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**49th Session of the Human Rights Council**

 Plain English version of:

Summary of the panel discussion on older persons’ human rights in the context of climate change (A/HRC/49/61)

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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| *What is the aim of this document?* |
| Under Human Rights Council resolution 44/7, the Council decided to hold a panel discussion on promoting and protecting older persons’ human rights in the context of climate change during its 47th session. The Council also requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to submit a summary report of the panel discussion to the Human Rights Council at its 49th session. This report summarizes the panel discussion on human rights and climate change that was held on 30 June 2021.*Who is this report for?*This report is for people who:* draft, design, or are interested in climate policy as it affects older persons,
* advocate for the rights of older people in the area of climate change, or
* are interested in the area of climate policy generally.
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 I. Introduction

1. Under resolution 44/7, the Human Rights Council held a panel discussion on older persons’ human rights in the context of climate change on 30 June 2021 during its 47th session. The full video of the panel discussion is available at: [**https://media.un.org/en/asset/k16/k162xwr21t**](https://media.un.org/en/asset/k16/k162xwr21t)

2. The President of the Human Rights Council chaired the panel discussion. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights opened the discussion with a statement. This was followed by a statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

3. The panel discussion provided an opportunity for States, international organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss:

1. how older persons can enjoy their rights in spite of the adverse impacts of climate change, and
2. how States can promote and protect older persons’ rights through age-inclusive climate action.

The list of speakers and non-speakers is listed in [**Annex 1**](#Annex_1).

Persons with disabilities were able to access the panel discussion as International Sign interpretation and real-time captioning were provided.

4. The panellists included:

* Ms. Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons,
* Mr. Saleemul Huq, the Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development,
* Ms. Katharina Rall, Senior Environment Researcher at Human Rights Watch, and
* Mr. Handaine Mohamed, an expert on issues of climate change and indigenous peoples in Africa.

II. Recommendations

**Speaker recommendations:**

5. The speakers made several recommendations during the discussion. They emphasized the importance of:

* treating the impacts of climate change as human rights violations, and
* empowering those whose rights have been violated to exercise their rights,

paying special attention to older persons.

Time is of the essence to use human rights to help stop the climate crisis. States are called upon to:

* take urgent climate action,
* end reliance on fossil fuels, and
* reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C.

This is highlighted as the most efficient way of preventing the adverse impacts of climate change on older persons’ human rights.

 **The best approach for climate action and older persons:**

6. The speakers called for an age-inclusive, gender-responsive, and human rights-based approach to climate action that includes older persons’ meaningful and informed participation in decision-making processes. They called upon States to:

* recognize older persons as agents of change,
* include older persons’ voices and perspectives when developing, implementing, and monitoring climate policies,
* make information about climate change accessible to older persons, and
* provide capacity-building to build resilience and empower older persons to engage in climate action.

States are also called upon to recognize and protect all persons’ abilities to access courts and use legal systems to uphold and protect their rights, rights that climate change directly impacts.

7. States should protect the human rights of indigenous peoples, including indigenous elders, and their traditional knowledge about how to preserve the environment and adapt to changes in it. This is highlighted as being key to protecting biological diversity and combating climate change.

8. The speakers called upon States to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic which has clearly shown the disproportionate impact of disasters on older persons’ human rights. They highlighted the need for States to adopt national strategies for disaster risk reduction in line with [**the**](https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030#:~:text=The%20Sendai%20Framework%20for%20Disaster,Investing%20in%20disaster%20reduction%20for)[**Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**](https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030#:~:text=The%20Sendai%20Framework%20for%20Disaster,Investing%20in%20disaster%20reduction%20for), and to ensure older persons are included in national strategies.

**Monitoring the impact of climate change:**

9. The impacts of climate change on older persons’ rights should be monitored and data should be collected and disaggregated – including by age – to inform and guide climate policymaking. Better data and more research are needed for States to develop evidence-based and age-inclusive climate policies. States are recommended to systematically consider older persons’ rights and requirements in assessing climate change impacts and in implementing their climate change adaptation and mitigation policies.

