



# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 47<sup>th</sup> SESSION

## Panel Discussion on the Human Rights of Older Persons in the Context of Climate Change 30 June 2021

- The panel is held pursuant to UN Human Rights Council resolution [A/HRC/RES/44/7](#).
- Panel chair: **H.E Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan**, President of the Human Rights Council

### Opening Statements

#### ***Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:***

The recent [study](#) submitted by OHCHR finds that **older people face disproportionate impacts from climate change** on the effective enjoyment of their rights – and may be neglected or marginalized by climate laws and policies. There is **no dedicated normative instrument on the rights of older persons**, and the limitations of existing instruments can hinder their effective protection, including in the context of climate change.

The study presents **promising practices** related to **inclusive climate action**, including in the context of **Mexico's** implementation of the Paris Agreement; collection of age-disaggregated data for disaster recovery planning in the **Philippines**; and ensuring access to climate information for older people in **Iraq**. States have legal obligations to implement climate policies that will stop future warming; promote effective adaptation; redress existing harms; and ensure participation in climate action of all people – including older people.

Many older persons are **increasingly using their skills, knowledge, experience, resources, and resilience** to help stop climate change and address its worst impacts; including indigenous elders across **Latin America**, the *Grandparents' Climate Campaign* in **Norway**, and the *Knitting Nannas* in **Australia**.

#### ***Ms. Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction***

The COVID-19 pandemic must serve as a wake-up call on human rights issues that are likely to become increasingly common as the climate emergency worsens. Accountability and human rights are at the centre of the people-centred approach to disaster risk management advocated by the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**, which makes special mention of the **need for governments to engage with older persons**. To date, just over 100 UN Member States have adopted national strategies for disaster risk reduction in line with a key global target of the Sendai Framework.

Older persons must be **included in the design of policies, plans and mechanisms** including for early warning. Issues such as mobility and access to transportation are important challenges that need to be addressed when it comes to timely evacuation in advance of an extreme weather event. Apart from ensuring their protection and safety, there is also a need to recognise the role the older persons can play in building a community's **resilience to disasters**.

### Statements by the Panellists

#### ***Ms. Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons***

The man-made climate change poses specific challenges for the **heterogeneous group** of older persons. **Intersectional factors** need to be taken into account as they often significantly shape the way older persons experience the impacts of climate. Older women, older persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and indigenous people face specific challenges in realising their rights in relation to the impacts of climate change.

The country visits, undertaken under this mandate to **Georgia, Costa Rica, Namibia, Mauritius, Mozambique**, and **New Zealand** demonstrated that climate change already has a disproportionate impact on the rights of older persons. Older persons are **more likely to die** from natural disasters caused or exacerbated by climate change. They may face specific challenges to **reach safety** because of reduced mobility or lack of information about evacuation and services in diverse and age-friendly formats.

States should **adapt national legal frameworks** to protect the rights of older persons in the context of climate change, building up on existing standards. The **voices and perspectives of older persons must be included** at all stages of developing, implementing and monitoring such policies. Persistent ageism, age discrimination, and the **lack of an international convention on the rights of older persons** make it more difficult for them to claim their rights and fundamental freedoms in many contexts, including in relation to climate change.

***Mr. Saleemul Huq, Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development***

**Bangladesh** is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, with 170 million people living in less than 150 thousand sq. kilometres. Located in the delta of the Ganges – Brahmaputra, it is subject to regular flooding and cyclones from the Bay of Bengal, which affect millions of people. The **loss and damage from climate change has a negative impact on the poorest people** living in the most hazardous and vulnerable locations. Women, children and the elderly are among those most affected. The government of Bangladesh is **taking steps to help these vulnerable communities** adapt to the impacts of climate change. Bangladesh also set up the **Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan**; and a new **Mujib Climate Resilient Prosperity Plan** to build the resilience of the vulnerable populations is now under development.

***Ms. Katharina Rall, Senior Environment Researcher, Human Rights Watch (HRW)***

Over the past few months HRW has carried out desk research examining the available data on **climate change and older people in more than 10 countries**, with the focus on heat-related impacts. Three observations:

1. There is robust data on the number of older people among those who have **died from heatwaves**.
2. Health impacts of heat on older people are **much less documented or monitored**.
3. Government responses to heatwaves **do not always account for the needs of older people** in addressing the **health impacts**.

