

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 53rd SESSION

Annual panel discussion on the adverse impact of climate change on human rights

3 July 2023

Panel discussion Theme: Adverse impact of climate change on the full realization of the right to food

Report of the Secretary-General on the impacts of climate change on the full realization of the right to food ([A/HRC/53/47](#))

Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, highlighted the lack of necessary urgency and determination to tackle climate change, and illustrated the horrific and dystopian outcomes manifesting today around the world : **“leaders play the choreography of making decision but get stuck in the short term”**. 828 million people faced hunger in 2021 and climate change is projected to increase this number by 80 million by 2050. Mr. Türk announced his upcoming trip to Iraq in August - where temperatures reached 52.6 degree Celsius – to highlight the risks of the current situation. He also specifically acknowledged that the impact of climate change is worst for smallholder farmers and people across Asia, in Central and South America, the SIDS, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries that did not benefit from industrial development and contributed next to nothing suffer the strongest impact. The High Commissioner laid out important steps to achieve climate goals including : ending **subsidies to the fossil fuel industry**; **courts** around the world must hold governments and companies accountable; make **COP28** a gamechanger; **“shun the green-washers and deniers”**. He underscored the potential for **financial institutions** to become engines of climate action, provided good governance is in place. In parallel to the right to food, Mr. Türk recalled the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, which was adopted by the General Assembly last year

A video testimonial from Indigenous peoples across the world spoke to their dependency on natural climate cycles and biodiversity. Peoples represented were Indigenous Coastal Community (Southern India) , Quechua (Peru), Kadazan (Malaysia), Indigenous people of Northern Kenya, smallholder farmer (Norway)

Mr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In May 2023, the CRC adopted [General Comment n°26](#) on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. He asserted that the effects of climate change are **disproportionately borne by children**. Children born in 2020 will experience nearly 3 times the amount of drought and crop failure. Mr. Mezmur recalled that addressing hunger and malnutrition is **a legally binding human rights obligation** enshrined, inter alia, in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 24**. Additionally, **30 countries constitutionalized the right to food**. However, out of 38 countries experiencing emergency levels of hunger in 2022, it is only the case for **Honduras, Niger, Kenya, and the Democratic republic of Congo**. Mr. Mezmur underlined that **disaggregated data on children** deserves heightened attention in regards to children’s right to food. **Social protection** also plays a crucial role in food security. Violence against children, including gender-based violence, is exacerbated as climate change causes social collapse. Finally, Mr. Mezmur emphasized the **agency of children** are not passive, stating that **children’s involvement in climate consultations** should move from the margins to the mainstream.

Ms. Anna Maria Suarez Franco, Geneva Representative of FIAN International. Citing the International Food Policy Research Institute, Ms. Suarez Franco stated that the industrial food system is the biggest contributor to climate change and to environmental degradation, through deforestation releasing enormous quantities of carbon, among other aspects of food systems. She echoed the report of the Secretary General regarding the need to transform our food industry, adding that **agroecology represented a viable and just mode of food production**. Some of the recommendations based on the analysis of transition experiences in various regions include adopting **binding transition plans** with necessary budget and support for peasants and indigenous communities in line with the **Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Declaration on**

the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, CEDAW general recommendation 34, ICESCR general comment 24, ILO Conventions and ILO guidelines on the promotion of decent work in the agro-food sector.

On state obligations as regards business activities and the recently adopted ILO guidelines on the promotion of decent work in the agro-food sector.; promote the consumption of products from agroecological peasant farmers, for example, through **guaranteed public purchasing for nutrition programs**; ensure access to **small scale markets** with just prices and **state supply contracts**; adopt measures to prevent interference in the industry and transition; reverse discriminatory structural policies against agroecology such as budget, subsidies, trade, investment, and research; recognize peasant farming innovation and the innovation of Indigenous Peoples. Ms. Suarez Franco expressed divergent views with the report of the Secretary-General regarding the fact that **food systems have caused serious environmental destruction**, adding that this report was inconsistent with that of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food ([A/HRC/52/40](#)). She deplored that the report did not address the **failure of the food security paradigm based on global trade** to ensure the right to food. Ms. Suarez Franco also recalled the **request of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food to include the right to food as a guiding principle of the UN Food Systems Summit** and echoed many NGOs and social movements disappointment in this regard.

Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri Director of the Geneva Global office of the World Food Programme stated that **3.6 billion** people live in areas highly vulnerable to climate extremes vulnerable areas. In 2023, **345 million** people are projected to be acutely food insecure across the 79 countries. In the past decade, **80% of all disasters were climate related**, affecting **1.7 billion** people globally and **150 billion USD annually**. Climate change is one of the leading causes of the rise of hunger around the world. Mr. Cirri mentioned multiple crucial elements of solutions : (1) **anticipatory action**; currently 1 in 3 people still lack these systems. (2) strengthen social protection systems. (3) Building resilience through multi-year investments. In Niger for exemple, communities who received these investment were able to cope with the 2022 food crisis without needing assistance. Mr. Cirri expressed concern for the **funding gap** in the humanitarian system, nearing **60%**, while needs are increasing rapidly.

