



Thessaloniki Sustainability Summit 2025

"10 Years Paris Agreement"

2nd - 3rd October, 2025,
Thessaloniki, Greece



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The 2025 “Thessaloniki Sustainability Summit” brought together scientists, policymakers, local authorities, entrepreneurs, and other key stakeholders to engage in a global dialogue marking the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, to contribute to the international conversation by assessing the progress made since the Agreement and exploring the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The 6th annual summit was organized by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Black Sea under the auspices of the Department of Civil Engineering at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS). The primary focus of the summit was the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, serving as a moment to reflect on progress, assess global positioning relative to the agreement's goals, and determine strategies moving toward the 2030 milestone. The global context is marked by turbulence and destabilization across political, economic, social, and technological systems. Despite a growing commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), progress, particularly on affordable and clean energy (SDG 7) and climate action (SDG 13), remains uneven. While rapid advancements have been made in renewable technologies, universal access to reliable, clean energy often remains exclusive, particularly in vulnerable regions.

The 2-day event featured six (6) panel sessions in total, during which prominent speakers discussed regional and thematic issues.

Day 1, held online, focused on the role of the World Academy of Art and Science in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, as well as the importance of the role of youths in present and future actions. Day 2, held in-person & streamed online, included discussions about the current status and future pathways of the Balkans, on the future through World Academy of Art and Science, and focused on two (2) specific SDGs: SDG 13-Climate Action and SDG 7-Affordable and Clean Energy, evaluating risks and opportunities of adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as the challenges and opportunities towards energy transition.



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Agenda

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Thursday, October 2nd, 2025	
14:30-15:00	Opening Welcome Speech: Garry Jacobs , President and CEO, World Academy of Art and Science
15:00-16:30	The role of the World Academy of Art and Science Moderator: Nicoalos Theodossiou , professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Chair of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS <u>Participants:</u> Phoebe Koundouri , professor, Athens University of Economics and Business and University of Cambridge, Chair of SDSN Global Climate Hub and Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Trustee of the WAAS Chantal-Line Carpentier , Head of Trade, Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, UNCTAD Amanda Ellis , Senior Director, Arizona State University Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory Denis Naughten , Former Minister for Climate Action and Environment, Ireland; Former Chair, Science & Technology Working Group, Inter-Parliamentary Union Josep Garí , Senior policy advisor at UNDP; Political ecologist; UN professional; Member of the management and advisory boards of various international funds and partnerships for climate action.
16:30-16:45	Break
16:45-18:00	The role of the youth branch of the World Academy of Art and Science and SDSN Youth in the implementation of the Paris Agreement Moderator: Evangelia Savvidou , MD, MScPH; Global Networks Manager & founding Regional Network Coordinator (Black Sea), SDSN Youth; Junior Fellow, WAAS; Climate Reality Leader <u>Participants:</u> Kehkashan Basu , Environmental and human rights activist; Founder and President, Green Hope Foundation, Junior Fellow of the WAAS Ash Pachauri , Director and Senior Mentor, Protect our Planet Movement, Junior Fellow of the WAAS Ibrahim Yunus , Network Coordinator, Youth Climate Collective, Surge Africa Organization, Junior Fellow of the WAAS Amer Qawasmi , Mentorship Project Officer, Local Pathways Fellowship, SDSN Youth; Private Sector Development Advisor, GIZ Jordan.
18:00-18:30	Closing - Conclusions

Faculty of Social and Economics Sciences (Room 319) Friday, October 3rd, 2025	
08:45 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:30	Opening - Welcome Speeches Ioannis Xenidis , professor, president of the Department of Civil Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece Nikos Eythimiadis , president and CEO of Thess INTEC Iakovos Michailidis , Vice Rector of International Relations and Outreach, Lifelong Learning and Student Care
09:30-11:00	The Balkans: Current Status and Future Pathways Moderator: Grigoris Zarotiadis , professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS <u>Participants:</u> Tamer Atabarut , professor Bogazici University, Türkiye, Board Member of SDSN Türkiye & Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Chair of Sustainability Commission Andjelka Mihajlov , professor, Former Minister for the Protection of Natural Resources and Environment, Republic of Serbia. Mila Popovich , Founder, EVOLving Leadership, Director General Directorate for Interculturalism, Government of Montenegro, Trustee of the WAAS Eden Mamut , professor, Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania, Secretary General of BSUN and Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS. Michael Christides , Former Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-12:00	Keynote Speech by prof. Mat Santamouris , professor of High-Performance Architecture at the University of New South Wales, Australia (<i>online</i>)
12:00-13:30	Our future through the eyes of the World Academy of Art and Science Moderator: Mila Popovich , Founder, EVOLving Leadership, Director General Directorate for Interculturalism, Government of Montenegro, Trustee of the WAAS <u>Participants:</u> Nicolaos Theodossiou , professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Chair of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS Eden Mamut , Professor and Director of the Institute for Nanotechnologies & Alternative Energy Sources at "Ovidius" University of Constanta, Romania, Secretary General of BSUN and Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS. Grigoris Zarotiadis , professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS Evangelia Savvidou , MD, MScPH; Global Networks Manager & founding Regional Network Coordinator (Black Sea), SDSN Youth; Junior Fellow, WAAS; Climate Reality Leader
13:30 - 15:00	Lunch Break

