



PRESS RELEASE - Government of the Republic of Vanuatu

Editor's note: Interviews with Vanuatu officials, youth groups, and experts are available. B-roll and other press materials [here](#) (password: icjao2023).

Vanuatu Government Comms Pack [here](#), w/ Prime Minister's remarks [here](#) (video) & [here](#) (text)

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United Nations adopts historic resolution seeking clarity on countries' climate change and human rights obligations under international law

Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau calls decision “a win for climate justice of epic proportions”

Resolution introduced by 18 core countries led by Vanuatu—and championed by youth groups—asks the UN's International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on a critical set of questions on climate obligations

UNITED NATIONS (March 29, 2023)—In a triumph for global climate diplomacy, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly today adopted a [resolution](#) introduced by 18 nations led by Vanuatu asking for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to determine the role of countries' obligations in upholding the rule of international law, protecting human rights, promoting intergenerational equity and enabling ambition in climate negotiations.

The resolution was adopted by consensus

Vanuatu is one of many small island nations in the midst of a climate crisis. Earlier this month, the country was hit by two Category 4 tropical cyclones in less than five days—an unprecedented weather event resulting in an ongoing state of emergency that is estimated to cost Vanuatu more than half of its annual gross domestic product.

“Today we have witnessed a win for climate justice of epic proportions,” said **Ishmael Kalsakau, Prime Minister of Vanuatu**, in a video statement responding to the adoption of the

resolution. “Vanuatu sees today’s historic resolution as the beginning of a new era in multilateral climate cooperation, one that is more fully focused on upholding the rule of international law and an era that places human rights and intergenerational equity at the forefront of climate decision making.”

The resolution asks the ICJ to pay particular attention to the harm inflicted on small island nations, which are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, increased and more severe storms, and other climate impacts. The initiative is aimed at providing clarity on existing international law as it relates to climate change and strengthening the rule of existing international law.

The idea for obtaining an ICJ advisory opinion began with law students at the University of the South Pacific, who persuaded Pacific Island leaders to take the issue to the United Nations. The government of Vanuatu launched its campaign in September 2021, and through careful diplomacy and with the support of a core group of countries and youth-led organizations, secured the introduction and adoption of the resolution.

The core group of countries comprises Angola, Antigua & Barbuda, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Germany, Liechtenstein, Federated States of Micronesia, Morocco, Mozambique, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Uganda, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

[Next steps](#) include communication of the resolution by the UN to the ICJ, and the ICJ commencing with the legal proceedings.

Ishmael Kalsakau, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, said about the UN decision to adopt the resolution:

“Today we have witnessed a win for climate justice of epic proportions.

I am proud beyond measure that today the United Nations General Assembly, which is the international community’s main policymaking body, has overwhelmingly adopted Vanuatu’s Resolution on climate change and human rights.

For more than 30 long years, most countries have considered that their only obligations on climate action are found within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

But friends, the UNFCCC is only one international legal instrument, and one in which there are few legally binding or enforceable obligations. That is why we see time and time again the pledges, promises and commitments made under the Paris Agreement seem to take us dangerously closer to the limit of 1.5 degrees.

But today, the nations of the world asked a critical set of questions on climate obligations to the world’s highest judicial body, the UN’s International Court of Justice. The Court will help to clarify the other legal instruments under international law that also contain climate obligations.

Importantly, the Court will tell us what the legal consequences are for states that disregard these laws, and cause climate and environmental harm.

Vanuatu sees today's historic Resolution as the beginning of a new era in multilateral climate cooperation, one that is more fully focused on upholding the rule of international law and an era that places human rights and intergenerational equity at the forefront of climate decision making.

The very fact that a small Pacific island nation like Vanuatu was able to successfully spearhead such a transformative outcome speaks to the incredible support from all corners of the globe.

Today I would like to celebrate with you all this historic win for climate justice.

I celebrate with the Pacific island law students who first lobbied the Government of Vanuatu to take up this fight.

I celebrate with previous administrations and leaders of Vanuatu who heeded the call of our youth.

I celebrate with the civil society from across the Pacific and indeed across the world who have stood by our side each and every day of this campaign.

I celebrate with the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum, the Caribbean Community, and the Organization of the African Caribbean and Pacific States who were the early champions of this initiative, endorsing it against all odds.

I celebrate with the 18 core countries of the Resolution drafting group who co-led with Vanuatu the challenging yet rewarding consultation process at the UN and beyond.

I celebrate with the majority of nations from all geographic regions that eventually co-sponsored this Resolution with us.

And most importantly, I celebrate today with the people of Vanuatu, who are still reeling from the devastation from 2 back to back cyclones this month, caused by the fossil fuels and greenhouse emissions that they are not responsible for. To my people, today shows us that the world stands with Vanuatu.

This celebration is a win for the rule of law, for protecting human rights, for improving multilateral climate cooperation, for climate justice and for acting with ambition to address the planetary climate crisis.

The road ahead is long, and we need countries to approach it with purpose. I hope that all countries will make robust and progressive submissions so that the International Court of Justice can make its advisory opinion based on the best legal interpreters on the planet. All States have a role to play.

To the rest of the world, know that Vanuatu will continue to lead from the front with highest climate ambition. You can count on Vanuatu to be your staunchest ally in the collective fight for saving our Blue Planet.”

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