

Sri Lanka Youth Statement to COP28

We, the youth of Sri Lanka, acknowledge the urgent need for immediate climate action and are dedicated to ensuring our voices are heard at the global level. Our collective statement echoes both local and global imperatives, rooted in our nation's commitment to environmental preservation and sustainable development. We recognize COP28 as an unprecedented moment demanding historic action. Our joint declaration serves as a rallying cry to all nations to face this grave threat. We are the final generation with the ability to provide a safe operating environment for current and future generations. Young people in Sri Lanka and throughout the world are empowered and ready to lead in the fight against climate change. We call on the Government of Sri Lanka and all parties to join us in taking immediate, systematic, and bold action in the fight against Climate Change.

1. Action for Climate Empowerment

- a. **Inclusive Climate Education:** We firmly believe climate education is the foundation for effective action. We demand to incorporate comprehensive, accessible, and language-inclusive climate education into national curricula. This should be mandatory and encompass topics such as, but not limited to, climate science, climate justice, sustainable practices, and strategies for mitigating climate change. We urge the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to lead these efforts, ensuring that climate change knowledge resources are available in the local mother tongues of Sinhala and Tamil, making them more accessible to children and youth.
- b. **Youth Engagement:** Opportunities should be available for Sri Lankan youth to actively engage in local, regional, and global decision-making processes. While expressing appreciation for the youth and children constituency for its continued efforts to create a platform for the voices of young people, we urge the Presidency of the Conference of Parties of the twenty-eighth session to continue its efforts to ensure youth opinions are represented at the negotiating tables. We appreciate the GoSL's efforts in ensuring that a prominent Sri Lankan youth delegation will be present at COP28. We also believe meaningful engagement needs to go beyond youth-youth dialogues to facilitate youth-technical delegation dialogues that ensure our expertise is purposefully incorporated into national and foreign climate policy. We further encourage the GoSL to provide youth representation from indigenous communities and individuals with disabilities in UNFCCC proceedings to ensure inclusivity.
- c. **Financing ACE:** We welcome with appreciation the International Climate Change University that is to be set up in Sri Lanka; we encourage the country to continue playing an active role in closing the finance gap for Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) activities. Mobilising new public-private and public-nonprofit partnerships is crucial to ensuring empowerment at the grassroots level, with a particular emphasis on children and young people. We also urge the GoSL to ensure that these partnerships exclude environmentally exploitative corporations and organisations to ensure real and permanent climate action and combat greenwashing.

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2. Adaptation and Resilience

- a. National Adaptation Plans:** Sri Lanka must review and realign its National Adaptation Plans, taking into consideration the socio-economic crisis that was faced by the Sri Lankan people. We demand that the National Adaptation Plans be fully aligned with local and global development agendas, incorporating diverse forms of knowledge and participatory approaches while emphasising the role of youth-led advocacy.
- b. Just and Equitable Adaptation Financing:** We acknowledge UNEP's Adaptation Gap Report 2023 and reiterate its call for more international, domestic, and private finance while reforming the global financial architecture for better multinational cooperation. We emphasize the importance of a just and equitable approach to adaptation financing for developing countries that are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The allocation of local funds should be transparent and accountable. Grants and concessional finance, given through transparent and responsible means, for the Global South are essential for equitable adaptation and ensuring their active participation against climate change.
- c. Evidence-based climate action:** The GoSL must consider traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge coupled with a science-based approach when crafting climate resilience policies. Further, we highlight the importance of enhancing collaboration across parties through sharing data and scientific findings to ensure all nations utilize the best available resources in their policymaking.

3. Markets and Energy

- a. Preserving the 1.5°C Guardrail:** As the youth of Sri Lanka, we recognise the urgency of restricting the rise in global temperatures to the 1.5°C threshold. We urge the GoSL and all parties to take a firm stance and bolster local, regional, and international initiatives that promote climate resilience, clean & renewable energy adoption, and stringent emissions controls. We encourage the GoSL to take ambitious actions to adhere to the 1.5°C guardrail and to condemn any actions that threaten this limit.
- b. Transition to Green Energy:** Applauds the Government of Sri Lanka's NDC target of 70% renewable energy in electricity generation by 2030 and urges the GoSL to set a goal to achieve 100% renewable energy generation by 2050. We call on the GoSL to be a key player in the clean energy transition in the Global South. We call upon the GoSL to ensure that green energy transitions follow the "just transition" principles to ensure policies that prioritize human life and dignity amidst its prioritization of green energy. We also call on Sri Lanka to display these intentions internationally by adopting instruments such as the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative and to err on the

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side of caution regarding nuclear energy and hydrogen energy sources, which have had mixed consequences in the West.

