss, uncertainty, and the constant pressure to protect land, livelihoods, and culture. As law students, we recognised a serious gap between what the science was showing, what vulnerable communities were already enduring, and what international law was clearly doing to address the problem.

That gap mattered because it revealed a deeper problem of accountability. Climate change was advancing quickly, but the legal and political responses were moving too slowly to match the scale of harm. Seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice became a strategic and principled way to ask for clarity: What are the obligations of States under international law when their actions contribute to climate harm? What duties exist to prevent further damage, protect vulnerable populations, and cooperate internationally in good faith? For PISFCC, these were not theoretical questions. They were questions about survival, responsibility, and the future of Pacific peoples.

What began as a student-led initiative soon grew into something much larger because it spoke to a wider Pacific vision. The campaign resonated across communities, governments, civil society, and young people who understood that climate justice requires more than technical solutions. It requires legal recognition, moral courage, and collective action. The strength of the initiative lay not only in its legal strategy, but in its ability to bring together Pacific voices around a shared demand for fairness and accountability.

The advisory opinion represents hope because it shows that even communities with limited power can help shape the development of international law. It offers legal clarity by affirming that climate change is not just a political concern to be negotiated endlessly, but a matter governed by law and linked to binding obligations. Most importantly, it recognises that climate change is also a human rights issue, because it affects the ability of people and communities to live with dignity, security, and self-determination. For PISFCC, the advisory opinion is therefore both a legal milestone and a statement of principle: the climate emergency must be answered with justice, responsibility, and respect for the rights of those most affected.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

How do young people in your region perceive the relationship between climate change, justice, and the future of their communities?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

For many Pacific youth, climate change cannot be separated from questions of justice. It raises fundamental questions about whose lives are valued, whose voices are heard, and whether future generations will inherit safe and thriving communities. Young people increasingly see themselves not simply as victims of climate change but as leaders shaping international solutions. The ICJ initiative itself demonstrates that youth leadership can influence global governance. Pacific youth understand that justice means ensuring today's decisions do not compromise the rights, dignity, and futures of those yet to come.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Do you believe international institutions and governments are adequately listening to the concerns of Small Island Developing States? Why or why not?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

There has been meaningful progress. The unanimous adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution requesting the ICJ advisory opinion, and the later General Assembly follow-up welcoming the Court's opinion, show that the voices of Small Island Developing States are increasingly influencing international decision-making. However, listening must ultimately be measured by action rather than statements. Many commitments made through international climate negotiations remain insufficient to match the urgency described by science and experienced by frontline communities. Greater ambition, accelerated implementation, and stronger accountability remain essential.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Have you observed particular impacts on women, children, or future generations as communities confront environmental and climate-related challenges?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

Climate change often amplifies existing inequalities. Women frequently carry greater responsibilities related to food security, water collection, caregiving, and community wellbeing, making them disproportionately affected by climate impacts. Children face disruptions to education, health, and security, while future generations will bear the cumulative consequences of decisions made today. At the same time, women and young people continue to demonstrate extraordinary leadership throughout the Pacific. Their knowledge, resilience, and leadership should be recognised as central to climate solutions rather than viewed only through the lens of vulnerability.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

From your perspective, why is it important to frame climate change not only as an environmental issue, but also as a human rights and justice issue?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

Climate change directly affects the enjoyment of internationally recognised human rights, including the rights to life, health, housing, food, water, culture, development, and self-determination. Framing climate change solely as an environmental issue overlooks the profound impacts on people and communities. A human rights approach also strengthens accountability. It recognises that States have obligations to prevent foreseeable harm,

protect vulnerable populations, and cooperate internationally to address a global challenge that no nation can solve alone.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

What does climate justice mean to you personally as someone engaged in Pacific climate advocacy?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

Climate justice means ensuring that those who have contributed least to the climate crisis are not left to bear its greatest burdens alone. It means recognising the dignity, rights, and agency of frontline communities and ensuring they have an equal voice in shaping the decisions that affect their future. Personally, climate justice is about responsibility across generations. It is about ensuring that future Pacific Islanders inherit not only resilient ecosystems, but also secure homelands, protected cultures, and international legal systems capable of safeguarding their rights.

FERNANDO HERRERA AND REBECCA JOLICOEUR

Finally, what message would you like to share with people outside the Pacific region about climate justice, solidarity, and the responsibility to protect vulnerable communities?