15:00 - 15:30	Keynote speech by prof. Jeffrey Sachs , professor at Columbia University, USA, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (<i>online</i>)
15:30 - 17:00	<p>SDG 13 - Climate Action: Evaluating the Risks and Opportunities of Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies</p> <p>Moderator: Nicolas Moussiopoulos, professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea</p> <p><u>Participants:</u></p> <p>Marina Stefanova, assoc. professor, Vice Dean of "Sustainability, Empowerment and Engagement", Sofia University, Bulgaria. Tamer Atabarut, professor Bogazici University, Türkiye, Board Member of SDSN Türkiye & Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Chair of Sustainability Commission Sergiy Byelikov, professor, former Rector of the National University "Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic", Honorary Academician of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea. Prodromos Zanis, professor, Department of Meteorology and Climatology, School of Geology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Dimitris Dimitriadis, Former President of the External Relations Section of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)</p>
17:00-18:15	<p>SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of the Energy Transition</p> <p>Moderator: Nicoalos Theodossiou, professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, Chair of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS</p> <p><u>Participants:</u></p> <p>Eden Mamut, professor, Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania, Secretary General of BSUN and Member of the Leadership Council of SDSN Black Sea, Fellow of the WAAS. Alexandra Ioannidou, professor, Department of Nuclear and elementary particle physics, School of Physics, Aristotle university of Thessaloniki, Greece Agis Papadopoulos, professor, Department of Energy, School of Mechanical Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Chairman of the Board of the Thessaloniki Water Supply and Sewerage company. Evangelia Loukogeorgaki, professor, Department of Hydraulics and Environmental Engineering, School of Civil Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece</p>
18:15 - 18:30	Closing - Conclusions

Please note that all hours are in EEST (Athens time)



The Summit will be available online [via Zoom](#). **Registration is needed**

To stay up-to-date visit the official webpage of the Summit.



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Outcomes

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Day One_1st Session: The role of the World Academy of Art and Science

The first session featured distinguished experts assessing the progress, challenges, and future direction of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. The Landmark Nature of the Paris Agreement and SDGs: The year 2015, which saw the establishment of the Paris Agreement and the Agenda 2030/SDGs, was described as a landmark moment in human history. It was the first time 193 to 195 countries of the world agreed on such an ambitious program for addressing global challenges. The Paris Agreement is considered the most existential and fundamental treaty of this century, structuring societal and economic changes.

2. Progress, Setbacks, and Challenges: Speakers acknowledged that significant progress has been made. Renewable energy investment has surged (doubled since 2015), and renewables now account for two-fifths of electricity generation. Global awareness of climate risk has risen. However, this progress is not enough. The global level of SDG implementation is low, estimated at only 17% to 18%.

Key obstacles identified included:

- **Political Will and Finance:** The world possesses the necessary science, technology, and financial resources (estimated global wealth of \$700 trillion) to address climate change and the SDGs, but lacks the political will and effective economic policies to channel that money appropriately.
- **The Implementation Gap and Accountability:** Agreements alone are insufficient; they must be translated into action. The most crucial missing element is accountability and the lack of an explicit institutional mechanism dedicated to implementing the SDGs within the multilateral system.
- **Economic Distortions and Subsidies:** The dominant economic model has maximized economic growth at the expense of environmental and social equity. Since the Paris Agreement, banks have spent an estimated \$7 trillion on fossil fuel investment. Furthermore, fossil fuel subsidies amount to an estimated \$7.1 trillion annually, the removal of which could cut global emissions by three-quarters by 2030.
- **Global Turbulence:** Events like the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and movements away from democratic principles have destabilized the world and set efforts "completely off track".
- **Inequality:** SDG 10 (Inequality) and environmental goals are currently regressing. The financing gap for renewable energy investments in developing countries is estimated at \$2 trillion.
- **Gender Equality:** No single country has achieved full gender equality (SDG 5). Women and children constitute 80% of the victims of the climate crisis.

