

Official justification for awarding the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award to Natur og Ungdom from Norway

The Jury of the Max van der Stoel Award has decided to honour Natur og Ungdom from Norway with the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award in recognition of its efforts to give young people of all backgrounds a voice in environmental policy. Since 1967, Natur og Ungdom has harnessed solidarity among generations of youth from majority and minority communities to successfully address environmental challenges and protect minority rights.

Natur og Ungdom has a long tradition of advocating on issues at the intersection between the environment and Sámi rights. This dates back to the Alta Case in the late 1970s, which sought to protect traditional herding and fishing areas threatened by the damming of the Alta River. The organization provides an effective platform for youth aged between 13 and 25 years from all communities in Norway to participate in public affairs. It advances the interests of minorities by giving a voice to Sámi youth, empowering them in the protection of their rights and traditional culture, and raising public awareness about the important role that Sámi communities play in protecting Norway's environmental heritage.

Natur og Ungdom has been highly effective in using youth activism and legal means to bring about positive change. For instance, in 2023, Natur og Ungdom helped organize peaceful actions calling on the Government to respect a 2021 Supreme Court ruling that it had violated the international minority rights of the Sámi by granting windmill farm licences in traditional reindeer grazing areas. Reindeer herding is an important part of indigenous Sámi culture and traditions. As a result, the Government issued an apology and initiated consultations to address the Supreme Court ruling. The Jury also notes that Natur og Ungdom takes concrete steps to ensure that their activism is peaceful and with clear objectives.

The Jury applauds Natur og Ungdom for showing how environmental issues – such as climate change, sustainable development and the allocation of resources – can be an opportunity to unite society around effective policies that also respect fundamental human rights. Natur og Ungdom uses these issues to build bridges between communities by incorporating Sámi youth as active members and by carrying out its environmental advocacy in co-ordination with other Sámi activists and organizations. The organization has demonstrated that environmental issues can be addressed in solidarity among majority and minority populations, fostering a sense of common purpose on a topic of crucial importance to youth in Norway.

In recognition of how this youth organization builds bridges among diverse communities and advocates for Sámi interests as a means to achieve its objectives focused on environmental issues, the Jury has unanimously awarded Natur og Ungdom with the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award.