- c. **Financing the Green Energy Transition:** Recalling the 2017 Asian Development Bank report titled “Assessment of Sri Lanka’s Power Sector—100 percent Electricity Generation through Renewable Energy by 2050,” investments totaling US\$54–US\$56 billion will be necessary for the power sector to achieve 100% RE. In this regard, we call on the GoSL to utilise the financing mechanisms available under the Paris Agreement by establishing relevant regulations at a national level. Sri Lanka’s updated NDC calls to engage in viable carbon trading mechanisms to promote the shift towards clean energy sources, and we, therefore, urge the GoSL to participate in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement in a manner that adheres to the rules and modalities outlined in 2/CMA.3, 3/CMA.3, and 4/CMA.3.
- d. **Article 6 of the Paris Agreement:** Recognising the development of Article 6 regulations and strategies in several developing countries, we strongly recommend that the GoSL enact carbon trading regulations to provide confidence to entities receiving Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs) and direction to competent domestic authorities on project selection and scope. In doing so, we note the GoSL’s experience with the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol and advise that any shortcomings experienced in the implementation phase of the CDM are addressed in fulfilling all operational and reporting aspects of Article 6.
- e. **Intellectual Property Rights:** The GoSL and Parties should work towards strengthening intellectual property rights, ensuring that developing countries have access to patented climate technologies and technical assistance essential to climate-related innovations. We call on the GoSL to work with the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) to accelerate the transfer of climate technologies to developing countries and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to align financing with the deployment of technologies.

4. Nature and Biodiversity

- a. **Protected Areas Expansion:** Urgent action is needed to conserve critical ecosystems for endemic and endangered species, ensuring protection from encroachment and exploitation. The GoSL must implement robust conservation strategies, engaging local communities and indigenous groups, to safeguard these biodiverse regions for future generations. The GoSL should ensure that local communities have equitable access to benefits from natural resources by implementing transparent resource management and having active community participation in decision-making. Bridging the gaps in information on environmental topics of national importance, such as but not limited to data on forest cover, is necessary to facilitate data-driven and science-based solutions. We urge the GoSL to enhance and safeguard existing legislative protections afforded to ecological areas and to ensure their full implementation. We urge the strengthening of

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existing EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) mechanisms that account for adequate study of the affected ecosystem's lifecycle and the stringent application of laws where corruption and bribery are used to bypass such mechanisms.

- b. Combatting Biodiversity Loss:** Biodiversity depletion poses a global challenge, particularly in developing nations that are starting to industrialize. Mitigation efforts should include reforestation initiatives, habitat restoration, and wildlife protection measures. Encouraging sustainable practices, reducing habitat fragmentation, and enforcing anti-poaching laws are vital to preserving biodiversity. We call for equal and informed resolutions to threatened species depletion, such as the Asian Elephant, through the stringent application of laws and real solutions through improved urban planning mechanisms and habitat-sensitive development propositions. We also call for the unequivocal end of targeted killing of species such as whales, a bedrock of maritime biodiversity and one of the world's largest carbon capturers, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and sharks for commercial and research purposes.
- c. Youth Engagement for Sustainable Ecosystems:** Youth involvement is pivotal in attracting innovative and diverse perspectives while ensuring a long-term commitment to preserving sustainable ecosystems. Encouraging educational programmes, fostering awareness campaigns, and providing platforms for youth-led conservation projects are imperative. We encourage empowering young leaders to advocate for biodiversity preservation, ensuring a more resilient and ecologically balanced future. We also urge the government to engage in information and resource exchanges with grassroots activists to ensure inclusive solutions cater to the area-specific needs of various ecosystems and the people living in them.

5. Ocean and Water

- a. Investment in the Tropical Belt:** Recognising the Tropical Belt's pivotal role as a climate modulator and environmental "shield" for the earth, we urge the GoSL to work with Annex 1 parties and secure climate finance for the Tropical Belt. In doing so, the GoSL must enhance sustainable ocean and water management practices, fortify resilience against climate-induced challenges, and foster inclusive governance. Collaboration on early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and capacity building is crucial to protecting vulnerable communities from water-related disasters in this region.
- b. Transboundary Water Agreements:** The GoSL, in coordination with other parties, must prioritize social inclusion and actively engage stakeholders in transboundary water agreements, including local communities and young people. Facilitating transparent dialogue, inclusive decision-making processes, and considering traditional knowledge are imperative to creating effective, sustainable, and just transboundary water projects. Parties must also ensure the equitable delivery of justice in instances of maritime law

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violations and account for the disproportionate technical legal expertise in instances of said violations in a way that honors the spirit of such agreements and treaties.