Day One_1st Session: The role of the World Academy of Art and Science

3. Future Strategies and the Way Forward: The consensus was that the next decade must be the decade of implementation. Strategies proposed included:

- Implementation Pathways: Designing explicit, science-based, and co-designed transition pathways for every year, detailing policies, technologies, and finance, developed in collaboration with stakeholders.
- Bridging Science and Governance: Scientists need to design research for policy uptake and be equipped to communicate their findings for policy use, ensuring that research evidence lands in policy and budgets.
- Trade Alignment: Trade regimes should be revised to align with the SDGs and the climate agenda, recognizing that trade is a powerful lever to reduce implementation costs.
- Reframing Climate Action: The Paris Agreement must be framed as economic development—building the economies of the future—rather than just an environmental issue.
- Local Action: Implementation requires focusing on sustainable land management and the energy transition, recognizing that these two areas fundamentally restructure society and local economies.

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Day One_2nd Session: The role of the youth branch of the World Academy of Art and Science and SDSN Youth in the implementation of the Paris Agreement

The second session focused on the contributions and perspectives of the younger generation, recognizing that youth are crucial "key players".

1. Youth Perspective on Progress and Gaps: Young leaders affirmed that while high-level commitments and strategies from governments regarding decarbonization are "massive," implementation is lacking. The Paris Agreement references human rights, gender equality, and intergenerational equity, but these commitments are often left as "words on paper".

2. Implementation Through Local Action: The youth emphasized that the ability to deliver on the Paris Agreement depends on local responses. Youth organizations are leading change by "transforming promises into practice".

Examples of localized action include:

- Solar-powered academies and computer labs.
- Installation of deep-bore tube wells and solar water farms to ensure clean water access.
- Utilizing agrivoltaics and organic farming to boost food security and yields.
- Bringing local actions to the highest levels of policy making, thereby bridging the gap between top-down strategies and bottom-up processes.

3. Necessary Policy and Cultural Shifts: Several critical shifts were highlighted:

- From Sustainability to Regeneration: The concept of sustainability is no longer enough. The approach must shift to regeneration, which requires restoring what has been lost, healing social fabrics, and designing systems that are actively "life-giving".
- Democratization of Finance: Access to climate finance for youth and local communities is severely limited. There is a call to democratize climate financing to resource those who act locally.
- Meaningful Participation: Youth must move beyond being rhetorically celebrated speakers and be recognized as co-negotiators and essential parts of strategic planning.
- Bridging Silos: A major gap is the lack of connection between high-level governmental strategies and the localized implementation efforts led by youth organizations, which are often treated merely as a "nice-to-have" social responsibility.
- Unity and Hope: The challenge requires the unity of all generations ("the wisdom of the experience and in the energy of the youth") guided by science and commitment

Day Two_1st Session: The Balkans: Current Status and Future Pathways

The Balkans are identified as a strategic geopolitical link between major continents, making the region crucial for trade, energy, and influence. However, the region stands at a critical juncture, viewed either as a zone of intense competition or an area with potential for cooperation and security integration.

Key Challenges and Risks:

- **Geopolitical Fragility:** The Balkans are described as a critical and fragile geopolitical region.
- **Implementation Gap:** Despite the existence of numerous national climate action documents (such as NDCs), effective implementation is seriously questioned.
- **Climate Setbacks:** The region is notably receding in progress concerning SDG 13 (Climate Action), driven by reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Severe atmospheric pollution and ecosystem degradation persist, with specific cities frequently registering among the world's most polluted.
- **Institutional Weakness:** The long duration of the European Union (EU) integration process has caused fatigue, providing external actors opportunities to exploit the situation.
- **Opportunities and Solutions:**
 - **Governance and Stability:** There is an urgent need to promote democratic governance, strengthen the rule of law, and institutional resilience, aiming to transition the region into an area of growth and cooperation.
 - **Regional Cooperation:** Cross-national collaboration is essential for managing overlapping crises (climate, energy dependency) and achieving climate adaptation goals.
 - **Economic Leverage:** The development of an innovation and technology center (Thess INTEC) is viewed as a groundbreaking initiative capable of bridging the long-standing gap between academic research and industry application across the region. The strategic use of EU resources and combating corruption were also highlighted as vital.

Day Two_Keynote Speech: Prof. Mat Santamouris

The challenge of urban overheating severely impacts approximately 1.7 billion people globally, with the frequency of overheating having tripled since the 1980s.

