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Acting through art, poetry that inspires climate action

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We are living in a world with multiple crises. The call for urgent action has never been more pressing as we witness increasing impacts of climate and biodiversity emergencies. Extreme weather events demand too much of our strength and resilience, forcing us to question how we will maintain our hope and courage towards pursuing climate justice.

Last week in the Hague, we participated in a Candlelight Vigil that honoured the brave individuals and communities who have dedicated their lives to the fight against climate change and remembered those who have tragically lost their lives in the process. This gathering took place near the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where the historic hearings on the world's governments' obligations with respect to climate change are taking place. Here, we collectively created the stage for meaningful dialogue about climate justice, and solidarity with community testimonies and realities of what needs to be heard at the ICJ.



A poignant and reflective Candlelight Vigil that honours the brave individuals and communities who have dedicated their lives to the fight against climate change and remember those who have tragically lost their lives. © Emiel Hornman / Greenpeace

We were forced to ask ourselves: how do we maintain our hope and courage while we pursue climate justice? Within this, the poems of Just Poetry were highlighted to reflect on frontline communities and allies in social movements visions for climate justice within the themes of “home” and “hope”.

Art and climate justice

While communities and organisations are challenging injustice at the world's highest courts, and scientists are gathering hard evidence to address the climate crisis, an equally powerful ally continues to make waves: **Artivism**.

Protest and activism can take many forms and happen in many places. Artivism pursues climate justice through artistic expression where we can envision a just future for us all. It raises awareness through storytelling, amplifying the voices of communities impacted by climate change and extreme weather events. It puts people at the center of the story of climate justice; and it shows the world that working together to create people power through the cultures and knowledge of impacted communities is the bedrock on which we must build a just future for all future generations.

In Greenpeace's history, activism started on the high seas. Since then, the climate justice movement has grown: it has stepped onto the streets in marches and demonstrations; it has taken the hot seat in interviews with media houses to make its message public; it has scaled buildings and dropped banners and blockaded streets; and it has stepped into courtrooms with the same determination that boarded the Rainbow Warrior in 1971.

Now, activists are writing poetry to share stories of hope and justice.

A Poetry Collection for Climate Justice

Together with our partners, Greenpeace is inviting activists and artists to write and share their poetry about climate justice. Greenpeace has a long legacy of activism in all forms, including activism and creative actions and, in collaboration with communities, the Just Poetry project builds upon this powerful legacy. Social and environmental movements from around the world have used art and creativity as a way of preserving culture, advocate for their rights and collective justice, and share visions for the future.

Just Poetry aims to continue this legacy of activism and explore the themes of “home and hope”, as we invite poets and cultural workers from communities around the world to share their visions for climate justice. As hearings on governments' obligations to protect the places we call home are underway at the world's highest court, Just Poetry invites us to ask ourselves: what are our hopes for justice? What are our hopes for the places we love? How do we envision their futures?

A Poetry Polyphony at the International Court of Justice

Vinzealhar Nen from Papua New Guinea is one of the poets involved in the Just Poetry Project and in her words, “Coming from a culture where storytelling and verbal intergenerational dialogue is used, I have learnt that writing is just as important, if not more. Pacific Islanders have always been one with nature. Most of our cultures derive from all things we see around us.

“With the climate crisis, many homes are lost; not just homes but our cultures, traditions and languages, and this is so much more than losing our land and Oceans. It is devastating for our people, but in times of crisis, it is good to remind ourselves of our resilience, resilience that was practiced by our forefathers and that influences and continues to drive us today.

“Since I was 12, I have used poetry as a way to remind my people of who we are, and that we can change the tides, and we can continue to fight the good fight. The prompts of hope and home are very strong to me. Living on vulnerable islands and facing frontline effects, I have no choice but to have hope; if I don't, I would watch my home fade and regret not fighting and giving my best shot.”

Poetry is a practice of creating caring, collective and courageous spaces for justice: in our language, imagination and relationships. Poetry asks us to communicate with other living beings and creates different understandings of the world as we know it. It is a practice that anchors remembrance, resistance and remedy; a practice that attempts to contribute to an alternative world-making. Just Poetry is an invitation for you.

An invitation

to understand, undo and renew,

to deconstruct, delight and rewrite,

to wonder, wait and relate,

to mourn, mark and re embark,

to comfort, connect and reflect,

to rally, reclaim and reframe,

to carry, care and repair,

an invitation to dare:

Just Poetry

Through poetry we celebrate the beauty, power and inherently provocative and stirring complexity of language: important muscles that we must use in our journey together. The poems gathered for this project gesture toward some essential considerations of home and hope, and, unsurprisingly, adjacent matters of community and privilege, responsibility and greed, dreams and impossibilities, and the built and natural worlds, the latter movingly characterised as the depths of the seas and the magisterial elevations of the mountains.

Through this poetry project we reiterate the importance of verse as a means of personal and collective expression. In his elegy to WB Yeats in 1940, WH Auden wrote:

[...]

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives

In the valley of its making where executives

Would never want to tamper, flows on south

From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,

Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,

A way of happening, a mouth.

[...]

2024 is a different time and context to Yeats, and Just Poetry contemplates yet resists a shared, received elegiac tone. In our eyes, poetry can do something; it can make something happen: it is a space where our minds and hearts can meet, as one, for all.

Here are a few photos from the vigil and poetry reading.



A poignant and reflective Candlelight Vigil that honours the brave individuals and communities who have dedicated their lives to the fight against climate change and remember those who have tragically lost their lives. This gathering took place near the International Court of Justice, setting the stage for meaningful dialogue and solidarity with community voices and realities ...

Share your poetry for climate action with us and tag #GreenpeaceJustPoetry.

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