BELYNDAR RIKIMANI

The Pacific is often described as the frontline of climate change, but this is ultimately a shared global challenge. Our experiences demonstrate what happens when scientific warnings are delayed by political inaction. They also demonstrate the power of collective leadership grounded in justice, solidarity, and international cooperation. We ask the international community not to see Pacific peoples as symbols of vulnerability, but as partners in building solutions. Climate justice requires more than empathy; it requires action through emissions reductions, adaptation support, and accountability so that no community is left behind.

SECTION G

G. State's Obligations regarding Climate Change and the Advisory Opinions of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Court of Justice, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

1. International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

On May 21, 2024, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea delivered its landmark Advisory Opinion in Case No. 31, addressing the specific legal obligations of States regarding climate change and the marine environment. The request was formally submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS), an intergovernmental organization established to advance the protection of the marine environment and the rights and interests of small island States particularly vulnerable to climate change. The inquiry sought to clarify the specific obligations of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including under Part XII, under two headings: first, the duty to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the marine environment in relation to the deleterious effects that result or are likely to result from climate change—including ocean warming, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification—caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; and second, the duty to protect and preserve the marine environment in relation to those climate change impacts.

The Tribunal began its analysis by concluding that anthropogenic GHG emissions into the atmosphere constitute "pollution of the marine environment" within the meaning of Article 1(1)(4) of UNCLOS (para. 179). This determination rests on the fulfillment of the three cumulative criteria of that definition: the introduction by humans of substances (CO₂) and energy (heat) into the marine environment that result, or are likely to result, in deleterious effects such as harm to living resources and marine life, hazards to human health, and the impairment of seawater quality (paras. 161, 178). By characterizing these emissions as marine pollution, the Tribunal activated the legal regime of Part XII of the Convention, in particular Article 194(1), which requires States to take all measures necessary to prevent, reduce, and control pollution from any source. The Tribunal held that this is an obligation of conduct, requiring States to act with due diligence (paras. 233-235), and that the applicable standard is stringent given the high risks of serious and irreversible harm to the marine environment from such emissions (para. 243).

In determining what constitutes "necessary measures" under Article 194(1), the Tribunal held that they must be determined objectively, taking into account, *inter alia*, the best available science—especially the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—and the relevant international rules and standards contained in climate change treaties such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement (para. 243). In particular, the global temperature goal of limiting the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and the timeline for emission pathways set out in the Paris Agreement inform the content of those necessary measures (paras. 216, 222, 243). While the scope and content of the measures may vary according to a State's means and capabilities, the Tribunal emphasized that the Paris Agreement is neither *lex specialis* in relation to the Convention nor a substitute for it: the Convention imposes independent legal obligations that are not satisfied merely by complying with the Paris Agreement (paras. 223-224).

Beyond the regulation of pollution, the Tribunal elaborated on the general obligation under Article 192 to protect and preserve the marine environment. This obligation has a broad scope, applies to all maritime areas, and can be invoked to combat any form of degradation of the marine environment, including climate change impacts such as ocean warming, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification; where the marine environment has been degraded, the obligation may also require the restoration of marine habitats and ecosystems (paras. 385-388, 400). Under Article 194(5), read together with Article 192, States bear a specific obligation to protect and preserve rare or fragile ecosystems and the habitat of depleted, threatened, or endangered species from climate change impacts and ocean acidification (para. 406). Furthermore, the Tribunal held that Articles 61 and 119 of the Convention impose specific obligations on States Parties to take measures to conserve living marine resources threatened by climate change impacts and ocean acidification, including by ensuring that the maintenance of such resources is not endangered by overexploitation and by applying the precautionary approach and an ecosystem approach to address climate-driven shifts in the distribution of stocks (para. 418).

The Tribunal also identified critical procedural and cooperative obligations underpinning these substantive duties. It held that, under Articles 197, 200, and 201, read together with Articles 194 and 192, States Parties have specific obligations to cooperate—directly or through competent international organizations—continuously, meaningfully, and in good faith to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution from anthropogenic GHG emissions, including by formulating relevant rules, standards, and recommended practices, by promoting scientific research and the exchange of information, and by establishing appropriate scientific criteria (para. 321). The Tribunal also recalled that, under Articles 202 and 203, States Parties must provide scientific and technical assistance to developing States—particularly those most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change—through capacity-building, scientific expertise, technology transfer, and

preferential treatment in funding and specialized services from international organizations (para. 339).