- c. The Human Right to Water:** Appreciating the United Nations' recognition of the right to water as a human right and calling for the inclusion of groundwater and rainwater in said right to end the weaponization of the same across countries and conflict zones in the world.

- d. Plastic Pollution Mitigation and the Private Sector:** We call on Sri Lanka to enhance efforts to mitigate ocean plastic pollution. Implementing robust recycling infrastructure, banning single-use plastics, and promoting eco-friendly alternatives are necessary. Emphasising the importance of public awareness campaigns to encourage behavioural changes towards reduced plastic use and responsible waste management. In addition to refining corporate social responsibility plans, the GoSL should establish stringent regulatory frameworks to enforce corporate accountability for their oceanic impact. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and instituting penalties for non-compliance are essential to ensuring responsible business practices. We acknowledge the progressive representations made by the GoSL at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to Develop a Legally Binding Instrument on Plastic Pollution, including in the Marine Environment, and call on the GoSL to encourage all parties to ensure that relevant international instruments account for the entire life-cycle of plastic, from its production to disposal.

6. Global Stocktake

- a. Enhancing Mitigation Commitments:** Recognising the critical misalignment of global emissions with Paris Agreement goals, the GoSL and all parties must elevate ambition. We encourage the GoSL to engage in this year's Global Stocktake meaningfully and raise its ambitions in the successive NDC that will be submitted by 2025. Moreover, stringent measures must be implemented, including a complete stop on new fossil fuel subsidies, exploration, and extraction, fostering economic diversification. Recognizing the interconnected nature of the climate crisis with fossil fuel concerns, we urge all parties to adopt a robust stance by considering the exclusion of significant fossil fuel entities from UNFCCC events. Additionally, we propose the limitation of hosting rights for states that significantly contribute to fossil fuel propagation to safeguard the integrity of COP and prevent it from being utilised as a platform for entities seeking to embellish their international image amidst climate change challenges.

- b. Inclusive National Stocktakes:** Parties are encouraged to establish national stocktakes beyond governmental boundaries. By fostering collaboration and shared responsibility, such integrative approaches can unlock a multitude of innovative solutions and ensure a comprehensive understanding of national climate efforts.

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7. Loss and Damage

- a. Urgent Need for Financial Resources:** Recognising the critical importance of new, additional, and predictable financial resources to aid vulnerable developing countries in addressing both economic and non-economic losses linked to climate change-induced loss and damage, especially in the face of extreme weather events and slow-onset events. We call on the streamlined implementation of the Loss and Damage Financing Facility, which was mandated at the twenty-seventh Conference of Parties under decision 2/CP.27. We urge the GoSL to call on Annex 1 countries to honour pledges and work swiftly to operationalize the agreed-upon loss and damage fund as promised and to ensure the swift and efficient dissemination of loss and damage funds to climate-vulnerable countries that have already been dealing with the devastating impacts of climate change for decades. We call for the loss and damage policy to be all-encompassing, holistic, and not limited to niches.
- b. Inclusive Participation and Collaboration:** Advocating for inclusive participation and collaboration in operationalizing loss and damage mechanisms and stressing the need to prioritise grant-based funding to uplift the disproportionately climate-vulnerable non-Annex 1 Parties, we urge the GoSL to continue to collaboratively work with the Annex 1 Parties in accessing both financial and non-financial support for all developing countries.