**Commitments under the Paris Agreement and International Instruments:**

10. States are called upon to honour their commitments under [**the Paris Agreement on Climate Change**](https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement) and the Sustainable Development Goals. Speakers highlighted the key role of climate finance to achieving these goals, including for older persons. States are urged to take measures to build the resilience of older persons and to account for climate change-related loss and damage through the use of climate finance. It is recommended that human rights be included in the final version of the Paris Agreement rulebook.

What do “[**Sustainable Development Goals**](https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals)” mean?

“A universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.”

Source: [www.undp.org](https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals)

11. Several speakers called for an internationally binding instrument to be adopted that is specifically dedicated to older persons’ human rights. This instrument would enhance the protection of their human rights – also from climate change impacts – both at the international and the national levels.

**The need for cooperation:**

What does “[**multilateralism**](https://www.britannica.com/topic/multilateralism)” mean?

“The process of organizing relations between groups of three or more States.”

Source: [www.britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com/topic/multilateralism)

12. The speakers emphasized the need for solidarity, multilateralism, and international cooperation in climate action. This would include addressing the adverse impacts of climate change on older persons’ human rights in countries that are disproportionately affected by climate change.

13. States are called upon to contribute to climate action and to protect older persons’ human rights including by supporting global recognition of the human right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

14. The speakers called to implement the recommendations on human rights and climate change in the work of the Human Rights Council and at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The organization of a dedicated dialogue on older persons’ rights at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was also proposed. Multiple speakers highlighted the need for a more systematic engagement on climate change at the Human Rights Council and called for a dedicated special procedure mandate on human rights and climate change to be established.

III. Opening session

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| **The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** |

15. Opening the discussion, the High Commissioner:

* stressed that the aging population and climate change will significantly impact human rights,
* noted the estimates that, by 2050, humanity will include 1.5 billion people over the age of 65, and
* emphasized that if greenhouse gas emissions have not been reduced to net zero by 2050, global warming will exceed 1.5°C.

16. She noted that climate change will significantly impact people over 65, especially as physical, political, economic, and social factors are making them vulnerable. Ageism is contributing to this vulnerability. The coronavirus disease (**COVID-19**) crisis has demonstrated how age-related discrimination is creating and exacerbating the poverty and marginalization of older persons, amplifying human rights risks.

17. She observed that, in facing climate change, older persons are likely to face negative impacts on their:

* health,
* access to food, land, water, and sanitation,
* housing,
* livelihoods, and
* well-being.

For example:

* in 2003, a heatwave in Western Europe created crop shortfalls and killed thousands of people, including 14,000 in France. Of the heat-related deaths in France, 80% were people aged over 75, and
* in 2013, 70% of the people who died as a result of floods in La Plata, Argentina, were over the age of 60.

18. She referred to the analytical study on climate change and older persons’ rights carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**) under Human Rights Council resolution 44/7 (see A/HRC/47/46).

The study found that:

* older persons face disproportionate impacts from climate change on the effective enjoyment of their rights, and
* climate laws and policies may neglect or marginalize older persons.

The existing international human rights framework provides fragmented and inconsistent coverage of older persons’ human rights in law and in practice. Older persons are seldom mentioned in international environmental agreements and there is no dedicated normative instrument to protect older persons’ rights. The limitations of existing instruments could limit how older persons are effectively protected, including in the context of climate change.

19. She also noted that many older persons occupy positions of authority and have benefitted from the economic development pathways that cause climate change. Older persons have a particular responsibility to leave a better legacy for future generations. Many older persons are increasingly using their skills, knowledge, experience, resources, and resilience to help stop climate change and address its worst impacts.

Examples included:

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| **Latin America** | Indigenous elders have formed networks of solidarity to: 1. preserve their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and
2. advocate for climate action that respected their entitlement to free, prior, and informed consent.
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| **Norway** | The Grandparents’ Climate Campaign supported climate litigation. |
| **Australia** | The Knitting Nannas advocated for policies that preserve the environment and fight climate change. |

20. She highlighted the fact that States have legal obligations, including under international human rights law, to implement climate policies to:

* stop future warming,
* promote effective adaptation,
* redress existing harms, and
* empower all people – including older persons – to participate in climate action.

She noted that States must also recognize and protect access to courts to allow older persons to protect and uphold the rights that climate change directly impacts through legal systems.

