



***The Post-Paris agenda: bridging human rights and climate change:  
High Level Dialogue***

**Geneva, Palais de Nations, 13 septembre, 2016**

**Implementing the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action  
Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al  
Hussein**

Geneva, 13 September 2016

Excellencies,  
Colleagues and friends,

I would like to thank the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action for hosting this important event. I am pleased to welcome Patricia Espinoza, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to this meeting.

We are here to discuss our common future – one that is threatened on many fronts, with climate change among the potentially most devastating.

In February 2015, when OHCHR and The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice co-hosted a Climate Justice Dialogue, our aim was to bring together climate negotiators and Council delegates to establish better understanding of the important links between climate and human rights.

States which signed the Geneva Pledge committed to advocating for a climate agreement that would protect the rights of people most highly vulnerable to climate change. They agreed to strive for a continuing dialogue on climate justice, and they pledged to help ensure that climate change and human rights communities worked hand in hand.

In the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris, my Office called for an ambitious and legally binding agreement that would ensure parties promote human rights in all climate action; keep temperatures within 1.5 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial levels; and protect those people who are most vulnerable to climate change. And we welcomed the consensus which took shape in the world's first universal, legally binding agreement requiring all States to address the shared danger created by our warming planet.

Today, there is no longer any doubt that climate change is a human rights issue. And that is thanks to the efforts of many of you here in this room.

However, now is not the time for complacency. This year, like the year before it, was the hottest on historical record, an estimated 1.38 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. We are in the midst of a climate crisis, and it is one of our own making.

The Paris Agreement can help guard against the worst consequences, but it will not stop climate change or its negative impacts. In fact, as it stands, the commitments made by States in their intended nationally determined contributions fall far short of the level of ambition needed to keep warming below 1.5 or even 2 degrees over pre-industrial temperatures. We need strong action to fulfil the commitments made in Paris last year, and to extend beyond that agreement.

Excellencies,

Climate change threatens the quality of life of every human being alive, as well as of our descendants. As the Human Rights Council has repeatedly pointed out, the damage will extend to a broad range of rights, including food, water, sanitation, adequate housing, and health. In some cases, rising sea-levels threaten the existence of entire countries, and their people's right to self-determination. The communities most vulnerable to the devastating human rights impact of climate change include indigenous people, small farmers, fishing communities, people in small island states and least developed countries – surely among those least responsible for creating this terrible situation.

Many victims of climate change could be rendered reliant on international support. We will need a concerted international effort to ensure justice for all those who suffer such climate harm by integrating human rights considerations in climate policy. Climate justice requires that this support should come especially from those who have the most resources and contributed the most heavily to climate change.

Climate change is the result of public policies and private actions. We know how to avert this threat, and State obligations in this regard are long-standing and clear. Under international human rights law, States must prevent climate harms by regulating environmental practices, protecting vulnerable communities, holding violators accountable, and ensuring redress where harms are suffered. To meet these obligations will require stronger laws, more effective regulation of the private sector, incentives to act and measures to protect.

Climate solutions rooted in human rights will require goals and targets with high ambition; accountability; protection and empowerment of the vulnerable; meaningful participation of civil society and affected communities; and non-discrimination. They will need States to allocate the resources necessary to shift to a sustainable course, including climate aid for developing countries. At the global level, it will mean strong steps must be taken to ensure carbon neutrality, and to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less.

This effort to rescue our planet starts with each of you, and your work to implement the Paris Agreement and the Geneva Pledge. It will continue at the COP22 conference in Marrakesh and subsequent meetings. It is an effort that must be integrated into local and domestic policies, including nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans of action. And I urge you to make it part of your advocacy internationally.

To support your efforts, OHCHR will continue to engage with the UNFCCC and other processes. We will advocate safeguards for the Sustainable Development Mechanism, and we will work to integrate human rights into all implementation of the Paris Agreement. Recently, we submitted inputs to the Nairobi Work Programme related to climate adaptation and the right to health, to the Lima Work Programme on gender equality, and to the Paris Committee for Capacity-building.

In October, the Geneva Pledge and my Office will co-host a meeting of human rights and climate experts to help chart a path forward for rights-based and inclusive climate action that benefits all people. I hope many of you will attend. We will take the meeting's recommendations to Marrakesh, where we will continue to work with Geneva Pledge States and other key allies to advance human rights considerations throughout climate response, mitigation and adaptation. I encourage each of you to support these efforts.

My friends,

Failure to take strong action today will take us further down a path of climate devastation – fuelling the spread of conflict, poverty, famine, drought and other dangerous weather phenomena, as well as the spread of disease.

