

43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

11 March 2020
Delivered by Laurence Blattmer

Establishment of the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and climate change

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Ms. President,

On behalf of the Geneva Interfaith Forum for Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights (GIF)¹ and several other faith-based and non-faith-based NGOs,² I am addressing the issue of the impacts of climate change on human rights. At the COP25, Antonio Guterres asked whether we really wanted to be remembered as the generation that buried its head in the sand while the planet burned.³

In that regard, we welcome the COP25 statement of the President of Marshall Islands, on behalf of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), “calling for the creation of a dedicated Special Rapporteur on climate change.”⁴ The establishment of this mandate would be in line with the Paris Agreement;⁵ the on-going work of the Council;⁶ the Special Procedures’ reports;⁷ the 2010 Social Forum’s recommendations;⁸ and the strong call from civil society organisations.⁹

We believe that the mandate of a future Special Rapporteur should, among others, include the following: 1. to take stock of the impacts of climate change on human rights, which should entail conducting country visits, receiving communications and organizing consultations with affected communities; 2. to promote policy coherence between climate actions and international human rights obligations; mainstreaming a human rights-based approach in all climate change-related actions and policies; and 3. to be the focal point for dialogue with governments, civil society, international financial institutions, Treaty Bodies and other Special Procedures. We believe that the establishment of this mandate will not undermine the work of other mandate holders but reinforce them as climate change is a cross-cutting human rights issue.

Ms President,

Given the tremendous impacts of climate change on human rights and the failure of the international community to raise sufficient ambition to achieve the indispensable targets agreed upon, can we really afford to miss this opportunity to establish such a mandate?

Thank you.

¹ Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, the World Council Churches, Lutheran World Federation.

² Soka Gakkai International, Earthjustice, Edmund Rice International, Congregation of the Our Lady of Charity of Good Shepperd, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Lawyers.org; Caritas International.

³ Secretary-General's remarks at opening ceremony of UN Climate Change Conference COP25, 2nd of December 2019: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-12-02/secretary-generals-remarks-opening-ceremony-of-un-climate-change-conference-cop25-delivered>

⁴ <https://thecvf.org/president-heine-statement-to-the-cvf-partners-leaders-event-at-unfccc-cop25/>

⁵ The Preamble of Paris Agreement has a specific reference to human rights.

⁶ In 2008, the Council adopted resolution 16/1 on Climate Change and Human Rights, and from 2014 to 2019, the Council annually adopted a resolution on Climate Change and Human Rights. The Council has also conducted several studies, reports and panel discussions on the impacts of climate change on human rights.

⁷ Several mandate holders published reports on climate change related issues, in particular the SRs on the right to healthy environment, rights of indigenous peoples, rights of migrants, adequate housing, and extreme poverty.

⁸ A/HRC/16/62

⁹ The members of the Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights have made several calls for the establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights, including: https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/call-for-a-special-rapporteur-on-human-rights-and-climate-change/