21. She noted that the Human Rights Council, in its resolution 44/7, acknowledges the need to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of older persons to respond to climate change. In that resolution, the Council emphasized the importance of international cooperation and assistance in addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, particularly on older persons. The OHCHR study presented promising climate action practices that are inclusive. Examples included:

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| **Mexico** | How Mexico implemented the Paris Agreement. |
| **The Philippines** | The collection of age-disaggregated data for disaster recovery planning. |
| **Iraq** | Access to climate information for older persons. |

22. In closing, the High Commissioner called upon States to implement an age-inclusive and human rights-based approach to climate action. She also noted that the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) in 2020.

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| **Ms. Mami Mizutori -** **The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction** |

23. In her opening statement, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, as an event that shares features common to many previous disasters, put the human rights of vulnerable groups – and particularly in this pandemic – older persons’ rights at serious risk. COVID-19 is a public health crisis, a social and economic crisis, and a protection and human rights crisis that reflects the world’s inequalities. Many of those who were not affected physically still endure long periods of solitude that impact their mental health.

24. She emphasized that while the world’s most developed nations are estimated to have secured COVID-19 vaccines to cover over 4.5 times their populations, the world’s poorest nations only have vaccines for 10% of their populations. While the collection of disaggregated data can still be improved, evidence shows that disasters disproportionately affect older persons. The pandemic is an example.

25. She also stressed the following examples:

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| **Hurricane Katrina striking New Orleans in the USA in 2005** | 75% of those who died were over 60, although this group comprised only 16% of the population. |
| **The 2011 severe eastern Japan earthquake and tsunami** | 56% of those who died were aged over 65, although they only accounted for 23% of the population. |
| **The Philippines** | The majority of older persons surveyed said that their health deteriorated after Typhoon Haiyan. |
| **Vancouver** | Older persons are particularly vulnerable to heatwaves. Many of those who died because of the recent heatwave in Vancouver were older persons. |

The impacts of these and other major disasters demonstrate the need for government engagement with older persons in the [**Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**](https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030#:~:text=The%20Sendai%20Framework%20for%20Disaster,Investing%20in%20disaster%20reduction%20for), adopted in 2015.

26. She noted that older persons hold knowledge, skills, and wisdom that are invaluable in reducing disaster risk. Older persons must be included in the design of policies, plans, and mechanisms including those for early warning. To date, just over 100 United Nations Member States have adopted national strategies for disaster risk reduction in line with the Sendai Framework. Local and national governments and their disaster management agencies must ensure that strategies include older persons.

27. She referred to a survey on older persons conducted by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The survey found that challenges in the areas of mobility and access to transportation must be addressed when evacuating in advance of extreme weather events. We must recognize the role that older persons can play in building community resilience to disasters. Older persons have a lot to contribute to strengthening national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction based on their life experience and understanding of the challenges faced in a crisis, e.g. a flood, a storm, or a heatwave.

28. She concluded by stating that the pandemic must serve as a wake-up call on human rights issues that could become increasingly common as the climate emergency worsens. This includes the high mortality rate older persons experience, the rise in xenophobia and domestic abuse, and restraints on freedom of speech. Accountability and human rights are at the centre of the people-centred approach to disaster risk management the Sendai Framework advocates. Persons at risk must be consulted on and participate in the decision-making that impacts their lives – their right to life depends on this.

IV. Summary of the panel discussion

29. The President of the Human Rights Council opened the panel discussion and invited the panellists to make their statements.

 A. Contributions of panellists

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| **Ms. Claudia Mahler - Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons** |

30. In her statement by video message, Ms. Mahler stated that human-made climate change poses specific challenges for the diversified group that makes up older persons. Due to the interaction of ageism, age discrimination, and climate change, older persons are particularly disadvantaged and discriminated against. Age is still missing as a specific grounds of discrimination in the current international human rights system. This is one aspect that explains the invisibility and insufficient protection of older persons both at the international and national levels.

31. She stressed that intersectional factors need to be taken into account as they often significantly shape the way in which older persons experience climate impacts. The following groups face specific challenges in realizing their rights in the context of climate change:

What does “[**intersectional factors**](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality)” mean?