8. Women and Gender

- a. Meaningful Participation and Representation:** We advocate for the meaningful participation of marginalised genders across all levels of climate decision-making. Out of the 110 heads of state and government at COP27 last year, only seven were women. Empowering these voices and ensuring their representation within government bodies is crucial to creating inclusive and equitable climate governance.
- b. Addressing Gaps in Life Skills:** According to the UNDP, women and children are 14 times more likely to die during disasters than men; of the 230,000 people killed in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, 70 percent were women. The U.N. Environment Programme estimates that roughly 80 percent of the people displaced by climate change are female. However, cultural and societal norms often hold women back from accessing life-saving skills as trivial as swimming. We ask the GoSL to invest in addressing the gaps in life-saving skills while ensuring that societal stigma does not hold women back from accessing these emergency response skills.
- c. Gender-Responsive Climate Initiatives and Finance:** Investment in gender-responsive climate initiatives is essential. Prioritising women and marginalised genders in

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mitigation, adaptation projects, policies, and resulting social safety nets are critical for building sustainable and lasting resilience, especially in underrepresented areas. Equitable climate finance mechanisms should acknowledge diverse needs and contributions across genders. Financial assistance must take into account the wage gaps, especially where women are the primary income earners, to ensure that resilience is equal and considerate of the patriarchal economic values that disproportionately affect women.

- d. **Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health:** Universal access to quality and affordable, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services is urgent. Championing laws and policies that enhance social protections and deliver essential services, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), particularly during climate-induced disasters, is crucial for health equity and resilience-building.

9. Health and Rights

- a. **Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Climate Action:** The Paris Agreement acknowledges in its Preamble ‘the responsibility of the Parties to respect, promote, and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities, and people in vulnerable situations, and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women, and intergenerational equity’ when taking action to address climate change. Drawing attention to the landmark resolution 76/300 adopted by the General Assembly on July 28, 2022, which recognised the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all human beings, we invite the GoSL to employ an HRBA in their local, regional, and global climate action. Applauding the state parties that have already set the course, we emphasise the importance of taking measures to domestically recognise and enable this right as a fundamental right by incorporating it into the Constitution. We highlight that in the current context of aggravated climate change, it is progressive and vital to recognise this right as an absolute right inextricably linked to the right to life.
- b. **Rights of Environmental Defenders and Activists:** We emphasise the need for Sri Lanka to condemn and actively combat human rights violations by climate and environmental activists. It is necessary to ensure the freedom of expression of these groups by acknowledging their rights through the establishment of more robust legal mechanisms, the removal of legislative obstacles to freedom of expression, and the allocation of resources for their protection and security. We highlight the crucial role played by climate and environmental activists, especially youth, in striving for climate action.
- c. **Mental Health:** We call on the GoSL to incorporate the consideration of climate change's effects on mental health into Sri Lanka's National Mental Health Policy, provide training for healthcare professionals to recognise and manage mental health issues linked to climate change and disaster risk, and educate media organisations on ethical reporting regarding mental health and climate change. We also urge the GoSL to establish community-focused mental health initiatives and

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awareness campaigns, integrate resilient livelihood strategies into climate policies with a priority on mental health, oversee the monitoring and progress of psychosocial support services, facilitate early intervention and prevention access, and enhance funding and monitoring efforts for mental health services in affected areas. We encourage the GoSL to invest in Nature-Based Solutions and Nature-Connectedness to boost mental health and climate change resilience in urban development planning.

10. Climate Justice and Finance

- a. Debt Crisis and Climate Risks:** We acknowledge the pledge made by Sri Lanka to establish a Climate Justice Forum in coalition with the climate-vulnerable Global South countries. We recognise the urgent need for equitable climate finance and debt relief for countries in the Global South, recalling the disproportionate debt repayment burden on vulnerable nations, hindering their ability to address the escalating impacts of the climate crisis. Highlight the inadequacy of existing initiatives addressing the interconnection of debt and climate crises. Building upon global institutions' limited actions despite the clear links between debt and climate impacts, we call on the GoSL, through the Climate Justice Forum, to advocate for justice for all countries impacted by the dire debt crisis.
- b. Climate Finance for Development:** Expressing grave concern about the growing gap between the needs of developing country parties and the support provided, we urge the GoSL to call on parties to meet their financial commitments and accelerate financial support to developing countries. We seek adequate, equitable, and predictable climate finance that considers the specific development needs of each developing nation. Emphasising the critical role of grants for mitigation and adaptation in vulnerable regions, we recommend that the GoSL call on multilateral development banks to reform practices and priorities to address the climate emergency adequately and divest from all fossil fuel investments.
- c. Economic Justice and Climate Impact:** Acknowledging the pressing need to address economic justice in the context of climate change, we urge the GoSL to encourage parties to ensure that marginalized communities in climate-vulnerable countries are not disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. Prioritising climate resilience measures and providing financial support to vulnerable populations will be pivotal in achieving economic justice within the climate action agenda.

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Sri Lanka Youth Statement to COP28 was presented to H.E. Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka who is leading the National Delegation of Sri Lanka for the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

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