



Joint Statement: Greenpeace – Amnesty International

Protection of human rights from climate change requires urgent shift to 100% renewable energy for all.

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Climate change is a human rights issue. Already today many people around the world have their rights to life, water, food, health, housing and other rights impacted by climate impacts.

It is in our hands to stop making this situation worse. Governments must speed up this change here in Paris to phase-out of fossil fuels by 2050 through a just transition towards 100% renewable energy, as well as the protection and restoration of forests and other ecosystems.

So far, however, States are still failing to take sufficient action on climate change. The national commitments to reduce emissions presented so far can, at best, keep the global average temperature rise to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels.¹ This is far higher than the 1.5°C most vulnerable countries see as the maximum, if they are to survive and which the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called upon States to treat as the maximum rise.

If this failure continues it will result in the destruction of ecosystems and deny millions of people their human rights. No accountability mechanism has been put in place in the climate regime with a specific mandate to ensure that these commitments are kept.

The human rights consequences of failure are stark. Up to an additional 600 million people could face hunger by 2080 due to climate change.² Even if the global temperature rises no more than 2°C, one in seven people in the world will face a severe reduction in water resources.³ The adverse effects are likely to be disproportionately experienced by those living in poverty, particularly women and girls, Indigenous Peoples and others disadvantaged due to discrimination. 157.8 million people were forced from their homes in the past seven years as a result of extreme weather. In 2015 we are at a 60 percent greater risk of being displaced than we were in 1975.⁴ With the impacts of climate change rapidly unfolding, the risk of displacement may soon reach catastrophic proportions – storms, floods, sea level rise, droughts, will impact an even large number of people, all around the world. Furthermore, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.⁵

All States have obligations under international human rights law to prevent harm to human rights, including the rights to life, to housing, food, water, sanitation and to a healthy environment. The obligations to protect human rights from harm caused by environmental pollution have been recognised by courts and international human rights monitoring bodies around the world. And these obligations apply irrespective of what States commit to in Paris. This means States must take all reasonable steps within their power to reduce carbon emissions from their countries within the shortest possible time-frame nationally, and through international agreement. On current scenarios, the world's carbon budget – the amount of carbon emissions that can be emitted without causing dangerous levels of climate change – will be exhausted by 2040. Human rights therefore cannot be protected unless governments phase out fossil fuels.

¹ Climate Action Tracker, 2015, <http://climateactiontracker.org/news/224/INDCs-lower-projected-warming-to-2.7C-significant-progress-but-still-above-2C-.html>

² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world, New York, 2007, p. 90.

³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), Working Group II Report, p.250.

⁴ IDMC report: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201507-globalEstimates-2015/20150713-global-estimates-2015-en-v1.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/>

In Paris, States must explicitly recognize their obligations to human rights in the context of climate change, clearly commit to end the fossil fuel era, and accelerate the transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050. The timeline must be mid-century – the end of the century is far too late.

States must commit to review and further deepen their emission reduction commitments every five years, commencing right after Paris with a view to improving on the commitments for 2020-2025. Emission reduction commitments must be legally binding, and include common accounting rules for mitigation and for provision of sufficient finance to poor and vulnerable countries to ensure that renewable energy is the most affordable option.

The shift to 100% renewable energy by mid century can and must be carried out in a manner that is just and complies with human rights standards. It should protect the rights of workers, such as by taking steps to ensure access to alternative livelihoods for those working in or whose livelihoods are currently dependent on fossil fuels sectors. The rights of everyone to an adequate standard of living and housing, in particular those living in poverty, are respected, protected and fulfilled in the course of this transition.

In order to comply with their obligations under international human rights law, states must take actions to prevent harm and also assist those negatively affected, helping them to build their resilience to already occurring climate change, such as by safeguarding their access to water. They must put in place mechanisms to provide remedy to those whose rights have been denied as a result of climate change.

States must abide by their human rights obligations in all aspects related to climate change. They must end all forms of discrimination and guarantee gender equality; guarantee the right to information; ensure the right to participation of affected people; and ensure the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Amnesty International and Greenpeace International call on governments at COP 21 to protect human rights by including an explicit reference to human rights in Article 2 as well as agreeing to phase out fossil fuels and deliver 100% renewables for all by 2050.

Notes

Greenpeace's 2015 Energy [R]evolution scenario proposes a pathway to a 100% sustainable energy supply based on renewable energy by showing how it is possible to drastically reduce CO2 emissions as climate science demands, and make redundant new oil exploration in the Arctic and deep sea waters such as off the coast of Brazil. It also demonstrates that this transformation would increase employment in the energy sector. It shows that within the next 15 years, renewable energy's share of electricity could treble from 21% today to 64%.

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