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The GNCHR at COP31 in Antalya

Human rights at the heart of climate action



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The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR), Greece's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) once again participated in this year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31), which is being held in Antalya, Türkiye, from 9 to 20 November 2026.

The President of the GNCHR, Professor Maria Gavouneli, spoke at the side event co-organised by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) on Tuesday, 10 November 2026, entitled *"Advancing Rights-Based Climate Action and Climate Justice: The Unique Role of National Human Rights institutions"*. The President of the GNCHR addressed the panel, "Turning Standards into Action: National Experiences and Regional Cooperation", where she presented, *inter alia*, the National Commission's experience in integrating human rights into climate action, in acting as a bridge between the State and civil society, in protecting environmental defenders and in ensuring accountability for the implementation of climate commitments. She also highlighted the challenges posed by energy policy in balancing security, decarbonisation, environmental protection and the needs of local communities.

The event was attended, among others, by Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention; Astrid Puentes Riaño, Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; Amina Bouayach, Chairperson of GANHRI; and representatives of NHRIs from Europe, Africa and Asia.

COP31 has been labelled an implementation COP". Among the issues at stake in Antalya are:

- closing the gap between the goals of the Paris Agreement and national climate plans, so that the rise in the global average temperature remains below 1.5°C compared with pre-industrial levels;

- ensuring a just and orderly transition from fossil fuels to clean energy;

- the operation of the new Just Transition Mechanism agreed at COP30;

- climate finance to support the adaptation of countries and communities to the impacts of climate change and to address the loss and damage experienced by the most vulnerable countries and communities.

It should be emphasised that, in light of recent advisory opinions and judgements by international courts, climate action is now a legal obligation for States rather than a mere political choice [see, for example , the recent advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), as well as the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in *KlimaSeniorinnen and Others v. Switzerland* and *Greenpeace Nordic and Others v. Norway*].

On the margins of the Conference, the President of the GNCHR visited the Greek pavilion and held discussions with members of the Greek delegation. She also participated in closed working groups with UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst and Amina Bouayach, Chairperson of Morocco's National Human Rights Council (CNDH) and Chairperson of GANHRI.

The GNCHR endorses GANHRI's Open Letter to COP31, which calls on States to place human rights at the heart of climate action. The Letter calls on States to implement their commitments to addressing the climate crisis through human rights-based laws and policies. It also calls for regular updating and public reporting of national targets as well as for strengthening accountability of States. The Letter also asks States to ensure that climate finance reaches the people and communities who need it, and that groups in vulnerable situations are included in responses to loss and damage. It further stresses the need to protect participation, civic space and independent scrutiny. Finally, it calls on States to enable NHRIs, to contribute evidence, monitor implementation and issue recommendations.

It is noted that the GNCHR has been invited to participate, with a presentation, in the 15th International Conference of NHRIs on Climate Change, to be held in Amman, Jordan, from 2 to 4 December 2026.

- Watch the presentation by the President of the GNCHR at the event *«Advancing Rights-Based Climate Action and Climate Justice: The Unique Role of National Human Rights institutions"* here

- Watch the full event here

- Read GANHRI's Open Letter here

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The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) is the independent advisory body of the Greek State and the National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights. It has been established by Law 2667/1998 under UN rules (Paris principles) as replaced by Law 4780/2021. It is composed of members designated by twenty bodies (independent authorities, trade unions, human rights organisations, higher education institutions and research institutions).