



UN Panel Refuses to Rule on Climate Complaint Brought by Thunberg, Other Young People

On Monday, a UN committee determined that it could not rule on a complaint brought by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg and 14 other young people. The complaint alleged that certain countries knew all about their carbon emissions and how they supposedly affected the climate but did nothing to mitigate those emissions.

The panel said that the young petitioners — aged eight to 17 at the time they filed the complaint in 2019 — should have taken the case to national courts first, prior to taking it to the UN.

The complaint accused five countries — France, Turkey, Brazil, Germany, and Argentina — of knowing for decades about the risk of climate change caused by carbon emissions, yet did little to curb those emissions.

The case was filed with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and was debated by an 18-member panel of “human rights experts.” The panel concluded that a “sufficient causal link” existed between the children’s complaint and the nations’ action or inaction on climate change, but that ultimately the complaints should have been brought in the individual countries first.

The committee was undoubtedly on the side of the children, but explained in a [letter](#) that they were constrained by the limits of their legal powers.

“We want you to know that the Committee spent many hours discussing your case, and we struggled with the fact that although we entirely understood the significance and urgency of your complaint, we had to work within the limits of the legal powers given to us under the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (OPIC),” the 18-member panel explained.

“You were successful on some aspects but not on others,” the panel noted, while also lauding the petitioner’s “courage and determination” in the accompanying explanation of the decision.

Although the UN committee ultimately punted on the subject, it urged the children to keep up the propaganda fight: “We hope that you will be empowered by the positive aspects of this decision, and that you will continue to act in your own countries and regions and internationally to fight for justice on climate change.”

The committee further noted that the complaint made by the children was not made in vain, but that it had increased awareness of the problem of climate change and that the committee promised it would address it in future writings.



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UN headquarters in New York City



Written by [James Murphy](#) on October 15, 2021

“Your case also increased the Committee’s awareness about these issues and highlighted our shared sense of urgency, and therefore we have already announced our decision to write our next General Comment on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change,” the panel noted.

Thus far, Thunberg herself has not commented on this specific decision. However, the young activist — now 18 years old and reportedly back in high school — has had a few things to say about the upcoming COP 26.

In an interview with the cooperative news group [Covering Climate Now](#), Thunberg said she was open to meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden, but didn’t expect much to come of it. “I guess that will depend on the situation,” she said. “I don’t see why these people want to meet with me, but yeah.”

Thunberg seems put off by politics and politicians in general. She has complained that youth climate activists such as herself “are not being taken seriously” by world leaders. “They’re just saying, ‘We listen to you,’ and then they applaud us, and then they go on just like before.”

While Thunberg has not commented publicly on the committee’s decision, one of her fellow petitioners did share her disappointment with the committee.

“I have no doubt this judgment will haunt the committee in the future,” said Alexandria Villasenor, a 16-year-old climate activist from the United States. “When the climate disasters are even more severe than they are now, the committee will severely regret not doing the right thing when they had the chance.”

What young Miss Villasenor does not understand is that the decision won’t haunt this or any other UN committee at all. They got exactly what they wanted out of these children — a chance to throw up their hands and say, “we wish we could do something — too bad about that pesky national sovereignty we have to deal with.”



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