

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 57th SESSION

### Interactive Dialogue on the Secretary-General’s analytical study on the impact of climate change on human rights

13 and 16 September 2024

In response to HRC resolution 53/6, the UN Secretary-General’s study explored how climate change impacts the full enjoyment of human rights, specifically through the lens of loss and damage. **Ms. Peggy Hicks, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Rights to Development**, underscored the alarming state of the planet, citing record temperatures during the summer of 2024, with 13 of the past 14 months exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a threshold established in the Paris Agreement. Such a rapid rise in temperature intensifies extreme weather events, such as forest fires, sea-level rise, and glacier melt, directly threatening human lives, ecosystems, and socio-economic stability. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), **losses and damages increase with every fraction of a degree of warming**, underscoring the need to mitigate and adapt swiftly to avoid further irreversible harm. The economic losses, especially for developing countries, were estimated at USD 435 billion in 2020 alone. However, Ms. Hicks emphasized that **the true extent of loss and damage transcends monetary quantification**, pointing to non-economic losses like biodiversity collapse, the destruction of cultural heritage, and violations of human rights, including the right to education, food, and a healthy environment. Climate-induced disruptions, such as droughts and soil depletion, lead to long-term consequences, depriving communities of their livelihoods and basic rights. Furthermore, Ms. Hicks drew attention to the inequitable impact of climate change, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations who often lack the resources to recover from such damages. This injustice is compounded by historical emissions: industrialized nations have been responsible for three times the emissions of the entire Global South from 1850 to 2002, amplifying their obligation to contribute to reparations.

**International human rights law requires States to take immediate action to avert and remedy climate-related harm.** Effective responses must incorporate equity-based approaches that acknowledge the polluter-pays principle and the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities. For example, Ms. Hicks referred to the Carbon Majors database, which attributes over 70% of global carbon emissions since the Industrial Revolution to just 78 fossil fuel and cement producers, further reinforcing the need to hold corporate actors accountable for their role in the climate crisis. Moreover, existing loss and damage mechanisms under the UNFCCC are not currently designed or intended, in and of themselves, to fulfil the human rights obligations of States to provide effective remedies for climate harms. With initial pledges of USD 661 million, Ms. Hicks pointed out that this covers only a fraction of what is needed annually, highlighting the urgent need for more robust financial solutions.

The Secretary-General’s **report calls for integrating human rights into climate policies and legislation**, urging States to adopt gender-responsive, intersectional approaches that account for structural inequalities. It also highlights the **importance of climate resilience through social security and a just transition towards a human-rights-based economy**, stressing that developed countries should support developing nations in strengthening social protection systems. Financial reform must include innovative measures like fossil fuel subsidy phase-outs, the introduction of taxes on carbon-intensive industries, and debt relief for climate-vulnerable nations. **Legal accountability** is another key element, with Ms. Hicks referencing the role of climate litigation as a tool for holding States and corporations accountable. She noted recent milestones such as South Korea’s Constitutional Court ruling that its climate policies violated the right to live in a healthy environment, as well as the proposal by Vanuatu, Fiji, and Samoa to recognize ecocide as a crime. Finally, the report introduces the idea of **using transitional justice frameworks to address the systemic and historic injustices tied to climate**

**change.** This approach could enable reparations on a larger scale, capturing not only economic damages, but also the deep, non-economic losses suffered by communities worldwide.

### Interactive dialogue

77 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of countries' statements emphasized the critical need for urgent, equitable action to address climate change and its impacts on human rights.** Many delegations stressed the importance of integrating human rights principles into climate policy and ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are prioritized. The discussion highlighted the severe economic and social consequences of climate-related extreme events and the need for enhanced financial resources and innovative solutions to support affected communities.

The **EU** called for increased global efforts and financial support to mitigate the disproportionate effects of losses from climate events on developing countries and small island States. Other delegations, including **Viet Nam, Bangladesh,** and the **Philippines** echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the devastating human rights impacts of recent disasters and the need for rights-based solutions and increased international cooperation.

Statements from **Samoa, Vanuatu,** and **the Bahamas**, *inter alia*, reflected a shared concern about the inadequacy of current adaptation efforts to fully address loss and damage. Samoa and Vanuatu stressed the importance of activating the Loss and Damage Fund and integrating non-economic losses, such as cultural and health impacts, into climate policies. The **Bahamas** also highlighted the severe impact of climate change on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and called for developed countries to fulfil their climate finance commitments and adopt innovative mechanisms to support vulnerable communities.

Several countries, including **Belgium** and **Denmark**, supported exploring new financial mechanisms to enhance climate resilience. This includes innovative approaches like debt-for-climate swaps and increased international financial commitments.

There was a common call for developed countries to lead in providing financial support, technology transfer, and capacity building to developing nations. This was particularly highlighted by **China, Brazil,** and **Zimbabwe.**

Some delegations, including **Burkina Faso** and **Albania**, emphasized the need for robust legal and policy frameworks to support climate resilience and protect human rights. They also highlighted the importance of international collaboration in developing and implementing these frameworks.

**UNEP** underscored that loss and damage undermine fundamental rights such as the right to life, health, food, housing, and a clean environment, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups including indigenous people, women, and children. **UNESCO** highlighted the urgency of addressing climate change, emphasizing the need for science-led action that also considers the distributional impacts of climate policies. **UNDP** stressed that the impacts of loss and damage on human rights are evident in least developed countries and SIDS, affecting their development priorities.

Overall, **NGOs** underlined the need for a human rights-based approach to climate action, accountability for climate-related damages, and the integration of diverse perspectives into climate policies. The **Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)** called for States to be held accountable for their role in the climate crisis and emphasized the importance of addressing fossil fuel contributions. **Plan International, Inc.** highlighted that loss and damage from climate change represent a profound intergenerational crisis, which underscores the need for urgent action to protect future generations while ensuring current human rights are respected.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (77 country delegations):

*European Union, Denmark (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States), Qatar (on behalf of the Arab Group), Maldives (on behalf of a group of country), Viet Nam (on behalf of a group of country), Bahamas (on behalf of a group of countries), Czechia, Germany, Kuwait, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Oman, Sovereign Order of Malta, Luxembourg, Nepal, Jordan, Iraq, Zambia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Belgium, Panama, Maldives, Honduras, Togo, United States of America, Indonesia, Côte d'Ivoire, Jamaica, Iran, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Bahrain, Egypt, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Romania, Albania, Philippines, Ghana, Cuba, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Bangladesh, Georgia, Zimbabwe, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Samoa, Ireland, Mauritania, Venezuela, Cyprus, Ethiopia, China, Mali, Vanuatu, Tunisia, Bolivia, Timor-Leste, Kenya, Thailand, Greece, Gambia, Benin, Niger, Marshall Islands, Namibia, Cambodia, Ukraine, India, Azerbaijan, Spain, Sudan, Mauritius, Saudi Arabia.*

NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (10):

*Center for International Environmental Law, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, FIAN International e.V., VIVAT International, Plan International, Inc., Green and Better World, Franciscans International, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, International Muslim Women's Union, World Barua Organization*

International organizations: UNDP, UN Women, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNEP.

To watch the full meeting refer to UN WEB TV: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)