

Quebec's youth sue the Government of Canada for its inaction on climate change

Montréal, November 26, 2018 – ENvironnement JEUnesse, represented by the firm Trudel Johnston & Lespérance, filed an application for authorization to bring a class action against the Canadian government before the Superior Court of Québec today on behalf of Quebecers aged 35 and under. ENvironnement JEUnesse alleges that the Canadian government is infringing on a generation's fundamental rights. It is interfering with young people's rights because its greenhouse gas reduction target is not ambitious enough to avoid dangerous climate change and because it does not even have a plan that would allow it to reach this already inadequate target. If the government continues in this direction, people under 35 will suffer the severe consequences of climate change, thus depriving them of their right their right to life and security of the person, to their right to equality, and to their right to an environment in which biodiversity is preserved.

"Climate change is real and we are already feeling its consequences. Despite the abundance of scientific studies pointing in the same direction, the Canadian government is failing in its duty to take action against climate change. Instead of accelerating a green transition, Canada is subsidizing oil companies and purchasing a pipeline in our name," says Catherine Gauthier, Executive Director of ENvironnement JEUnesse, which is taking legal action on behalf of young people aged 35 and under in Quebec. The young spokesperson adds: "We demand that our rights and those of future generations be protected and respected. We demand that Canada act without delay to avoid dangerous global warming, above 1.5°C, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change."

As Bruce Johnston, a partner at TJL, explains, "the Canadian government's behaviour infringes on several fundamental rights protected by the Canadian and Quebec charters." As such, young people have the right to demand that the government take the necessary measures to ensure that the infringement ceases. "We believe that we have a solid legal case that deserves to be brought before the courts," he says.

The first step in judicial proceedings that may take several years

To obtain leave from the Court to bring these judicial proceedings, ENvironnement JEUnesse must first demonstrate to the Superior Court of Québec that it has an arguable case, meaning that at first glance, the alleged facts, if they are proven in a trial on merits, appear to justify the conclusions sought, i.e. that the insufficient target and actions to combat climate change violate several fundamental rights.

"The battle will be long. We encourage all young people aged 35 and under, and parents on behalf of their children, to show their support by visiting challenge.qc.ca/justice ", says Catherine Gauthier.

A global movement

Several similar proceedings have been instituted around the world, notably in the Netherlands, where the government was forced to adopt a concrete plan to reach its climate target. The Dutch government is legally bound to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. Similar legal actions are ongoing in the United States, Belgium, Norway, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Colombia and the United Kingdom.

Quotes from people aged 35 and under

"Experts are telling us that in 2030 we will experience the impacts of climate change more severely. In 2030, I'll be 32. Maybe I'll have one or two kids. What will their future be? As a country, Canada is one of the worst polluters on the planet. We have a duty to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible. Delaying action will only make the consequences of climate change worse for me, my children, for all young people and future generations. It's fundamentally unjust."

-David Morin (20), student and Vice President of Policy and Communications at ENvironnement JEUnesse

“Can I have a safe, positive future without climate threats? The Canadian government is not making the necessary decisions in order to protect future generations’ quality of life and opportunities.”

-Zy St-Pierre-Bourdelaïs (19), student

“The climate crisis is not science fiction. It’s a phenomenon with disastrous consequences and it affects everyone, here and now. Not only are the Canadian goals far below the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Canada doesn’t even have an effective plan to reduce GHG emissions.”

-Alix Ruhlmann (23), environmental activist

“The government of Canada funds and protects an oil industry whose activities harm the environment and release greenhouse gasses. In this way, it is jeopardizing future generations’ ability to meet their needs and is contributing to the suffering of populations that are already experiencing the consequences of climate change. It’s time for my government to take responsibility and stop violating the rights of young people.”

-Bernadette Veilleux-Trinh (17), student

About ENvironnement JEUnesse

For nearly 40 years, the non-profit organization ENvironnement JEUnesse has been acting to raise awareness on environmental issues among Quebec’s youth, empower them through educational workshops, and encourage them to take action in their communities. ENvironnement JEUnesse has been intervening on climate issues for nearly 30 years now, in addition to speaking for Quebec’s youth at the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change since 2005. www.enjeu.qc.ca

About TJL

Trudel Johnston & Lespérance (TJL) is the law firm that has won the most class actions in Canada since it was founded 20 years ago. It is currently leading 41 class actions, including one against the tobacco industry and one against Gilbert Rozon. TJL is also leading several environmental class actions, notably regarding the emissions of the Anacolor plant, nuisances from the Canadian Malartic mine and dust emissions from Quebec City’s port. TJL is the firm that obtained an injunction to protect the belugas of the St. Lawrence against Energy East. Its lawyers act in many public interest cases on a *pro bono* basis, and are doing so in this case for ENvironnement JEUnesse. <http://tjl.quebec/>

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