Impacts and Costs:

- **Health and Social Consequences:** Heat-related mortality risk is significantly elevated (up to 80% higher) for low-income populations, who often reside in high-temperature areas with inadequate housing quality. Overheating contributes substantially to increased domestic violence, crime, and mental health issues.
- **Economic Strain:** Economic costs are tremendous, stemming from reduced human productivity (which can drop by 60% in extreme heat) and infrastructure resilience needs (estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually in losses for developed countries).
- **Technological and Policy Solutions:**
- **Innovative Materials:** The deployment of photonic materials (daytime radiative coolers) can achieve temperatures 6 to 8 degrees below ambient temperature without consuming energy, acting as "natural air conditioners". The implementation of these materials has demonstrated success in significantly reducing city-wide peak temperatures (e.g., by 4.6°C in one major project).
- **Limitations of Greenery:** Simply planting trees is often an insufficient solution, particularly above 35°C, as trees cease cooling mechanisms (evapotranspiration) and may increase toxic emissions.
- **Monetization of Externalities:** Policymakers must create mechanisms to monetize the impact of overheating, ensuring that entities contributing to temperature increases face costs, while those implementing cooling solutions receive financial benefits.

Day Two_2nd Session: Our Future through the eyes of the World Academy of Art and Science

Global knowledge institutions, such as the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS), established in 1960 by intellectuals concerned about the profound consequences of scientific advancements, advocate for the social responsibility of science.

Mission and Influence:

- **Moral Guidance:** The academy aims to serve as a moral compass for science and policy, fostering accountability, integrity, and responsibility.
- **Integrated Knowledge:** A core function is to bridge the historical separation (divorce) between humanities (arts) and natural sciences, seeking to unite diverse interests and expertise with a shared vision for humanity.
- **Academia in Action:** Educational institutions must evolve, moving away from outdated systems to cultivate new multidisciplinary, integrated knowledge where educators act as guides for students.
- **Global Policy Role:** Working through affiliations with international bodies (UN, UNESCO), such institutions mobilize global opinion and contribute to the shaping of future policies, emphasizing integrated approaches and global governance models.

Day Two_3rd Session: SDG 13-Climate Action: Evaluating the Risks and Opportunities of Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies

SDG 13 (Climate Action) was a critical topic discussed during the summit, particularly in relation to the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement.

Current Status and Challenges:

- The outlook concerning climate action is described as "sobering". Strong commitments alone are insufficient, as the current trajectory of progress "is undeniably not enough to keep global warming between ".
- The actual implementation of climate commitments should be evaluated using data from SDG 13.
- SDG 13 is crucial because it merges both climate mitigation and adaptation. The effectiveness of mitigating emissions must be paired with measures to build resilience against already occurring climate change.
- In some regions, such as the Balkans, progress on SDG 13 is noted as "going backwards". Significant challenges remain, particularly concerning the reliance on fossil fuels.
- There is an urgent need for more ambitious mitigation, stronger adaptation efforts, and deeper international cooperation to meet climate goals.
- It was emphasized that the Paris Agreement goal (keeping warming below 1.5 degrees) is likely "not reachable" with the current level of commitment.
- Strategies and Integration:
 - Effective climate action requires a synergy between goals, ensuring mitigation and adaptation proceed "hand to hand".
 - For nations, implementing comprehensive policy frameworks that integrate both mitigation and adaptation is essential. For example, Turkey's new climate legislation has translated international pledges into binding domestic laws and embeds adaptation as a legal obligation, accelerating progress on SDG 13. This approach requires all authorities to integrate climate risk assessments into decision-making.
 - For countries like Greece, while mitigation is a global necessity, prioritizing adaptation plans at the national level is critical. Important adaptation issues include managing water stress, floods resulting from extreme events, and urban planning.

Day Two_Keynote Speech: Jeff Sachs

Geopolitical Crisis and Climate Failure:

- The situation of the Paris Agreement, much like the Black Sea region, is in a "deep crisis by geopolitics".
- The "abandonment of the agreement by the United States" as a major contributing factor to the Paris Agreement's failure, emphasizing the enormous impact given the US's historical responsibility (nearly 25% of historical emissions) and current emissions (around 14% of global fossil fuel CO₂).
- Even Europe, despite the European Green Deal, is prioritizing military escalation and subsequently postponing or cutting financing for the energy transition.