Finally, the Tribunal underscored the obligation under Article 206 to conduct environmental impact assessments (EIAs). Where there are reasonable grounds for believing that planned activities under a State's jurisdiction or control—whether public or private, land-based or at sea—may cause substantial pollution of, or significant and harmful changes to, the marine environment, the State concerned must, as far as practicable, assess their potential effects (paras. 352-367, esp. 358-362). The Tribunal also recognized that, under Article 196, States have a specific obligation to take measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution arising from the introduction of non-indigenous species to a particular part of the marine environment as a result of climate change impacts and ocean acidification (para. 436).

The State obligations identified by the ITLOS Advisory Opinion are summarized in the following table.

Obligation Category	Legal Determination and Content	Paragraphs
Characterization of GHG Emissions as Marine Pollution	Anthropogenic GHG emissions into the atmosphere constitute "pollution of the marine environment" within the meaning of Article 1(1)(4) of UNCLOS. They satisfy the three cumulative criteria of that definition: introduction by humans of substances (CO ₂) and energy (heat) into the marine environment, resulting—or likely to result—in deleterious effects such as harm to living resources and marine life, hazards to human health, and impairment of the quality for the use of seawater.	161, 178-179
Prevention, Reduction, and Control of Marine Pollution (Art. 194(1))	States Parties have the specific obligation to take all measures necessary to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution from anthropogenic GHG emissions, and to endeavour to harmonize their policies in this connection. Necessary measures must be determined objectively, taking into account, <i>inter alia</i> *, the best	243 (with ¶¶ 207-216, 222)

	available science (notably IPCC reports) and the relevant international rules and standards contained in the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement—in particular the 1.5°C temperature goal and the timeline for emission pathways.	
Due Diligence Standard	The obligation under Article 194(1) is an obligation of conduct, requiring States to act with due diligence by deploying adequate means and exercising best possible efforts. The applicable standard is stringent given the high risks of serious and irreversible harm to the marine environment from anthropogenic GHG emissions, although its implementation may vary according to States' capabilities and available resources.	233-235, 243
Relationship with the Paris Agreement	The Paris Agreement is not *lex specialis* in relation to UNCLOS and does not supersede or modify the Convention's obligations. Compliance with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement does not, by itself, satisfy the specific obligation under Article 194(1) of UNCLOS. Both instruments establish separate sets of obligations that must be implemented in a complementary manner.	223-224
Transboundary Pollution (Art. 194(2))	States Parties have the specific obligation to take all measures necessary to ensure that anthropogenic GHG emissions under their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage by pollution to other States and their environment, and that pollution from such emissions does not spread beyond the areas where they exercise sovereign rights.	258

	The standard of due diligence under Article 194(2) may be even more stringent than that under Article 194(1) given the nature of transboundary pollution.	
General Duty of Protection and Preservation (Art. 192)	Article 192 imposes a general obligation on States Parties to protect and preserve the marine environment. It has a broad scope, applies to all maritime areas, and can be invoked to combat any form of degradation, including climate change impacts—such as ocean warming and sea-level rise—and ocean acidification. Where the marine environment has been degraded, the obligation may require the restoration of marine habitats and ecosystems. The standard of due diligence is stringent.	385-388, 400
Rare or Fragile Ecosystems and Endangered Species (Art. 194(5))	Article 194(5), read together with Article 192, imposes specific obligations on States Parties to take the measures necessary to protect and preserve rare or fragile ecosystems, as well as the habitat of depleted, threatened, or endangered species and other forms of marine life, from climate change impacts and ocean acidification.	406
Conservation of Living Marine Resources (Arts. 61 and 119)	Articles 61 and 119 impose specific obligations on States Parties to take measures necessary to conserve living marine resources threatened by climate change impacts and ocean acidification. Under Article 61, States Parties must ensure that the maintenance of living resources in the exclusive economic zone is not endangered by overexploitation; conservation and management measures must be informed by the best available	418

