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Y4EL & GARN YOUTH HUB

COP 16 & COP29 POSITION STATEMENT 2024

The **climate and ecological emergencies have been produced by decades of business-as-usual** rooted in an anthropocentric mindset and a profit-oriented mentality, resulting in environmental harm and violations of basic human rights. This harm has been largely caused by a handful of privileged corporations, countries, and a systemic lack of accountability for those contributing to environmental degradation.

The consequences of human neglect are visible globally, especially in communities suffering from poverty, political conflict, and climate-related disasters. Among the **most affected are children, women, marginalised groups, and Indigenous Peoples, whose voices are underrepresented**. At the heart of this crisis is the failure to recognize that ecosystems, species, and nature itself have intrinsic rights that need protection. This anthropocentric worldview has led to the degradation of our planet's ecosystems, which threatens not just humans but all life on Earth.

To address this imbalance, **we must move beyond seeing nature merely as a resource for exploitation**. We must embrace **an Earth-centred approach** that legally recognizes the inherent rights of nature, granting legal personhood to ecosystems, rivers, forests, and species. This is not an abstract idea: more than [400 initiatives across 39 countries](#) have already recognized the rights of nature in various forms. Furthermore, we must criminalise the destruction of nature.

The Rights of Nature and Ecocide Law

The health of humanity is intrinsically tied to the health of ecosystems. Without urgent action to halt biodiversity loss, curb pollution, and prevent the overexploitation of natural resources, we risk further undermining the **rights of nature** and exacerbating the climate and biodiversity crises. We demand the legal recognition of the rights of nature alongside the criminalization of **ecocide** to create a legal framework that holds corporations, governments, and individuals accountable for mass environmental destruction.



The Role of Youth in Leading the Change

Young people around the globe often hear that they represent the future. However, we are not just the future: we are the present, and we are leading the charge. From Kenya to Bangladesh, young people are mobilising to voice their opinions and provide concrete solutions to the critical issues facing us. As the generations hardest hit by the environmental and climate crises, we are speaking out to ensure our demands are heard. In light of the upcoming Conferences of the Parties, we emphasise the **interconnectivity between the climate and biodiversity crises**. These crises are not happening in a vacuum. We call on governments to focus on the **interplay between international instruments** designed to address climate change and biodiversity loss, particularly by integrating the rights of nature into legal frameworks.

Demands for Action

Ahead of COP16 in Cali, Colombia, and COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, Youth for Ecocide Law, in collaboration with the Global Alliance on Rights of Nature (GARN) Youth Hub, calls on:

1. Governments to:

- Legally recognize the **rights of nature**, following the growing global movement to enshrine legal personhood for ecosystems.
- Recognize **ecocide** as a crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
- Implement **domestic laws** against ecocide and the destruction of nature.
- Uphold the **universal human right** to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, as recognized by the United Nations.
- Incorporate **Indigenous knowledge** and perspectives into climate and biodiversity governance, especially from younger Indigenous generations, and uphold their **land rights**.

Develop legal instruments that protect biodiversity and ecosystems not only from pollution and over extraction but also from **species extinction**, promoting **restorative justice** for nature.



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- Support international mechanisms for **nature-based solutions** that prioritize the protection of ecosystems over profit-driven resource extraction.
 - **Endorse the advisory decision on climate change** from the **International Court of Justice**.
 - Upholding the **rights of future generations** to inherit a livable planet.

1. Businesses, civil society, and individuals to:

- Implement and advocate for **nature-positive solutions** that respect the rights of ecosystems and ensure a balanced relationship between humans and nature.
- Demand accountability for environmental harm by both corporations and governments, ensuring that youth and communities are engaged in meaningful environmental action.
- Empower young people and communities through **education** and **capacity-building programs** that offer creative, innovative solutions for ecosystem restoration and climate mitigation.

3. Finally, with regard to **Indigenous Peoples**, that governments, organisations, civil society and all parties respect their rights, as called for in the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, not only towards them but also towards their lands. The inclusion of their traditions and knowledge in key policies of states, the protection and inclusion of their sustainable ecosystems and livelihoods and, finally, their **full participation and representation at all decision-making tables**.

No Silence, No Tokenism

Let us be clear: we will not be silent; we will not be tokenized; and we will not be excluded from critical environmental decision-making processes. Youth are leading movements worldwide, and we will continue to demand that our voices are not just heard, but that they shape the future of environmental law, particularly in recognizing the intrinsic rights of nature.



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Supporting Organisations



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