

Joint Press Release

Date: April 9, 2025

Over the past few weeks, air quality in major cities—including the Kathmandu Valley—has deteriorated significantly, reaching increasingly unhealthy levels. According to the World Air Quality Index (AQI) Ranking, a global standard for measuring air pollution, the air in these urban areas has frequently reached extremely hazardous levels, placing Kathmandu among the most polluted cities in the world. Several factors contribute to this severe air pollution: unmanaged waste, forest fires, vehicle emissions, dust from neglected and unfinished road construction, and smoke from factories and industries. Additionally, the impacts of climate change—such as prolonged droughts and insufficient winter rainfall—have intensified forest fires across the country, including areas surrounding the valley, further worsening the air quality ahead of the summer season.

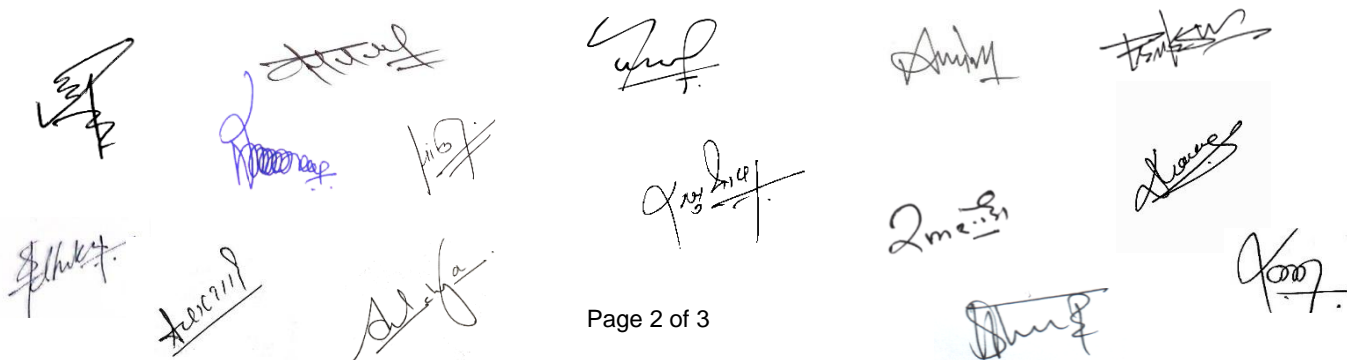
The rising levels of air pollution are increasingly affecting the public, leading to symptoms such as eye irritation, headaches, fatigue, dry cough, and difficulty breathing. Health experts warn that air pollution can have serious impacts on vital organs, including the heart, blood vessels, lungs, brain, eyes, nose, and throat. Vulnerable groups—such as children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, those with chronic illnesses, the elderly, and individuals with respiratory conditions—face a significantly higher risk. If current trends continue, air pollution is likely to have severe long-term consequences on the overall public health of residents in major cities, especially in the Kathmandu Valley.

Article 30 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 guarantees every citizen the right to clean environment. (1) Every citizen shall have the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. (2) The victim shall have the right to obtain compensation, in accordance with law, for any injury caused from environmental pollution or degradation. It is our collective responsibility to uphold and safeguard the Constitution. CLEAN UP NEPAL has been consistently advocating for the effective enforcement of constitutional provisions, act, and regulations related to environmental protection.

We urgently call on all levels of government, federal, provincial, and locals to take immediate and long-term action to reduce the dangerously high levels of air pollution and safeguard public health. Addressing this crisis requires close collaboration with national and international non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society, and community-based organizations to swiftly develop a concrete response plan and implement preventive measures, including widespread health awareness campaigns. We (likeminded organizations) jointly and firmly demand the effective implementation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution by ensuring lasting solutions to the growing pollution crisis in the Kathmandu Valley and across the country through comprehensive policy reforms.

Our demands:

- 1) Wearing masks should be made mandatory in public spaces, including outdoor areas, public transportation, and crowded places.
- 2) Considering the vulnerability of children's health, schools in areas with dangerously high pollution levels should remain closed until air quality significantly improves.
- 3) All offices within the Kathmandu Valley should operate on a five-day work week until air quality conditions improve.
- 4) An odd-even rule for private vehicles should be enforced immediately in the Valley to reduce emissions, dust, and pollution caused by excessive traffic.
- 5) The government must carry out regular and effective inspections of fuel-powered vehicles and prohibit the operation of outdated and high-emission vehicles.
- 6) Individuals who fail to segregate waste at the source, dispose of it carelessly, or burn it openly should be identified, publicly disclosed, and held accountable without delay.
- 7) Individuals who smoke in public places and carelessly discard matches or cigarette butts should be identified and prosecuted in accordance with the law.
- 8) Given that forest fires are a major contributor to the destruction of natural resources, biodiversity, and air quality, those responsible for starting such fires must be identified and brought to justice under the law.
- 9) Local communities, civil society organizations, and community forest user groups should be actively engaged to raise awareness and empower people to prevent and respond to wildfires.
- 10) To safeguard citizens from pollution-related health risks, timely public information and alert messages should be disseminated through various channels, including electronic media, social platforms, and mobile messaging services.
- 11) Urban greening initiatives should be prioritized, with widespread tree plantation actively promoted and supported.
- 12) All levels of government must establish regular and effective pollution monitoring systems, enforce legal action against individuals, organizations, and companies that contribute to pollution, and ensure compensation for those affected.
- 13) Tax incentives should be offered for the import of both private and public electric vehicles to promote clean, sustainable, and environmentally friendly transportation.
- 14) To enhance accountability in the private sector, policies should mandate investment in waste management, environmental protection, and pollution control as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations.



Joint signatory organizations:

- 1) CLEAN UP NEPAL, Kathmandu
- 2) SEBAC Nepal, Kathmandu
- 3) BAS Nepal, Nepalgunj
- 4) SOSEC Nepal
- 5) NICE Nepalgunj
- 6) Bhoomithan Nepal
- 7) Yuwalaya
- 8) Community Development Forum (CDF) Nepal, Dolakha
- 9) Green Decision Labs and Research (GD Labs)
- 10) Freed Kamalari Development Forum (FKDF), Dang
- 11) Dalit Development Society (DDS), Salyan
- 12) Dalit Social Development Center (DSDC), Kapilvastu
- 13) SpeakUp Nepal, Kathmandu
- 14) Sustainable Environmental & Ecosystem Management Nepal (SEEM Nepal)
- 15) Himalayan Nature, Kathmandu