Energy Transition and Regional Cooperation:

- A positive development is that the cost of green technologies, including solar, wind, electric vehicles, and batteries, has dropped "much faster than was expected," largely due to advances made by China.
- If global cooperation is achieved, the energy transition can proceed rapidly.
- Regional cooperation in building zero-carbon energy systems is crucial, as handling the intermittency of solar and wind is cheaper and provides a more resilient system on a large grid.
- He specifically highlighted the potential for connecting the Black Sea region and the North Sea via a power grid. These regions form a "dipole," meaning their wind power is anti-correlated, which could tremendously reduce the need for energy storage.
- Europe should cooperate with China on a "Eurasian-wide initiative for energy transformation".

Peace in the Black Sea Region:

- Prof. Sachs addressed the geopolitical crisis in the Black Sea, stating that peace in Ukraine would come quickly if based on neutrality.
- He proposed that the Black Sea region should work together to develop a regional low-carbon power grid.
- Prof. Sachs also recommended that the SDSN Black Sea and the Black Sea University Network collaborate with the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) to study and finance this transformation to a zero-carbon energy system. The moderator noted that the BSTDB is conveniently based in Thessaloniki. Sachs welcomed the opportunity to participate in these discussions.

Day Two_4th Session: SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of the Energy Transition

The discussion centered on the complex challenges of the global energy transition, emphasizing the necessity of simultaneously achieving "Clean and Affordable" energy (SDG 7) globally.

Challenges and Economic Barriers:

- **Affordability Disparity:** Affordability is not universal, posing the single greatest problem globally.
- **Financial Intensity:** The transition requires massive, upfront capital investment (trillions of euros/dollars). Market volatility makes bank financing difficult, often necessitating government sponsorship.
- **Geopolitical and Supply Chain Risks:** Geopolitical tensions interfere with the transition path. Furthermore, the lack of control over critical raw materials (often centralized in certain nations) and the insufficient industrial capacity/skilled labor in certain regions hinder the timely implementation of solutions.
- **Philosophical Gap:** The sustainability discourse has often neglected the third crucial pillar: the reassessment of energy consumption to minimize use.

Energy Solutions Discussed:

- **Nuclear Energy:** Post-Paris, nuclear energy has experienced a "rebirth". Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) are proposed as a flexible solution due to their lower cost (enabling private investment), modularity, and ability to follow the fluctuations of renewable sources, thus integrating well into the modern grid. Stringent, modern safety regulations address historical public concerns (Chernobyl, Fukushima).
- **Offshore Wind:** This source holds massive potential, particularly with the transition to floating offshore wind technology in deeper waters. This enables the use of larger units and achieving economies of scale, which is crucial for cost reduction. The main barriers to development in emerging markets (Mediterranean/Black Sea) include lengthy licensing procedures, the need for grid upgrades, and the absence of a strong local supply chain.

General Overview

The Paris Agreement is acknowledged as a foundational and existential treaty that structures societal and economic change this century.

Review of Progress:

The framework is excellent, but its functionality is compromised by a crisis of cooperation and a critical lack of accountability within the global multilateral system. Only 18% of SDG targets are on track, with environment and inequality goals actively receding. Trade tensions restrict access to necessary clean technologies.

Crucial Action Areas:

- **Financial Restructuring:** Closing the \$2 trillion investment gap in renewable energy for developing countries requires restructuring global debt and de-risking projects to attract private savings into the Global South.
- **Trade Integration:** Trade policy must be integrated into national climate commitments (NDCs). The shift to renewables is already cost-competitive against fossil fuels.
- **Gender Equality:** Despite disproportionate vulnerability to climate crises (80% of victims are women and children), gender equality (SDG 5) is lagging, with women possessing less than two-thirds of the rights enjoyed by men globally. Tools like databases tracking national laws are vital for legislative progress and accountability.
- **Implementation Focus:** Action must move from declarations to implementation, focusing on practical, visible benefits for citizens (e.g., lower energy bills, local renewables). This requires policy integration across various government sectors and significant capacity building for the workforce.

Youth are recognized as both experts and leaders, driving climate action globally.

Youth Imperatives:

- **Implementation and Localization:** The next decade must prioritize implementation by transforming high-level pledges into practical, local actions. Grassroots initiatives—such as solar water farms, sustainable agriculture, and ecosystem restoration—are essential for addressing basic human rights and livelihoods.
- **Shift to Regeneration:** The framework of "sustainability" is viewed critically as insufficient for planetary repair, often sustaining the status quo. A shift to regenerative models is needed, focusing on restoring ecosystems and healing social fabrics.
- **Shared Leadership:** Youth demand shared responsibility and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making, emphasizing that their capacity for change is already proven.
- **Accountability and Finance:** The moral voice of youth acts as a compass to ensure the agreement is honored. Leaders must democratize climate finance to resource local actions, avoiding the rhetorical celebration of youth without providing structural participation.



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