	science and must take into account relevant environmental and economic factors, including the impact of climate change and ocean acidification. This entails the application of the precautionary approach and an ecosystem approach. Article 119 substantially replicates this duty for the high seas.	
Environmental Impact Assessment (Art. 206)	States Parties have the obligation to assess, as far as practicable, the potential effects of any planned activity—public or private, land-based or at sea—under their jurisdiction or control, when they have reasonable grounds for believing that such activity may cause substantial pollution of, or significant and harmful changes to, the marine environment. The assessment must be conducted prior to the implementation of the activity.	352-367
Global and Regional Cooperation (Arts. 197, 200, 201)	Articles 197, 200, and 201, read together with Articles 194 and 192, impose specific obligations on States Parties to cooperate, directly or through competent international organizations, continuously, meaningfully, and in good faith in order to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution from anthropogenic GHG emissions. This includes the duties to formulate rules, standards and recommended practices; to promote studies, undertake scientific research, and exchange information and data; and to establish appropriate scientific criteria.	321
Technical and Scientific Assistance to Developing States (Arts. 202 and 203)	Articles 202 and 203 set out specific obligations to assist developing States, in particular vulnerable developing States, in	339

	their efforts to address marine pollution from anthropogenic GHG emissions. Article 202 provides for appropriate assistance—directly or through competent international organizations—in capacity-building, scientific expertise, technology transfer, and other matters. Article 203 reinforces such support by granting developing States preferential treatment in funding, technical assistance, and the use of specialized services.	
Introduction of Non-Indigenous Species (Art. 196)	Under the second clause of Article 196(1), States Parties have the specific obligation to take appropriate adaptive measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution arising from the introduction of non-indigenous species to a particular part of the marine environment as a result of climate change impacts and ocean acidification, where this may cause significant and harmful changes to the marine environment.	436

2. The International Court of Justice

On July 23, 2025, the International Court of Justice delivered its Advisory Opinion on the *Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change*. The proceedings were initiated by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution 77/276, adopted on March 29, 2023 (para. 1).

The General Assembly requested the Court's guidance on two primary legal questions: first, the obligations of States under international law to ensure the protection of the climate system and other parts of the environment from anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, for States and for present and future generations; and second, the legal consequences arising under those obligations for States that, by their acts or omissions, have caused significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment,

with particular regard to specially affected States—such as small island developing States—and to peoples and individuals of present and future generations.

The Court noted that the General Assembly has characterized climate change as "an unprecedented challenge of civilizational proportions" (para. 95), and clarified that its own role was to state the existing law, not to legislate (para. 48). The ICJ held that the climate change treaty framework—comprising the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement—sets forth binding obligations that are mutually supportive (para. 195), and identified the 1.5°C threshold as the parties' agreed primary temperature goal under the Paris Agreement, which must inform the implementation of all mitigation duties (para. 224).

Under Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, States are bound by a procedural obligation of result to prepare, communicate, and maintain successive Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (paras. 234-236). The ICJ clarified that these NDCs must represent a progression and reflect each State's highest possible ambition, and that their content must be capable of making an adequate contribution to the achievement of the temperature goal (paras. 240-244, esp. 240 and 242). The Court further identified a binding obligation of conduct for States to pursue domestic mitigation measures aimed at achieving their NDCs, governed by a stringent standard of due diligence that requires States to employ their best efforts (paras. 250-254).

Beyond the specific climate treaties, the Court affirmed that the customary duty to prevent significant harm to the environment is fully applicable to the climate system (paras. 272-279). This duty requires States to act with due diligence under a standard that is heightened by the severe and, in many respects, irreversible nature of climate-related risks, and demands the adoption of appropriate regulatory measures over both public and private actors within their jurisdiction or control (paras. 280-282). The Court also held that the duty of due diligence entails the procedural obligation to undertake environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for proposed activities that may significantly contribute to GHG emissions (paras. 295-298), and the duty to cooperate in good faith, characterized as a "pressing need and a legal obligation" rather than a matter of choice (paras. 301-308, esp. 308).

Additionally, the Court found that anthropogenic GHG emissions constitute pollution of the marine environment within the meaning of UNCLOS (para. 340), triggering specific obligations under Part XII of the Convention for States to protect and preserve the marine environment from the adverse effects of climate change (paras. 339-355).

The Court also integrated international human rights law into its analysis, holding that a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of many human rights—including the rights to life, health, and an adequate standard of living—and

that the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is essential for the enjoyment of other human rights (para. 393). Consequently, in order to guarantee the effective enjoyment of human rights, States must take necessary measures—including mitigation and adaptation measures, the adoption of standards and legislation, and the regulation of private actors—to protect the climate system and other parts of the environment (para. 403).