The **gap in data and monitoring of climate impacts** on older people is likely one of the main reasons why their needs are not addressed. Governments must protect the rights of older people and other vulnerable groups from adverse climate impacts including by **measures** to urgently reduce GHG emissions, such as removing fossil fuel subsidies, and by supporting individuals and communities to adapt to climate change. This adaptation element requires states to **consider the impacts** on different groups, including older persons, and to **design targeted measures** to assist them. This can only be done with better data and research.

There is an urgent need for an on-going and more systematic engagement on climate change at the Human Rights Council, by **creating a dedicated Special Procedures mandate** on human rights and climate change.

***Mr. Handaine Mohamed, Expert on issues of climate change and indigenous peoples in Africa***

Researcher Fanny Privat projected older people will constitute almost half of the world's population by 2100. The climate change will also continue to accelerate. **The elderly is a heterogeneous group**, and the situation of people inside this group differs, for example in the industrialized countries of the **North** and in the less developed countries of the **South**. **Women** are said to adapt better to the effects of climate change than men, which is why the death rate of older men is much higher than that of women.

Climate change directly affects the rights of older people on several levels: in terms of **access to the right to information** related to the effects of climate change, the elderly do not have the ability to quickly assimilate all the information on climate change in order to understand it and adapt. There is a need to establish **capacity building programs** for older people. The older persons have the right to a healthy and clean environment, the right to access to clean water and food, and to live a calm and peaceful life.

The **situation in Africa** is worrying. With the lack of infrastructure, good governance, and ultra-modern logistics, the elderly will be the easiest prey to the effects of climate change, which is already witnessed in the region of the Sahel and the Sahara. The **indigenous peoples** who are already in a situation of marginalization and the deprivation of their most basic rights, are particularly vulnerable to climate change. They face a terrible risk of the loss of their language and identity in case if climate-induced displacement.



## Oral Interventions from States, Groups of States and Observers

**States (Joint Statements):** *European Union* (on behalf of European Union, its member states and over 40 other countries), *Viet Nam* (on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), *Azerbaijan* (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), *Viet Nam* (on behalf of the Core Group on Climate Change and Human Rights – Bangladesh, Philippines, Viet Nam), *Cameroon* (on behalf of the Group of African States), *European Union*, *Bahamas* (on behalf of a group of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – Bahamas, Fiji, Haiti, Maldives, Singapore), *Ecuador* (on behalf of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Ecuador), *Slovenia* (on behalf of Cross-Regional Group of States – friends of older persons). **States (Statements made in the State's individual capacity):** *Germany* (read by Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance at the Federal Foreign Office), *Qatar*, *Luxembourg*, *Maldives*, *Mauritius*, *Morocco*, *Nepal*, *Pakistan*, *Timor-Leste*, *Mozambique*, *Marshall Islands*, *United States of America*, *Slovenia*, *Fiji*. **Other Observers:** *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*. **NHRIs:** *Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)*, *Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines*. **NGOs:** *International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse*, *Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI)*, *International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations*, *Center for International Environmental Law – CIEL* (joint statement)

**States:** Anthropogenic climate change was said to be one of the **biggest and most profound threats** of our days. Both **sudden-onset events** and the **slow-onset effects** of climate change have a devastating impact on the planet and on human rights. This is particularly true in contexts of fragility and for **vulnerable groups**, including older people. **Older persons** are often less resilient and have fewer adaptive capacities to respond to the effects of climate change. While age does not in itself make individuals more vulnerable to climate risks, age is, however, accompanied by a **number of physical, political, economic and social factors** that may do so. Climate change effects can impair the realisation the **rights to life, food, water and sanitation, housing, freedom of movement, livelihoods, social protection, development and culture**, among others. Climate-related harms such as the increasing spread of vector-borne diseases, heat stress, and the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, disasters and displacement, can have a severe impact on both **physical and mental health** of older persons.

A number of states regretted that vulnerable groups were far too often **excluded from meaningful participation** in discussing solutions. **Traditional knowledge and practices** could be an important contribution to ensuring a holistic, sustainable and human rights-based approach to **adaption and mitigation** of climate change. The **participation of women** in decision-making processes has led to improved outcomes with regard to climate action.

