

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Statement by Raina Ivanova, youth environmental defender

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“Shout out loud because you deserve to be heard!” These are the words of a 15-year-old environmental defender from Pakistan and I believe they capture the urgency and relevance of why us children and young people have to be involved in decision-making.

My Name is Raina Ivanova, and I’m a 19-year-old youth environmental defender and climate justice activist located in Germany. Only in the past few months climate activists here have been publicly called terrorists by Parliamentarians, they’ve become subject to nationwide police raids, and have even been instrumentalized as enemies at police training. This includes child and youth activists. A criminalization of these heights has been unprecedented during my lifetime, and it imposes a serious threat to safe public participation. Climate activists have been painted as radicals but what I find truly radical is the disregarding of critical climate targets and the lack of climate action.

As a young person, it scares me how many large-scale fossil fuel expansion projects are being planned by my government even though the civil society protests against it have never been bigger. An example of this are the protests that took place in Lützerath at the beginning of this year, which I also took part in. 35 000 people gathered in this small village that is located at the edge of Europe's second-biggest open-cast coal mine and protested against its expansion amidst the climate crisis. Unfortunately, we couldn’t save the village and while many activists are still recovering from the police brutality and other scenes that took place there, the German government is planning further expansions of LNG Terminals and is abolishing the sectoral targets of our climate protection law.

The consequences of this are clearly felt in countries like Pakistan, which is the 7th most affected country by climate change. In recent conversation with children from Pakistan they shared that their right to education is threatened by smog and the livelihoods of many have been destroyed by climate change-induced floods. These issues are interlinked because children can not meaningfully participate without an education or a safe home that sustains them.

I want to End by alluding to the statement I mentioned at the beginning. Our shouting is meaningless if it is not heard and transformed into action and for this all of us have to work together. So I ask you, especially the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, to join us in shouting for climate justice, and to ensure that children and youth are always consulted, here and in decision-making at the national level. That we can do this without fear and that there are accessible mechanisms for us.