Finally, regarding the legal consequences of a breach, the Court determined that the failure of a State to take appropriate action to protect the climate system from anthropogenic GHG emissions may constitute an internationally wrongful act entailing State responsibility under the customary rules on State responsibility (paras. 421-430, esp. 427). Because the obligations pertaining to the protection of the climate system and other parts of the environment from anthropogenic GHG emissions are owed to the international community as a whole, they possess an *erga omnes* character (para. 440). The responsible State is under a continuing duty to perform the obligation breached (para. 446), to cease the wrongful act if it is ongoing and, where appropriate, provide assurances and guarantees of non-repetition (paras. 447-448), and to make full reparation through restitution, compensation, or satisfaction, or a combination thereof (paras. 449-455).

Obligation Category	Description of Legal Determination	Paragraphs
UNFCCC — Mitigation Obligations	All parties have mitigation commitments under Article 4(1) of the UNFCCC. Annex I parties bear specific additional obligations under Article 4(2) to take the lead in mitigating climate change by adopting national policies and corresponding measures to limit anthropogenic GHG emissions and to protect and enhance GHG sinks and reservoirs.	199-208
Paris Agreement — Primary Temperature Goal	The 1.5°C threshold is the parties' agreed primary temperature goal under the Paris Agreement. This goal must inform the implementation of mitigation obligations, and mitigation measures must be based on the best available science.	224
Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) —	Under Article 4(2) of the Paris Agreement, each party has a binding procedural obligation of	234-236

Procedural Obligation of Result	result to prepare, communicate, and maintain successive NDCs, to communicate them every five years, and to account for and register them. Mere formal compliance is insufficient.	
NDCs — Content (Progression and Highest Possible Ambition)	Under Article 4(3), each successive NDC must represent a progression beyond the party's previous NDC and reflect the party's highest possible ambition. The content of an NDC must be capable of making an adequate contribution to the achievement of the primary temperature goal.	237-249
Implementation of Mitigation — Obligation of Conduct	The obligation under Article 4(2) (second sentence) of the Paris Agreement to pursue domestic mitigation measures is substantive and constitutes an obligation of conduct. Compliance is assessed against a stringent standard of due diligence, requiring parties to employ their best efforts and pursue measures reasonably capable of achieving their NDCs, including through legislation, administrative procedures, and enforcement mechanisms.	250-254
Customary Law — Duty to Prevent Significant Harm	The customary duty to prevent significant harm to the environment applies to anthropogenic harm to the climate system. States must use all means at their disposal to prevent activities within their jurisdiction or control from causing significant harm to the climate system, in light of the cumulative nature of GHG emissions and in accordance with the common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) principle.	272-292

Due Diligence — Regulation of Public and Private Actors	The standard of due diligence is stringent and requires the adoption of appropriate regulatory measures—including legislation, administrative procedures, enforcement, and monitoring mechanisms—governing the conduct of both public and private operators within the State's jurisdiction or control.	280-282
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	As an expression of the due diligence standard, States must provide for and conduct EIAs for particularly significant proposed individual activities that may contribute to GHG emissions, on the basis of the best available science.	295-298
Duty to Co-operate	States are legally required to cooperate in good faith for the protection of the climate system. Cooperation must be sustained and continuous; it is not a matter of choice but "a pressing need and a legal obligation". The duty is reinforced by the customary duty to prevent significant harm.	301-308
Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)	Anthropogenic GHG emissions constitute pollution of the marine environment within the meaning of Article 1(1)(4) of UNCLOS. Accordingly, Part XII of UNCLOS is applicable, and States parties must adopt measures to protect and preserve the marine environment from the adverse effects of climate change and to cooperate in good faith.	339-355
International Human Rights Law	A clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a precondition for, and inherent in, the enjoyment of many human rights, including the rights to life, health, and an adequate standard of living. To guarantee the effective	387-404

	enjoyment of human rights, States must take necessary measures—including mitigation and adaptation measures and the regulation of private actors—to protect the climate system.	
Financial Assistance, Technology Transfer, and Capacity-Building	Under the Paris Agreement, the principal forms of cooperation are financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity-building. Developed country parties (and Annex II parties under the UNFCCC) bear obligations to provide such support to developing country parties to assist with their mitigation and adaptation obligations.	260-267 (UNFCCC framework also at 199 and 206)
Legal Consequences — Internationally Wrongful Act	A failure by a State to take appropriate action to protect the climate system from anthropogenic GHG emissions, including failure to regulate private actors with due diligence, may constitute an internationally wrongful act attributable to that State, entailing its international responsibility.	421-430
Erga Omnes Character of the Obligations	States' obligations pertaining to the protection of the climate system and other parts of the environment from anthropogenic GHG emissions—in particular the customary duty to prevent significant transboundary harm—are obligations *erga omnes*. Obligations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement are obligations *erga omnes partes*.	440
Legal Consequences — Duty of Performance, Cessation, Reparation	A responsible State is under a continuing duty to perform the obligation breached, to cease the wrongful act if it is ongoing (and, where appropriate, to provide assurances and guarantees of non-repetition), and to make full	446-455

