



CANARI POLICY BRIEF No.32

Call to Action for Climate Justice in The Caribbean

2026

Introduction

The Caribbean is facing increasingly severe impacts of climate change, which is recognised as an existential threat to the region's development. Caribbean stakeholders are increasingly calling attention to climate change as an issue of climate justice, requiring it be addressed centring equity and fairness in terms of who is responsible for causing climate change, who benefits, who is harmed, and how human rights are impacted.

Responding to this call, in January 2026 the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) convened a “Partners Forum: Towards climate justice in the Caribbean” in Barbados to deepen shared understanding and to strengthen collaborations to address climate justice. The Forum was attended by 82 participants spanning frontline communities, human rights defenders and civil society advocates, including members of the Caribbean Climate Justice Alliance; members of the legal profession; climate finance experts; representatives of key technical agencies in the Caribbean; academia; and international organisations and funding agencies and partners supporting climate and environmental justice.

The Partners Forum was held with financial support from the Open Society Foundations, Clara Lionel Foundation, Legal Empowerment Fund, Climate Works Foundation, Panta Rhea Foundation, and in collaboration with the Caribbean Environmental Law Unit, Faculty of Law, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus and Climate Analytics Caribbean.

Participants at the Forum committed to work in solidarity for climate justice in the Caribbean and called for action to ensure that justice, dignity, and human rights stand at the centre of the global and Caribbean climate response.

Call to action by participants at the “Partners Forum: Towards climate justice in the Caribbean”

We are calling on governments and regional agencies to:

- integrate human rights-based approaches into climate policy and law;
- operationalise human rights through protecting freedom of expression and investing in arts and culture as climate justice infrastructure;
- uphold rights to information, participation, and justice for Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other marginalised peoples facing injustices across the Caribbean;
- protect and support climate, environmental and human rights defenders and activists across the Caribbean region;
- invest in Caribbean-led research, governance, and resilience initiatives;
- ensure transparency and accountability in climate finance;
- shift from debt-based climate and disaster finance to grants, and strengthen accountable and inclusive recovery systems;
- address land and housing insecurity underlying vulnerabilities;
- partner with non-state actors to enhance the availability of data in support of greater regional resilience through development and promotion of Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other local and traditional knowledge systems and approaches; and
- engage meaningfully with Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities and civil society as partners in climate action.

This policy brief is based on dialogue at CANARI's “Partners Forum: Towards climate justice in the Caribbean” held on January 19-20, 2026 in Barbados. It was prepared by Nicole Leotaud drawing from rapporteur reports by Carole Excell, Janine Coye-Felson, Rueanna Haynes, and Anthony Vieira with additional input from session facilitators, Alana Malinde S.N. Lancaster, Tighe Geoghegan, and Cletus Springer.

Supported by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

We are calling on funders and the international community to:

- recognise climate justice as a human rights obligation;
- act in solidarity with Caribbean governments and peoples seeking climate justice; and
- support transformative, equitable, and human rights-based climate solutions.

We recognise that we too have an important part to play and have committed to:

- work together to build understanding, share experiences, and connect networks to drive active operationalisation of human rights in climate responses;
- further collaboration at all levels and amongst all key actors in the region to advance a just climate finance agenda for the Caribbean; and
- strengthen regional cooperation on climate justice through dialogue, capacity building, collective advocacy, and action.

Key messages from the Forum

This Policy Brief also outlines the key messages which emerged from the rich dialogue which can lead to a Caribbean-centred framework for climate justice grounded in human rights, equity, solidarity, and accountability.

Key messages

1. **Climate change is fundamentally a justice issue for the Caribbean.**
2. **Human rights must be at the centre of the response to climate change.**
3. **Delivering climate justice must address the lived experiences of those facing the worst injustices and ensure that their voices are heard, their losses are recognised, and they have the freedom to imagine and demand a just future.**
4. **Recent international advisory opinions strengthen the legal and moral basis for climate justice for the Caribbean.**
5. **Climate finance must deliver justice for the Caribbean.**

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Climate change is fundamentally a justice issue for the Caribbean.

The Caribbean faces a ‘triple inequality’ given that the region contributes negligibly to global climate change, but Caribbean states and territories are among the most vulnerable to its impacts and have limited capacity to resist or recover from impacts.

While much of the discourse on climate justice has taken place at the global level, stakeholders must also consider the lived realities of those on the frontline of climate impacts in the Caribbean to understand how their human rights and developmental opportunities are impacted, and how to work through care and solidarity to support their pathways to justice.

It is only when we deeply understand the injustices faced and the underlying violence and oppression at the root of these injustices that we can support efforts to seek justice and build resilience. The structural injustices stemming from the extractionist economic models of the colonial period persist at the regional and national levels and must be recognised and dismantled. Climate justice must therefore challenge structural power disparities and reduce marginalisation, exploitation and oppression. Failure to enforce human rights obligations in climate action will perpetuate climate injustice.

The climate crisis is also a human rights crisis and responding to both is a legal obligation.

The climate crisis is essentially a human rights crisis which affects all, but some more acutely than others. As elucidated in Advisory Opinion 32/25 of the Inter American Court of Human Rights, this includes particularly vulnerable States, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Caribbean, and persons in vulnerable and marginalised situations, including Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, women and LGBTQI+ persons, children, the elderly, migrants and persons with disabilities. The rights of future generations must also be considered. Lived experiences in the Caribbean confirm that climate impacts are experienced disproportionately, with impacts being felt most severely on those who are most exposed due to their livelihoods and location, but who are marginalised due to

their intersecting identities and who may lack the capabilities to respond. Climate justice must move beyond techno-managerialist climate solutions and expose the root causes of power and social disparities. Using an intersectional lens, climate justice must consider how gender, race, poverty, Indigeneity, and other identities amplify injustices.



