

# First climate lawsuit against Russian government launched over emissions

**Group of activists file supreme court case demanding stronger action on meeting Paris accord goals**



Smoke rises from chimneys in Moscow. Russia is the fourth biggest producer of carbon emissions worldwide. Photograph: Maxim Shipenkov/EPA

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The first-ever climate lawsuit in **Russia** has been filed by a group of activists demanding that the the government take stronger action over the climate crisis.

The group wants the Russian authorities to take measures that will reduce the country's greenhouse emissions, in line with targets of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5C agreed under the 2015 Paris climate accords.

Russia is the fourth biggest producer of carbon emissions worldwide, and its average temperatures have risen twice as fast as the global average. The country's emissions are predicted to reach 2,212m tons of carbon dioxide by 2030.

However, to have a two-thirds chance of meeting the Paris climate goal, Russia needs to reduce its greenhouse emissions to 968 m tons of CO<sub>2</sub> by 2030, which would be 31% of 1990 levels. By 2050, Russia plans to reduce its emissions to 1,830m tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, when under Paris targets the country should be emitting just 157m tons.

The figures, taken from a report written by Mark Chernaik of the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, warns of the devastating consequences that Russia faces due to climate change, ranging from severe health impacts due to recent heatwaves and outbreaks of vector-borne diseases, to increased exposure to anthrax disease and infrastructure damage due to melting permafrost.

By taking the government to Russia's supreme court, the group hopes it will "save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people".

Grigory Vaypan, the spokesperson for the group's legal team, said: "The Russian government's approach to climate change is irresponsible and contrary to its international law obligations."

For Vaypan, the case represents the need for "the court to recognise that these [climate] targets are manifestly insufficient to fulfil Russia's obligation to mitigate climate change, and order the government to set new, Paris-compliant targets."

The group says Russia's insufficient measures on climate change are "violating the Russian constitution and the European convention on human rights". Russia will withdraw from the ECHR on Friday 16 September, which means the climate lawsuit could be among the last cases in the country that the ECHR could issue a binding agreement on, if it is taken to the European courts.

Activists from several climate action groups in Russia joined forces to file the court case against the government. They include members of the Fridays for Future school strikers, senior figures from climate NGOs such as Ecodefense and the Russian Socio-Ecological Union, and human rights campaigners from various Indigenous populations.

The group filing the court case says it faces "considerable risks", in light of recent government crackdowns on civil and opposition movements in Russia,

especially since the invasion of Ukraine. Many of the climate activists in the country are also anti-war activists, who worry that they are already “paying a heavy price” for speaking out.

For activist Arshak Makichyan, this court case goes beyond climate policy in Russia. “This is a case against the government,” he said. “Russia after 24 February [the date of the Ukraine invasion] became a dictatorship, and I can no longer live my life there. I don’t understand how Russia will negotiate any climate deals ... they have been lying to people about the climate crisis.

“The government has never wanted to have a climate policy. For them, the climate is a way to not talk about the war in Ukraine, but they have never cared about the climate.”

Makichyan, who has since moved to Germany, is sceptical that the present government’s promises on climate change will lead to sufficient action. “We keep lying to ourselves – they’re not going to do anything. It’s the same government as 20 years ago.”

The court case presents a great opportunity to “make noise”, Makichyan said. “I want to shout and make noise because the government is responsible for all the suffering due to climate change in the country, but most people do not care. I want people to see the truth, and shouting is the only thing we can do.”

The Russian government has been contacted for comment.