	reparation for the damage caused, through restitution, compensation, satisfaction, or a combination thereof, subject to the establishment of a sufficiently direct and certain causal nexus.	
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3. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights

On May 29, 2025, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued Advisory Opinion OC-32/25, titled "*Climate Emergency and Human Rights*", in response to a joint request submitted by the Republic of Chile and the Republic of Colombia. The Court sought to clarify the legal reach of the American Convention and the Protocol of San Salvador regarding the unprecedented threats posed by the climate crisis, specifically reformulating the State queries into the scope of substantive rights, procedural guarantees, and differentiated obligations for vulnerable populations. The Court concluded that the current global situation constitutes a "*climate emergency*" characterized by an accelerated increase in global temperature caused by anthropogenic activities, which can only be adequately addressed through urgent, effective, and coordinated actions guided by human rights considerations and framed within the concept of resilience (paras. 183-184).

One of the most significant legal developments in this ruling is the recognition of a human right to a healthy climate as an independent right derived from the right to a healthy environment. This right protects the global climate system from dangerous anthropogenic interferences and constitutes a precondition for the enjoyment of all other human rights, in both its individual and collective dimensions (paras. 297-300).

Consequently, States are bound by an obligation of "*enhanced due diligence*" in the context of this emergency, which requires the thorough identification and assessment of risks, the adoption of proactive and ambitious preventive measures to avoid the worst climate scenarios, and the utilization of the best available science—specifically the reports of the IPCC—in the design and implementation of climate actions (paras. 232-236). Furthermore, the Court established a duty of non-retrogression, holding that States must refrain from any conduct that results in a setback, delay, or limitation of the results of the measures required to protect human rights from the impacts of climate change (paras. 221-222).

Regarding mitigation, the Court held that States have a binding duty to define and progressively update mitigation targets that reflect the highest possible ambition, based on their current and historical cumulative contribution to climate change, their capabilities, and their actual circumstances; these targets must be established in a binding legal instrument with specific compliance time frames (paras. 322-332). This obligation

extends to the regulation and strict supervision of private actors: States must enact legislation requiring business enterprises to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence to identify and address impacts—including climate-related ones—across their entire value chain, as well as require the disclosure of greenhouse gas emissions along that chain (paras. 345-348).

The Court explicitly required that Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) must compulsorily include an evaluation of the potential impacts on the climate system for any project or activity posing a risk of generating significant greenhouse gas emissions (paras. 358-362). Moreover, the Court characterized the prohibition of anthropogenic conduct causing massive and irreversible damage to the environment as a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*), mandating that all States cooperate to end such conduct (paras. 287-294).

The Court recognized that the right to science, in light of an evolutive interpretation, extends beyond access to scientific knowledge in the strict sense and encompasses access to local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, which is particularly relevant in the context of the climate emergency given the urgency and complexity of the measures required to address it (paras. 471-478). Consequently, States are bound by a positive obligation to adopt measures for the protection, restoration, and regeneration of ecosystems, which must be compatible with the best available science and recognize the value of traditional, local, and indigenous knowledge (para. 283). This integrative approach ensures that climate actions are not only technically sound but also grounded in a systemic understanding of the environment.

Furthermore, the Court established that, in the context of the climate emergency, beyond prior consultation, States must promote the participation of indigenous and tribal peoples, as well as Afro-descendant, peasant, and fishing communities, considering their particular vulnerability and the importance of incorporating traditional, local, and indigenous knowledge into climate-related decision-making processes (para. 539). The Court also reaffirmed that, in the case of large-scale development or investment plans that may have a major impact on indigenous or tribal territories, States have not only the obligation to consult but also the duty to obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of the communities concerned (paras. 608-610). Additionally, the Court underscored a special duty to protect environmental defenders, who face heightened risks of violence, criminalization, and strategic lawsuits, with particular attention to indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant populations, rural communities, and women, who face intersectional forms of heightened vulnerability (paras. 568-571).