We must pull back from this imminent danger. The time for dialogue is over. The time for rights-based climate action is now.

Thank you.

## **Statement by the Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, Amb. Patricia Espinosa**

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me at the outset thank the Signatories of the Geneva Pledge for hosting this event and inviting me to join you. And let me thank all the other speakers and panelists who will participate in today's crucial conversation.

Following last year's historic agreements – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and, of course, the Paris Climate Change Agreement – conversations such as this one are shaping the future of global growth and development.

The agreements reached in 2015 hold great potential to be included in a list of mankind's greatest achievements. Nations of the world came together and agreed to change the trajectory of global growth for the better. At the heart of this determination by nations is an explicit aim to guarantee many of the human rights that must be afforded to every woman, man and child on this planet.

The Paris Agreement preamble acknowledges that climate change is a common concern of humankind. It states that Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights.

These rights include the right to health, the right to development and the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations. There is a stated aim of achieving gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

The Sustainable Development Goals similarly seek to realize the human rights of all. And, the SDGs speak to these rights directly, from the food and water that make up our most essential right to life... to civil and political rights that are part of inclusive societies where women and girls are treated equally and opportunity is open to all.

Yet, as we look forward to a future transformed in which development can be sustained for generations to come, we do so against the backdrop of terrible humanitarian crisis throughout the world.

In southern Africa and Central America, hundreds of millions of people are suffering from drought made worse by a strong El Niño phenomenon. In North America, Asia and Europe, millions more have lost their homes to record flooding.

There are communities across the world that are right now rebuilding from the latest climate impacts. And there are communities that cannot rebuild and must relocate due to these impacts. Even the migration flows that we have witnessed in the last months, may have been partially caused or worsened by climate change-related phenomena.

It is excellent news that climate science is getting better. But the bad news is that we can now more clearly see the fingerprints of climate change on some of the most challenging crises we face. And we can see how climate change impacts human rights.

Reduction in quantity and quality of water resources impacts rights to water and health. Reduction of crop yields impacts the right to life and food. Loss of land and displacement that can result from these conditions affect a host of human rights and puts many of our sustainable development goals out of reach.

One of the central questions I must confront as I begin my tenure as Executive Secretary of the UN Climate Change secretariat is how to establish climate change policy as a positive force in the modern movement towards human rights.

Certainly we have the foundation to accomplish this. Every country that adopted the Paris Agreement is party to at least one human rights treaty with binding legal obligations to respect, fulfill, and protect the rights of their people, including those most at risk. The Paris Agreement is the first treaty on climate change to recognize the importance of human rights in both principle and practical action. We have a mandate to make the connection.

There are three ways that I believe we can strengthen this connection and make every step forward on climate change a step forward for the rights of all people.

First, we must recognize the intersections and overlaps between climate action and action to advance the sustainable development agenda. Yes, finance must be allocated separately, policy must be articulated in distinct ways and action must advance on both issues at the same time. But we can also recognize how the outcomes of each are mutually reinforcing and mutually beneficial.

It is a concept recognized by Pope Francis in his encyclical call to care for our common home. It is reflected by the world's largest investors and insurers who see climate change as a long-term threat to their viability. It is stated in the IPCC Fifth Assessment report, which links sufficiently disruptive climate change to the preclusion of any prospect for a sustainable future. Every country should therefore reconcile sustainable development and human rights with implementation of their national climate action plans submitted under the Paris Agreement.

The second way we can strengthen the link between climate change and human rights is through communication to our constituencies. The highest levels of moral authority, leaders of the investor and business communities and the world's scientists are calling climate change the most pressing challenge – or even threat – that we face.

An overwhelming amount of evidence points to fundamental principles that everyone can understand. Satisfying the most basic needs opens opportunity for society as a whole to advance. Healthy populations make healthy growth and development possible. Efforts towards equality, education and ending poverty are the foundation for positive progress. These global goals can only be met with full participation and public support. Awareness and action by all only happens when the need to act is communicated and practical pathways are available to all.

The third thing we can do is maximize the mutual benefits. When policymakers recognize the intersection of climate policy and development that respects human rights and communicate that overlap to their constituencies, the door is open for policy that satisfies both sides of the equation.

Policy to sustainably manage forests and other natural resources also protects the rights of indigenous peoples. Climate smart agriculture creates resilient communities that are food and water-secure even in the face of impacts. Gender sensitive climate change policy empowers women and gives them equal standing in the decisions that affect their future and their children's future. Climate policy can be – and must be – more than a way to stabilize the atmospheric system. It is a way to deliver benefits to the people.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the greatest opportunities of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals offer is the potential for systemic change – a long-term shift at a generational scale, a transformation where the human rights of all are guaranteed.

