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IPCC REPORT REVEALS STRONGEST EVIDENCE OF HOW CLIMATE CHANGE HARMS LIVES AND PERPETUATES INEQUALITY

Today's report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on Climate Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability provides unequivocal evidence that governments' failure to rapidly cut emissions is leading to irreversible changes to the conditions that sustain humanity, nature and ecosystems. More than ever before, it is clear that these failures constitute human rights violations.

In the report, the IPCC provides its most detailed evidence thus far of how marginalisation and discrimination exacerbate climate-related harms and explicitly recognises the differential impacts of climate change caused by historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The report shows that between 2010 and 2020, deaths from floods, droughts and storms were 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions, compared to regions with very low vulnerability to climate change.

All governments have read and approved the IPCC report summary. They have no excuse. They are fully aware of the losses that humanity is already facing and the threats that lie ahead if they don't change course. They must adopt, in consultation with affected groups, urgent policy and legal changes to rapidly phase out fossil fuels and carry out a rapid and just transformation of energy use in a way that reverses discrimination, oppression and inequality and protects and advances the rights of workers, communities reliant on fossil fuel-based economies, Indigenous Peoples and others whose human rights are at risk. Wealthy states must significantly increase their contribution to international climate finance, including significant resources towards loss and damage faced by affected people. For every single day in which states postpone or avoid action – or even worse take backwards steps – they take the conscious decision to deny people's human rights.

As the UN Secretary General said at the report launch, the report findings are enraging but we must now turn rage into action. Faced with climate tipping points, we need mobilization tipping points. People from around the world must be able to claim their rights. Mass mobilization is essential to remove states' license to play with humanity's future.

The report shows that severe impacts from human-induced climate change are accelerating compared to the IPCC's assessment in 2014, and already causing severe loss and damage, including loss of life, livelihoods, and biodiversity. These climate-related impacts severely harm people's enjoyment of their human rights. For example, the right to food has been harmed, with climate change slowing the growth of agricultural productivity globally. The right to water is being greatly compromised, as half of the world's population currently experience severe water scarcity for at least some part of the year due to climatic and non-climatic drivers. The rights to life and health are also impacted, for example with growing numbers of people dying or suffering as the result of extreme heat events or in relation to climate-related food-borne and water-borne diseases.

The report stresses what people at the frontline of climate change have been highlighting for years. Those who are marginalised, discriminated and excluded from decision-making are the ones who are suffering the most and will experience the gravest impacts yet to come. Climate-related impacts are not felt equally, with "hot spot of human vulnerability" found particularly in West, Central and East Africa, South Asia, Central and South America, Small Island Developing States and the Arctic. Observed impacts of heatwaves in urban areas are concentrated amongst the economically and socially marginalized residents, such as those living in informal settlements.

Looking at the future, the report provides terrifying projections on what would happen if the world does not change course: extinction of species, destruction of entire ecosystems, and entire parts of the world becoming practically uninhabitable, either because they are unsuitable to grow food, or because heat stress and humidity will make it impossible for human bodies to cool down. Approximately 50-75% of the global population could be exposed to periods of "life-threatening climatic conditions" due to combination of extreme heat and humidity by 2100.

For example, going above a 1.5°C temperature increase would increase the risk of simultaneous crop losses of maize in major food-producing regions. This would increase food prices, reduce household incomes, and lead to malnutrition unless there is significant adaptation, especially in tropical regions. More than 250,000 people would die each year by 2050, more than half in Africa, due to heat, undernutrition, malaria, and diarrheal disease caused by climate change.

At 1.5°C warming, between 9% and 18% of the global population will be regularly exposed to extreme heat events at least once in 5 years, with the exposure rate nearly tripling with 2°C warming. If temperature increase reaches approximately 2°C, the number of days of exposure to extreme heat would likely increase exponentially from 15 million person-days to 170 billion person-days. India and Sub-Saharan Africa would be among the most affected.

In the medium-term, approximately a billion people in low-lying cities and settlements, including Small Islands, are projected to be at risk from coastal-specific climate hazards. Sea level rise poses an existential threat for some Small Islands and low-lying coasts.

As climate-related impacts are already happening and will worsen with increased levels of global warming, the report shows the imperative for governments to put in place adequate measures to support people to adapt to these effects. So far governments have failed to allocate sufficient resources for adaptation, including wealthy countries' international development assistance. However, this must change, as effective adaptation measures can significantly reduce the negative impact of climate change on human rights, as illustrated by the report's findings.

The report highlights how adaptation measures that do not consider adverse outcomes for different groups can lead to maladaptation, increasing exposure to risks, compounding marginalization of certain groups, and exacerbating inequalities. Instead, the report calls for adaptation measures to be designed as "multi-sectoral solutions that address social inequities", such as those that integrate climate adaptation into social protection programs and forest conservation and restoration approaches that fully respects the rights of Indigenous peoples and other local communities. The report calls for inclusive planning initiatives informed by cultural values, Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge.

The report makes clear that climate adaptation measures, while crucial, are not by any means sufficient. Not all losses and damages can be prevented, even with effective adaptation, especially for lower-income people and those marginalized. In addition, the report explains that the capacity of people and ecosystems to adapt to climate change is limited and that some limits to human adaptation have already been reached or could be approaching fast. Limiting global warming as much as possible and keeping the global temperature rise to 1.5°C remains the utmost imperative. There is very limited room for manoeuvre. If global warming even temporarily exceeds 1.5°C, many human and natural systems will face additional severe risks, as some impacts will cause release of additional greenhouse gases and some of the impacts will be irreversible.

The final statement in the report could not have been clearer. "The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all."

Further resources:

Amnesty International, COP26 outcome: 12 months to take climate action that delivers on human rights, available [here](#).

For more detailed analysis on climate change and human rights, see Amnesty International, Stop burning our rights: What states and corporations must do to protect humanity from the climate crisis, June 2021, available [here](#).

See also Amnesty International report, "*It will be too late to help us once we are dead*" : The human rights impact of climate change in drought-stricken southern Madagascar, October 2021, available [here](#) and the Amnesty International photo-digest, "*Unliveable for humans*": A visual documentation of Jacobabad, one of the world's hottest cities available [here](#).