

LAWASIA

THE LAW ASSOCIATION FOR
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
FOUNDED IN 1966

5 June 2026

LAWASIA STATEMENT ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY – 5 JUNE 2026 & WORLD OCEAN DAY – 8 JUNE 2026

“Our Planet, Our Responsibility: Climate Action, Ocean Protection, and the Environmental Rule of Law”

Introduction

LAWASIA (the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific) marks **World Environment Day on 5 June 2026, “Climate Action”** and **World Ocean Day on 8 June 2026, “Strong Marine Protected Areas for Our Blue Planet”**, with a statement on behalf of its member bar associations, law societies, and legal practitioners across Asia and the Pacific.

These two days are a call to conscience and a call to law. The signals the Earth is sending are unambiguous: rising seas, intensifying storms, collapsing marine ecosystems, and a climate system under unprecedented stress. The signals the law is sending are equally clear. The international legal framework, from the Paris Agreement and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ) Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to the landmark International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion (AO) of 23 July 2025, has never been more explicit about the obligations binding upon States and the responsibilities incumbent upon all actors, including the legal profession.

LAWASIA issues this statement to affirm its commitment to environmental rule of law as the indispensable foundation for effective, equitable, and enduring climate and ocean action. We call on governments across Asia, the Pacific, and the broader international community to honour their legal obligations, implement their commitments, and ensure that the rule of law, not political convenience, governs the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

World Environment Day 2026: Climate Action and the Duty to Act

The theme for World Environment Day 2026 is **“Climate Action.”**

For the legal profession in Asia and the Pacific, climate action is not an aspiration. It is a legal obligation. On 23 July 2025, the ICJ issued its unanimous AO on the obligations of States in respect of climate change, confirming that States are bound by a stringent duty of due diligence under customary international law to prevent significant harm to the climate system, that these obligations are *erga omnes* in character, and that failure to act may constitute an internationally wrongful act engaging State responsibility. The ICJ was unequivocal: climate action is not a matter of political preference. It is a matter of binding law.

The UN General Assembly voted to support the ICJ AO determination on 20 May 2026, with 141 countries in favour, 8 against and 28 abstentions. This resolution recognises that States have a clear obligation to act on climate change or be in breach of their obligations under international law.

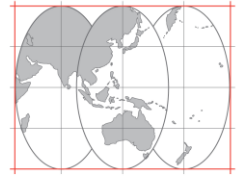
World Ocean Day 2026: Strong Marine Protected Areas and the Law of the Sea

The World Ocean Day 2026 Action Theme is **“Strong Marine Protected Areas for Our Blue Planet.”** This theme reflects both a scientific imperative and a legal commitment. Leading scientists worldwide have confirmed that a healthy ocean is not optional, it is a critical part of the solution to both the climate and biodiversity crises. Oceans produce over half the world’s oxygen, absorb between 25 and 30 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions, and support the livelihoods of over three billion people globally — a figure that encompasses a vast proportion of the Asia-Pacific’s coastal and island communities.

The legal architecture to protect the ocean is increasingly robust. The **BBNJ Agreement** (the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction) reached the required 60 ratifications in September 2025 and entered into force on 17 January 2026. The **30×30 commitment**, to protect at least 30 per cent of lands, waters, and oceans by 2030, has been endorsed by world leaders. UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) remains the constitutional framework for the governance of ocean space. And the ICJ Advisory Opinion has confirmed that the obligations of States under UNCLOS, including the duty to prevent significant harm to the marine environment, are part of the binding international legal framework governing climate change.

LAWASIA accordingly calls on all States in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond to:

- Align national legislation, climate plans, and policies with the legal obligations confirmed by the ICJ, including through stringent due diligence, measurable emissions reductions, and a just, orderly transition away from fossil fuels consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C.
- Enact and enforce domestic environmental laws that give full effect to international climate obligations, ensuring that rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, recognised by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2022 and affirmed by the ICJ, are justiciable and accessible to all.
- Phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, accelerate deployment of renewable energy, and implement climate finance commitments as a matter of legal duty, not merely political generosity.
- Implement the UNGA resolution introduced by Vanuatu and endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the UNGA on 20 May 2025, to operationalise the ICJ Advisory Opinion.
- Ratify the High Seas Treaty without delay and move swiftly into implementation, including the creation and effective management of High Seas MPAs and other area-based conservation measures.
- Fulfil the 30×30 commitment through binding national legislation, well-resourced enforcement mechanisms, and the equitable inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and coastal nations in the design and governance of marine protected areas.



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- Amplify the voices of frontline communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and the most vulnerable in legal advocacy and policy processes.

Conclusion

The Earth's signals are clear. The law's signals are clear. What remains is the political and institutional will to act.

On World Environment Day 2026, we recommit to the imperative of climate action. Not as aspiration but as obligation, grounded in the rule of law, guided by the best available science, and owed to present and future generations across Asia, the Pacific, and the world.

On World Ocean Day 2026, we recommit to the protection of our blue planet, through strong, enforceable marine protected areas, full implementation of the High Seas Treaty, and governance frameworks that place law, not just goodwill, at the heart of ocean stewardship.

The legal profession in Asia and the Pacific has a critical role to play. We will play it. We invite governments, civil society, businesses, and communities to stand with us.

The ocean does not pause. The climate does not wait. Neither shall we.

TL Yap

President

LAWASIA, The Law Association for Asia and The Pacific