And while each country has its own legal obligations to ensure rights in the multilateral agreements they have signed on to, assuring all the actions needed for positive progress puts us on the path to a new model of development.

Our only development path must now be sustainable. We can ensure the planet provides the essential ingredients for life and the opportunity for better lives by recognizing the danger of unchecked climate change and acting on that threat.

We must – as a global community of nations, as sovereign states and as communities of concerned citizens – act now to secure long-term benefits. We must act on sustainable development and on climate change and we must do so with the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable at the forefront of our decision making.

We must act for the people suffering on every continent of our common home. We must act for the people suffering from drought in Southern Africa and Central America, for people displaced by conflict and climate change and for those who are hit by more floods, stronger storms and higher seas than we have ever seen. We must act so that this suffering is not extended to future generations.

Today, I invite the signatories of the Geneva Pledge to reach out. Reach out to your country's negotiators. Reach out to national ministers and cabinet members. Reach out to decision makers in public and private sectors. Reach out to anyone who can build human rights into climate action and implore them to do exactly that.

I also respectfully ask that you increase the size and strength of your network. Whether it is inviting more nations to join the Geneva Pledge or asking more cities, companies, investors and institutions to work on this issue or raising public awareness... these crucial connections must be made and then acted upon.

This is a momentous moment for climate change and sustainable development. Together we can make it more. We can make it a moment that we put the inalienable human rights of every person on this planet at the center of the transformation of social and economic development.

We can do this together, and I look forward to a robust discussion from the many perspectives here today on how we can achieve this aspirational aim.

Thank you.



**Comunicado de prensa**  
**Diálogo: La agenda post-Paris, acercando los derechos humanos, el cambio climático y el ambiente**  
**Setiembre 13, 2016**

El día de hoy se realizó en Ginebra, un diálogo de alto nivel con la presencia del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos, S.E. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein y la Secretaria Ejecutiva de la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas para el Cambio Climático S.E. Patricia Espinosa. Este evento fue organizado por el Geneva Pledge y fue presentado por la Embajadora Sra. Elayne Whyte, quien moderó el intercambio en nombre de los países signatarios del Geneva Pledge. Construyendo sobre las bases del preámbulo del Acuerdo de París, donde se establece que los Estados deben, al tomar acciones contra el cambio climático, respetar, promover y considerar sus respectivas obligaciones en materia de derechos humanos. Y dando seguimiento a las resoluciones del Consejo de Derechos Humanos sobre derechos humanos, cambio climático y ambiente respectivamente, los Estados signatarios propiciaron este encuentro público para abordar oportunidades y mecanismos de colaboración entre ambas agendas, y concretar acciones tanto a nivel de política internacional como en la esfera doméstica y local.

El Alto Comisionado inauguró el diálogo insistiendo en que la 'justicia climática' es un derecho humano, y que el planeta debe luchar por la carbono neutralidad y para mantener el efecto del calentamiento global a 1.5 C grados o menos. Al mismo tiempo, hizo hincapié en la necesidad de empoderar a las poblaciones más vulnerables y asignar recursos para la sostenibilidad. Dijo que: 'en un mundo de contradicciones' debemos optar por encontrar similitudes, y que los derechos

humanos y el ambiente no pueden eclipsarse el uno al otro, sino trabajar juntos para implementar los acuerdos internacionales, la agenda 2030 y las metas de desarrollo sostenible.

Por su parte, la Secretaria Ejecutiva del UNFCCC enfatiz que este es 'el momento de momentos' y debemos trabajar juntos para implementar el Acuerdo de París y todas las acciones concretas para que la transformación hacia un desarrollo sostenible sea una realidad. En ese contexto dijo: 'los derechos humanos son inalienables y deben estar en el centro del desarrollo social y económico', insistió también en trabajar juntos para lograrlo.

La conversación de hoy fue crucial e histórica en la redefinición del desarrollo global y la relevancia del respeto y aplicación de los derechos humanos de los hombres, mujeres y niños en las políticas de cambio climático, y el derecho básico al agua, la salud, el alimento, la paz, la educación, la participación ciudadana, entre otros.

**El diálogo concluyó con un panel de alto nivel, moderado por Marc Limon del Universal Rights Group; con la participación de Jan Dusik, representante regional del PNUMA; Laurence Boisson del Comité Asesor del Consejo de Derechos Humanos; Sebastian Duyck de CIEL y el Emb. Mohamed Auajjar Representante Permanente de Marruecos y anfitrión de la COP22.**

c.c. Maricela Muñoz