States said the **implementation the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**, and the **Paris Agreement**, as well as climate-focused targets within the **SDGs**, the **Sendai Framework**, and the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** was essential. **National-level commitments** resulting from COP21 must be age-inclusive and sensitive to the rights and needs of people in vulnerable situations. **Slovenia** said its government decided to invite its long time climate negotiator to return to the Slovenian EU presidency project, as a consultant on the international climate negotiations.

**European Union** said that, with the **adoption of the Green Deal**, it was more than ever engaged in the fight against climate change. **Viet Nam**, in a joint statement, called for **enhanced international cooperation** for providing financial, technological and capacity-building support to developing countries, especially low- and middle-income countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation. **Cameroon, on behalf of the African Union**, echoed the call for international solidarity. **Ecuador, in a joint statement**, referred to **good practices** of the States and other actors in its region, that take into account the **differentiated effects of climate change on the rights of the elderly**. **Slovenia, in a joint statement**, raised the concern of **ageism**. **Bahamas on behalf of SIDS** reminded that nowhere on earth can you find better **witnesses to the change** in our climate than in the eyes of older persons in our countries.

A number of countries, including **Morocco, Nepal, Mozambique** and **United States** spoke of their **national efforts** to mitigate the negative impact of climate change on the most affected groups, including older persons. **Qatar** said it would host the **first carbon-neutral World Cup**; and pledged to **provide \$100 million**



to support SIDS and LDCs. **Mauritius**, said it had put in place an **online Climate Change Information Centre** to give access to information and reports on climate change to general public.

**Mauritius** also said the **39 Small Island Developing States were paying the high toll** for climate change, even if they were the least to be blamed for this global crisis. **Maldives** referred to disproportionate suffering from the **carbon emissions in other countries**, and of its national efforts. **Timor-Leste**, referred to tropical cyclone Seroja that hit the country in April 2021, and provoked the worst floods in 48 years of the country's history. As a small and developing state, the associated natural hazards threaten to **reverse progress made** towards the SDGs.

A number of speakers, including **Germany, Viet Nam (on behalf of the Core Group on Climate Change and Human Rights), Marshall Islands, Fiji** expressed their support to the **creation of a new mandate of a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change**. **CIEL** referred to a recent **Open Letter**, signed by representatives of more than 400 NGOs and indigenous peoples' organizations that is calling for the **establishment of the mandate at this session** of the Council.

**UNEP** is partnering with the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions, OHCHR and UNDP to **strengthen the capacity of National Institutions** in addressing climate change. **The GANHRI Working Group on Aging** and the **Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines** called the Member States to support and actively engage in drafting of the Convention on the human rights of older persons. **CIMI** spoke on the **role of indigenous people** and their **traditional knowledge** in mitigating the impact of climate change, and the situation of indigenous peoples in **Brazil**.

*Statements not delivered due to lack of time, but available on HRC Extranet: Bahamas, Barbados, Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Namibia, Russian Federation, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; UN Women.*

### Final Remarks

**Ms. Claudia Mahler:** a binding international human rights instrument with a focus on older persons is urgently needed. Older persons should be more visible. There is a need to have indicators for older persons in SDGs, as well as a need for more disaggregated data. Older persons should take part in discussions on national and international levels, including on the risk assessment. Access to easy, accessible and systematic information is key.

**Mr. Saleemul Huq:** the climate change world has changed over time: the first era – climate change as an environmental problem; the second era – linking the climate change to development; the third era – climate change as a human rights problem, a problem created by rich countries which will impact people in poor countries.

**Ms. Katharina Rall:** climate should be integrated in human rights policies, both nationally and internationally. There should be obligations of monitoring the impacts. Empowerment of older persons and ensuring their participation is key. There is also an urgent need to scale up mitigation commitments. An important step the States can do at this session is to establish a new mandate of a Special Rapporteur on climate change and human rights.

**Mr. Handaine Mohamed:** brought two key points: the need to promote and reinforce the legal framework to protect the human rights of this group; and the need to protect the indigenous peoples. The loss of indigenous people will lead to the loss of indigenous knowledge which is very important in protecting biological diversity and combatting climate change.

Contact: Maryna Yazianok [myazianok@gchragd.org](mailto:myazianok@gchragd.org)

To watch the video recording of the Panel discussion, please refer to [UN Web TV](#)