Participants of the CANARI Partners Forum: Towards climate justice in the Caribbean—Barbados, January 2026. Credit CANARI

Responding to the climate crisis and the human rights crisis is not optional. Both crises create legal obligations of states to protect the multiple human rights impacted by climate change, including the right to a healthy environment, life, food, health, water, housing, and development. However, human rights tend to be referenced more in principle than through concrete obligations, accountability, participation, remedy, or non-discrimination mechanisms. Several international pronouncements have been made on the need to address this gap and deepen the nexus between human rights and climate action. States have an obligation to ensure that climate actions address harms borne by rights holders, who benefits, and what duties follow in terms of ensuring transparency, participation in decision-making, accountability, remedies, reparation, and restitution.

Delivering climate justice for the Caribbean must be grounded in lived experiences of those facing the worst injustices and ensure that their voices are heard, their losses are recognised, and they have the freedom to imagine and demand a just future.

Climate change is intensifying existing social, economic, and institutional inequalities, leaving those who contribute least to the crisis bearing the greatest losses, while recovery systems remain under-resourced, debt-driven, and unjust. Seven types of climate injustice are being experienced in the Caribbean: recognitional injustice, distributional injustice, procedural injustice, restorative injustice, retributive

injustice, intergenerational injustice, and injustice in natural and cultural heritage system outcomes.

Climate justice for frontline communities, including Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendent communities, requires recognising non-economic loss; protecting Indigenous and local knowledge and culture; and supporting diverse, community-defined forms of activism that connect culture, research, and accountability. Procedural rights to access information, participate in decision-making, and seek justice when human rights are impacted must be respected. Local and Indigenous governance concepts should be operationalised within policy and organisational structures. Regional coordination and rights-based legal strategies must be strengthened, including through the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement).

Increasingly severe hurricanes pummeling the Caribbean reveal distributional, procedural, and restorative injustices. Extreme weather events expose deep-rooted injustices related to land rights, housing, livelihoods, and governance. Communities living in areas that should never have been developed into settlements or areas for cultivation, often due to historical exclusion, marginalisation or informality, suffer the greatest losses. Small farmers, fisherfolk, informal workers, refugees, and asylum seekers are also disproportionately affected. Weak institutional capacity, politicised aid distribution, and poor technical communication on preparedness further compounds harm.

However, fear of retaliation, economic vulnerability, and informal censorship are limiting the ability of human rights defenders – including artists, cultural workers, and community voices – to hold power to account and to articulate the lived realities of climate harm. Without deliberate investment in cultural expression, protection of voices, and recognition of non-economic loss, climate justice risks becoming a technocratic project disconnected from people's lives. Recognising, protecting and supporting those who are defending human rights which are being impacted by climate change is essential.

Recent international advisory opinions provide legal and moral support for pursuing climate justice for the Caribbean.

Recent advisory opinions by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirm that states have obligations under international law to prevent significant climate harm and protect human rights. States must meet their legal obligations to address climate change – including obligations on due diligence, cooperation, mitigation, adaptation, and climate

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finance – as an issue of climate justice. Consequently, these international bodies have unanimously laid down several features of state responsibility, including internationally wrongful acts, which states are required to act upon in the face of the climate crisis. While the majority are of significance for the Caribbean region, the duties regarding international cooperation and assistance underscored by all three opinions are important for achieving climate justice. Additionally, the advisory opinions have transformed the policy and negotiating landscape, have embedded the role of human rights in the climate emergency, and offer expanded judicial opportunities for parties who seek more meaningful participation in climate decision-making processes, and redress against climate injustice in international, regional and domestic courts. Within this context, the advisory opinions strengthen the goals of the Escazú Agreement. Caribbean states and civil society should actively engage with and utilise these emerging legal principles in diplomacy, litigation, and policy development.

Climate finance must be founded on sovereignty of Caribbean states and take a human rights-based approach to reach those who most face climate injustices.

The Caribbean must free itself from climate finance models that are based on neocolonial structures of dependency. Climate finance must address climate injustices, particularly by applying a human rights approach to address injustices

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faced by those in vulnerable situations and marginalised by their intersecting identities.

Just climate finance requires a reform of the systems that exacerbate vulnerability and promote dependency. Climate finance which is just and equitable for the Caribbean must be adequate to respond to the scale of the climate impacts facing Caribbean SIDS; predictable and accessible; primarily grant-based, not debt-creating; and responsive

to adaptation and loss and damage, not mitigation alone. Eligibility criteria based solely on income status fail to reflect climate vulnerability and must be reformed. Loss and damage financing is a matter of climate justice, not charity. Climate finance mechanisms must centre human rights and equity; support community-based and locally led adaptation; and ensure transparency, participation, and accountability.

A system/charter of national accounts could be used to ensure that finance goes where it is needed. Education for policy makers could support regional efforts. Regional coordination and policy reform are needed to increase availability and use of data to support just climate finance and address key risks and harms. Blended finance options can be explored, but many structural hurdles need to be addressed for these to be accessed. Rules of the existing institutions need to be engaged more tactically. Civil society, grass roots organisations and individual activists should be engaged to support just climate finance through their work in education and awareness, advocacy, implementation, and most importantly, accountability to ensure that finance gets to where it is needed the most. Governments, academia and civil society all have a role to play. In this context, disruption must remain on the agenda.

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is an independent, technical institute working across the Caribbean with a mission to promote and facilitate stakeholder participation and collaboration in the stewardship of renewable natural resources in the Caribbean. For more than 30 years, CANARI has been a persistent and influential voice for justice in the stewardship of natural resources across the region.

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