

Climate Emergency

Meet Ridhima Pandey – The 11-year-old Climate Activist from Uttarakhand

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"I have been taking small steps by myself. I stopped eating all sorts of snacks because they come in plastic packets, promoting reusable cutlery in my school and I am also part of the green committee in our school which has the job of making our school more sustainable. I make sure that we don't have to use plastic at home. I have encouraged all of my friends and even my community when you take prasad they give you like a plastic sheet, I try encouraging people not to take those and instead take those in your hand. Even small steps that we do is certainly making a difference and we do need events like these. "

This was a student in Hyderabad in India who is participating in the climate strike this week. These strikes are being organized in solidarity with Greta Thunberg who now has become a household name because of the climate strikes she has started a year ago. This week children all around the world have called for Climate Strikes and are generating awareness on climate change and questioning the politicians to be accountable to the commitments made in the Paris agreement.

So to cover this very important issue Suno India has partnered with India Spend whose correspondent Disha Shetty is reporting straight from New York where the Climate Action Summit is being held and attended by all the top world leaders of the world.

Hi, I am Rakesh Kamal, host of this podcast "Climate Emergency".

Even before Greta Thunberg started the school strike for climate, Ridhima Pandey, a native of Uttarakhand filed her first petition when she was 9 against the Indian government in the National Green Tribunal in which she stated that the Indian government should take "effective, science-based action to reduce and minimize the adverse impacts of climate change". Disha spoke with Ridhima who along with fifteen other children from all over the world have come together to file a petition against five countries who have failed to uphold their end of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified human rights treaty in the world.

Disha: We are here with 11-year-old Ridhima Pandey. Ridhima is one of the sixteen petitioners who petitioned the UN against certain countries, so we will try to find out from Ridhima to know more about her. So, Riddhima tell us where do you belong to, what is your age and how you managed to come to New York?

Ridhima: Basically, I am from Uttarakhand in India. I am 11 years old. Thomson Reuters Foundation is an organization, they contacted me through my lawyer Rahul. Their contractor brought me here, who contacted me in India.

Disha: Okay, you told us first about the case filed in India, which has been filed by a national green tribunal. So, when did you first get interested in climate change, what was your age then and when did you get the idea of filing a case first?

Ridhima: So, in 2013 Uttarakhand had a flood, there was a lot of damage in that, a lot of kids died, many lost their parents. People lost their homes, agricultural lands, all their hometowns were destroyed. There was a huge loss and people didn't even get help for a long time because the water level was too high for someone to reach there. The rain was falling, so help was not accessible. So, when people eventually managed to get help, the media managed to reach them. So, we saw that all on tv through the media and my father works for an NGO, So he also went there. He works for the wildlife trust of India. He reached there with his team to rescue animals, so I saw all that during that time. I discussed that with my teacher, this is bad and this could have bad repercussions. At that time, I don't use to sit in conversations with my parents but I used to understand little bits that this is bad and it will have a bad effect on the future. So, one day I asked my father, what is this? Why is this happening? And, what is this thing that can harm our future? He told me that this is climate change and global warming is rising which will affect our future like fossil fuels are being used highly, traffic is high which is causing emissions of greenhouse gases causing greenhouse effect which increases earth's temperature. This will cause a lot of impact on our future for like even now we have to face floods, droughts or things like these. There is severe cold in some places or there are such high temperatures that people are struggling to survive. Too many diseases are also in India like dengue, malaria.

Disha: So how did you come to file the case?

Ridhima: So, when I came to know about all this, like if global warming keeps increasing like this, we will have a very bad effect on our future. Then, when I researched I found out it is us humans who are the main reason for the increase in global warming. Our activities are causing this phenomenon and if this keeps on increasing, we might not have a future. At that time I realized I should do something for my future because I want to live and I want all kids to have a good life, all have a good climate as I feel it is our right. We have the right to live in a good atmosphere, have good water, these are our rights as I want to fight for a good future. At that time I asked my father is there something we can do? He said we can file a case in.. if I want too. At that time I thought that I wanted to do this as I wanted to have a good future. So at that time, I filed a case in the national green tribunal in 2017 when I was in the 4th standard.

Disha: So that case is now at which node?

Riddhima: They didn't accept our case and said that the Indian government is doing good service. And now we have taken our case to the supreme court, hearing is pending.

Disha: So now how do you come to the UN. When and how did you get to know about this NGO?