The Court stated that effective climate governance depends on the robust protection of procedural rights, including access to information, public participation, and access to justice. States are obligated to maintain active transparency, providing complete,

understandable, and up-to-date climate information in accessible language (para. 489), and to adopt measures to prevent and counter climate-related disinformation, ensuring that such measures do not amount to prior censorship or arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression (paras. 524-528). In matters of access to justice, the Court called for the application of the *pro actione* principle with respect to standing and admissibility (para. 546), and for a flexible interpretation of evidentiary rules—including the reversal of the burden of proof—to overcome procedural asymmetries and guarantee effective access to justice for victims, particularly those in situations of vulnerability (paras. 553-554). Finally, the Court recognized differentiated obligations toward groups in situations of heightened vulnerability—including children (paras. 597-604), indigenous and tribal peoples, Afro-descendant communities, and peasant farmers (paras. 605-613), and persons living in multidimensional poverty (paras. 619-627)—whose rights are disproportionately affected by the climate emergency.

Category of Obligation	Description and Legal Scope	Paragraphs
Standard of Conduct	States must act under a standard of enhanced due diligence, which requires: (i) thorough, detailed, and in-depth identification and assessment of risks; (ii) adoption of proactive and ambitious preventive measures to avoid the worst climate scenarios; and (iii) utilization of the best available science—including IPCC reports—in the design and implementation of climate policies.	232-237
Mitigation of Emissions	States have a binding duty to establish mitigation targets in a binding legal instrument, with specific compliance time frames and progressive increases. Targets must reflect each State's current and historical cumulative contribution, its capabilities, and its actual circumstances, and must be defined and progressively updated with the highest possible ambition. The duty extends to the regulation of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from both public and private sectors.	322-332

Right to a Healthy Climate	Recognition of a human right to a healthy climate as an independent right derived from the right to a healthy environment. It protects the global climate system from dangerous anthropogenic interferences and constitutes a precondition for the enjoyment of all other rights, with both individual and collective dimensions.	297-300
Non-Retrogression	States must refrain from any conduct that results in a setback, delay, or limitation of the results of measures required to protect human rights from the impacts of climate change. Any retrogressive measure must be exceptional, duly justified on objective criteria, and comply with the standards of necessity and proportionality.	221-222
Adaptation Duties	States are required to define and regularly update National Adaptation Plans. The obligation to define and update such plans is of immediate enforceability, while the implementation of the measures contained therein is progressive. Adaptation measures must be designed under an enhanced due diligence standard to reduce vulnerability and enhance the resilience of individuals, communities, and ecosystems.	380-389
Business Supervision	States must (i) urge business enterprises domiciled or operating within their jurisdiction to take effective climate measures; (ii) enact legislation requiring them to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence across their entire value chain;	345-348

	(iii) require public and private businesses to disclose their GHG emissions along that chain; and (iv) adopt regulations to discourage greenwashing and undue corporate influence.	
Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)	EIAs must compulsorily include a section evaluating climate impact for any project or activity that poses a risk of generating significant GHG emissions. The assessment must be conducted by independent entities before the activity is carried out, and renewed for new stages or modifications.	358-362
Prohibition of Massive and Irreversible Environmental Harm (*jus cogens*)	The prohibition of anthropogenic conduct causing massive and irreversible damage to the environment constitutes a peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*). All States have the obligation to cooperate to bring an end to conducts that violate this prohibition.	287-294
Right to Science and Recognition of Traditional Knowledge	Under an evolutive interpretation, the right to science encompasses access to local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge. States must base climate-related decisions on the best available science and on the recognition of these forms of knowledge, which are essential for objective and informed public decision-making in the context of the climate emergency.	471-479
Protection, Restoration, and Regeneration of Ecosystems	States have a positive obligation to adopt measures to guarantee the protection, restoration, and regeneration of ecosystems. These measures must be compatible with the best available science and recognize the value of traditional, local, and indigenous	283

	knowledge, and must be guided by the principle of non-retrogression.	
Procedural Rights – Active Transparency	States have a positive obligation of active transparency: they must unofficially provide the public with the maximum amount of climate-related information, which must be complete, understandable, in accessible language, up to date, and effectively delivered to different sectors of the population.	488-491
Procedural Rights – Countering Disinformation	States must adopt measures to prevent and counter climate-related disinformation in order to guarantee access to information, ensuring that such measures do not amount to prior censorship or arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression.	524-528
Public Participation in Climate Governance	Beyond prior consultation, States must promote the participation of indigenous and tribal peoples, as well as Afro-descendant, peasant, and fishing communities, in climate-related decision-making, given their particular vulnerability and the importance of incorporating their traditional knowledge. The participation of independent scientists, organizations, and institutions must also be promoted.	539
Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)	In the case of large-scale development or investment plans that may have a major impact on the territories of indigenous or tribal peoples, States have not only the obligation to consult but also the duty to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent in keeping with their customs and traditions.	608-610