Ms. Pasang Dolma Sherpa, Executive Director of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Research and Development highlighted that Indigenous **knowledge, spiritual values, cultural practices** and way of living have been the main foundation for the preservation of natural resources, ecosystems, biodiversity, and food security. Indeed, 6.2 % of Indigenous contribute to protecting more than 80% of biodiversity. Additionally, 70% of Indigenous people live in Asia and 75% still live in rural area and depend on ecosystems. According to the IPCC, indigenous knowledge is essential to adapt and deal with the crisis. Ms. Dolma Sherpa underscored the significance of the **Paris Agreement**, the establishment of the **Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, and the discussions in the UNFCCC**. However, she pointed out that at the national and local level, Indigenous communities are being severely impacted by climate change, **losing resilience capabilities**. Moreover, Indigenous rights and knowledge still exist in the margins of climate discussions. Answering questions from the floor, she asserted that investing in **indigenous-led** resource is fundamental to promote food security.

Interactive dialogue

The Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of **Viet Nam** was the first to take the floor expressing his government's belief that those who are **more affected should receive more attention and assistance**. This view was shared by **Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Caribbean Community, Peru on behalf of a group of Latin American and Caribbean countries, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Costa Rica, Mauritius, Maldives, on behalf of a group of countries**, who highlighted the unique position of the **SIDS** in this crisis. Sharing Viet Nam's experience in the transition of food systems, the country was able to "feed its population and become a transparent, responsible and sustainable food provider, at a regional, and global scale". The country also reiterated its commitment to the **2021 UN Food Systems Summit**.

Lebanon, on behalf of the group of Arab countries, refer to General Assembly resolution [A/76/L.55](#) recognizing the negative impact of climate change on food security and resolution [A/HRC/RES/37/10](#) of

the Human Rights Council. Also reiterating support of the group for the **Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN)**, which was launched by Egypt as the host country of COP27. Peru called for concrete action in line with the **FAO Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security**.

The Dominican Republic* addressed the disastrous proliferation of **sargassum algae** which endangers marine ecosystems and environmental sustainability. The delegation called for **urgent support** from the international community in the form of **financial and technical support and capacity-building**. Other delegations have made in this call according to their national context, including

Belgium, on behalf of the Organization of the Francophonie highlighted the various international cooperation projects carried by the International Organization of Francophonie driven by the **2022 Djerba Summit**, including **project NEXUS** launched in the Sahel. The **European Union** concurred with panellists that current food systems contribute to climate change and highlighted the **impact of war**, including the war on Ukraine, on the food crisis. Costa Rica on behalf of 21 countries signatories of the **Geneva Pledge on Human Rights and Climate Action**, expressed its intention to revive the pledge first adopted in 2015. Many countries invited Member States to contribute and engage with **COP28**. **Oman on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council** and **Pakistan** also mentioned their support for the **Saudi & Middle East Green Initiatives**. Many developing countries, including the **Philippines, on behalf of the core group on climate and human rights which includes Bangladesh and Viet Nam** called for enhanced support and **international cooperation** to build resilience and continue adaptation efforts.

Lebanon, Trinidad and Tobago, the Maldives, Brazil, and Mali on behalf of a group of countries beneficiaries of the Special Trust Fund for LDCs and SIDS welcomed the decision to establish a **Loss and Damage Fund**. Many countries explained the challenges posed their reliance on food imports and by excessive price volatility and fluctuating availability of food imports including **Trinidad and Tobago, Maldives, Mauritius**. The **disproportionate impact** on vulnerable people, particularly **women and girls** were expressly acknowledged by **Lithuania on behalf on the Nordic-Baltic countries, Costa Rica, Cameroon, Senegal, Germany, Benin, and Peru** which mentioned indigenous women.

Pakistan underscored that climate change contributes to a **reduced fiscal space** and impacts infrastructure, thereby impacting other social economic and cultural rights. Finally **Cameroon** brought attention **climate related migration**.

NGOs and NHRI call for a human rights based approach to the food crisis, emphasizing just and **equitable food system transitions** as opposed to the **unfair structures of the global economy**. **Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII** stated that health, the environment and food should be treated as common goods. **CIEL** reminded the Council that the food sector is **intertwined with the fossil fuel sector** since synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are byproducts of fossil fuels. The **Centre Europe-Tiers Monde** asserted that discussions on the economics of food systems have historically **marginalized groups and social movements** and should undergo a profound transformation.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (23 country delegations):

Viet Nam, Lebanon, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Peru, Dominican Republic, Belgium, Maldives, Lithuania, European Union, Oman, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Mali, Cameroon, Timor-Leste, Mauritius, Oman, Niger, Senegal, Germany, Benin, Brazil

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (6):

Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (El Salvador), Commission on Human Rights (Philippines), World Vision International, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Centre Europe - tiers monde

To watch the full meeting refer to [UN Web TV](#).

* on behalf of Barbados, Costa Rica, México, Honduras, France, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Antigua y Barbuda, Bahamas, Colombia, El Salvador, China