Ridhima: Basically, I have one more event in Norway, so I went to apply for a visa for that. At that time, my lawyer went to meet them. He told me there is an organization who is filing a petition in the UN. They are looking for a kid each from various countries who might be interested in this work and if I am interested in this work, I could tell them and they will select. I told yes because if we can get numbers, we can do this at a higher level than much of the attention we can seek from global leaders. I don't think if we stand individually, all will pay attention to us. But if we stand united, we will get attention. At that time, I got their number, they interviewed me and they told me now you are one of these 16 petitioners, I have to reach here and our case will be filed in the UN committee against the rights of children. That's why I am here.

Disha: You have filed a petition in the UN. So what are your expectations from that?

Ridhima: We all 16 children have done this together, I have expectations that all the global leaders will not ignore us, will pay heed to us and will look for our future. Keep a check at fossil fuel emissions and do what they say. As we know there are a lot of dialogues in India, but work is less. Like Swachh Bharat, Swachh Ganga many campaigns have been made but as I reside near Ganga, I don't feel that much amount of work has been done as the expenditure. If the work is done, it will make us feel good because people promise a lot, but work is not done enough. So, I would like to tell everyone to talk less and do more.

Disha: So, you are just 11. And there are these big leaders in front of you, does that scare you?

Riddhima: No, I am not scared. They cannot harm me, I think so because I am doing everything legally. It's legal to fight for our rights. All presidents and prime ministers of all countries have made this rule themselves, that we should have rights. So, if they have made rights, then they must follow them. It ain't like there is a rule and you are not following. And I am not a bit scared and I will keep on fighting until I am satisfied.

"I am Dinesh Pandey. I am 44 years old. I am Haridwar, Uttarakhand."

That was Dinesh Pandey, Ridhima's father.

"Normally, when anything happens, kids are sensitive, they see and hear, there is not a big space where all things are scattered. When all these things were happening, they asked me to show pics and videos. So, I showed them. Ridhima asked his father, so many people have died, lost homes, and more. So, I told her these are disasters and these things are rising because climate change is happening and many more things. And this is how discussion advanced. So she asked why don't you do something, you file cases, you work for wildlife and more. So, I said to her let me see it and after that, I met my lawyer, who has been with

me for a long time. I discussed with him if we should do something about it. He said we can file a case on this. At first, I thought, to include more kids in this but it didn't go through because no one wants to fight against the government. In the end, can you do it alone? I said sure. The government might go against you? I said I don't care about that, as a legal guardian I signed a petition in the name of Riddhima ultimately. I want this upcoming generation to get clean air and water. I am proud my kid is at the front of this task and I don't have to guide her. I feel my daughter is very active and I am with her at every step and we don't fear anyone because we are doing it for the whole community, for the whole world”.

Disha also spoke with the Lawyer of the case.

“I am with law firm Hausfeld LLP. I am legal counsel of the case that has been brought to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.”

Lawyer: 16 children brought this petition to the United Nations.

Disha: So what organ of the UN are you petitioning and what is that you hope to achieve?

Lawyer: So, the petition is registered under the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the child. My hope is that the countries we have named, all the world leaders and countries will reduce their emissions to protect the children of today and tomorrow.

Disha: And why these particular countries?

Lawyer: So we brought this petition which is called the third optional protocol which is making children bring complaints against countries within the committee of the child. within the third optional protocol, there are 44 countries that have ratified under the protocol. Within these 44, we have filed petitions against 5 majors which are France, Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Turkey. They are also part of G20. Globally, they have an influence not just on themselves but on other nations and can work to reduce their emissions on international cooperation.

Disha spoke with Luis Alfonso de Alba, Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the 2019 Climate Action Summit about the role of youth.

Disha: So this is the first year we have seen such an involvement of the young people and they have indulged in naming and shaming the leaders of the world. What kind of an impact on climate change negotiations is likely to have?

Luis: Well, let me tell you, youth plays a very important role for many years. I remember since 92, it was a conference in Rio De Janeiro, especially during the last month it has been incredible. I am very proud and I think it is important because this is anger, this is a request from the government and activists to do much more and do it much faster. And that is important because if they are talking about their own future but there is also a sense of

commitment. And that is exactly why we are trying to get them a Summit. Space for them to send this message, their statement to the governments, their recommendations, and their requests. and I think this movement is going to grow and it has been growing in the last few months and it is very positive because it will help us to raise the visibility of the topic and urgency.

Thank you for listening to this episode of climate emergency. If you like it please subscribe to climate emergency wherever you are listening to this podcast. We would like to thank Disha Sethi for reporting from New York and Vaishali Pandiyen our reporter from Suno India for reporting from Hyderabad.