Access to Justice — *Pro Actione* Principle	Judicial authorities must apply the *pro actione* principle with respect to the admissibility of actions, appeals, and standing requirements, in both collective and individual claims, given the urgency, gravity, and complexity of the climate emergency.	546
Access to Justice — Flexible Evidentiary Rules	Rules concerning the admissibility, reliability, and assessment of evidence must be interpreted flexibly to avoid unjustified procedural barriers for victims, particularly those in situations of vulnerability. The Court endorses appropriate measures—such as the reversal of the burden of proof—to address asymmetries between the parties.	553-554
International Cooperation	States have a duty to cooperate in good faith, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Cooperation must focus on technology transfer, financial resources for adaptation and mitigation, capacity-building, and assistance for developing and particularly vulnerable States.	247-264
Protection of Environmental Defenders (including SLAPPs)	Environmental defenders face a heightened risk of rights violations in the context of the climate emergency, including censorship, violence, arbitrary detention, criminalization, and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). States must adopt special, gender-sensitive, and intersectional protection measures, recognizing the particular exposure of indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural, and women defenders.	561-571

Differentiated Protection — Children	States must progressively adopt measures to guarantee children's access to integral health services responsive to climate-related illnesses (including "eco-anxiety"); align environmental health policies with the best available science on the impacts of climate change on children; and ensure their effective access to information and participation in climate decision-making.	597-604
Differentiated Protection — Indigenous, Tribal, Afro- descendant, and Peasant Peoples	States must adopt progressive measures to strengthen the institutions of these peoples, generate disaggregated data on climate impacts in their territories, design and implement public policies with their participation, and protect their territories and the climate resilience of their communities.	605-613
Differentiated Protection — Persons in Multidimensional Poverty	Recognizing that climate change disproportionately affects persons in multidimensional poverty and exacerbates intersectional vulnerabilities, States must design and implement policies to (i) guarantee access to goods and services necessary for a dignified life, and (ii) progressively eradicate the causes that perpetuate climate-related vulnerability. Just-transition measures must not intensify poverty.	619-627

SECTION H

H. Conclusions

This dossier set out to reframe the climate emergency as what it fundamentally is: not a distant environmental externality, but a present and systemic human rights crisis. The testimonies gathered here confirm that climate change operates as a “threat multiplier,” turning ecological degradation into concrete violations of the rights to life, health, water, food, culture, territory, and self-determination.

Read together, the frontlines reveal a shared architecture of injustice despite their contrasting geographies. In the Amazon, the erosion of an intact biome threatens the territorial and cultural survival of Indigenous peoples — most acutely those in voluntary isolation. In the Small Island Developing States of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific — from Mauritius and Rodrigues to the Solomon Islands — sea-level rise, water scarcity, and the loss of natural coastal defenses threaten the habitability of territory and, with it, statehood itself. In every case, the communities bearing the gravest consequences contributed the least to the crisis.

Crucially, the gap between this lived reality and its legal recognition is now closing. Three international courts converged on principles that vindicate the claims of frontline communities: emissions as pollution and transboundary harm; a stringent obligation of enhanced due diligence anchored in the best available science and the 1.5 °C threshold; prevention and cooperation as legal duties; and a clean, healthy environment as a precondition for human rights, owed *erga omnes* and extending to generations not yet born.

Yet legal recognition is not, by itself, redress. The advisory opinions supply the normative foundation, but their promise depends on implementation: on mitigation aligned with 1.5 °C, on adaptation finance that does not deepen the debt trap of vulnerable states, and on accountability mechanisms accessible to the communities these obligations are meant to protect. This dossier therefore closes not with a portrait of victimhood, but with a demand for partnership — recognizing frontline peoples as agents of a more just international order. Their message is, in the end, a simple one: responsibility must match harm.

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