“The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or [intersect](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersect) especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.”

Source: [www.merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality)

* older women,
* older persons with disabilities, and
* older members of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples.

For example,

* older women experience higher rates of poverty and economic hardships that are aggravated by climate change, and
* older persons with disabilities disproportionately experience poor housing conditions which increase the risk posed to them by emergencies and disasters.

She encouraged everyone to pay special attention to these groups.

32. Ms. Mahler stated that climate change has a disproportionate impact on older persons’ rights worldwide, e.g. in Costa Rica, Georgia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, and New Zealand, as highlighted during the country visits of the mandate holder. For instance, in Georgia, floods often cause harm to residential areas and to agricultural land, which particularly affect older persons, as 84% of people aged 65 years or older work as subsistence farmers.

33. She emphasized that climate change and the lack of action to mitigate it may violate older persons’ rights to life, health, and safety. Older persons are more likely to die from natural disasters that climate change causes or exacerbates, e.g. heatwaves, typhoons, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, or floods. Older persons face specific challenges in reaching safety because of reduced mobility or lack of access to information about evacuation and services.

34. Ms. Mahler urged Governments to systematically consider older persons when:

* assessing the impact of climate change, and
* implementing policies to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

Any policy that is adopted should adopt an approach of ‘climate resilience’ that takes older persons’ specific needs into account. States should change national legal frameworks to protect older persons’ rights in the context of climate change, building on existing standards. Older persons’ voices and perspectives must be included when developing, implementing, and monitoring such policies. States should also highlight older persons’ contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

35. She concluded by saying that persistent ageism and age discrimination, as well as the lack of an international convention on older persons’ rights, make it more difficult for older persons to claim their rights and fundamental freedoms, including concerning climate change. COVID-19 has illustrated that older persons cannot enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others because international human rights law does not provide coherent, explicit guidance in this respect. This results in older persons facing specific human rights concerns and challenges from being overlooked and deprioritized. Older persons’ dignity and human rights are at stake and action is needed to move closer to a legally binding international instrument on older persons’ human rights.

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| **Mr. Saleemul Huq - Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development** |

36. In his statement by video message, Mr. Huq stressed that Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, with more than 170 million people living in a land area of less than 150,000 km2. Bangladesh is located in the delta of two of the world’s biggest rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, which is subject to regular flooding and regular cyclones from the Bay of Bengal. The impacts of climate change affect millions of people in Bangladesh every few years.

37. Mr. Huq referred to this loss and damage from climate change and noted that some of the most vulnerable people are the poorest people who live in the most hazardous and vulnerable locations. He noted that, within these groups, it is possible to observe who are more impacted, i.e.:

* women,
* children, and
* the elderly.

The Government of Bangladesh is taking steps to help groups in vulnerable situations adapt to the impacts of climate change, including by setting up and implementing Bangladesh’s Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. He concluded by noting that the new Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan is being developed to build the resilience of vulnerable populations with a focus on the most vulnerable which includes the elderly.

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| **Ms. Katharina Rall - Senior Environment Researcher, Human Rights Watch** |

38. Ms. Rall emphasized that those who are already marginalized are often the most affected by climate change. Frequent droughts worsen malnutrition among indigenous children in Colombia, and increasing heat in the United States of America and Germany is threatening healthy pregnancies. Indigenous peoples in Canada, including many older persons, struggle to access food as a result of rising temperatures. Governments are not doing enough to mitigate climate change or to help the most affected populations adapt. Millions of older persons around the world experience human rights violations every year, including:

* age-based discrimination and social and political exclusion,
* abuses in nursing facilities,
* neglect in conflict and refugee camps, and
* barriers to healthcare and other essential services.

Most of these abuses are undocumented and those responsible are not held to account. COVID-19 has exposed the dangerous price of ignoring older persons’ rights.

39. She shared three observations regarding the impacts of heat on older persons.

* First, there is robust data on the number of older persons among those who have died due to heatwaves.
* Second, the health impacts of heat on older persons are much less documented or monitored. The health monitoring gap and related barriers – including barriers to accessing health-care services – is especially concerning for older persons with disabilities. These barriers are often not monitored; neither are the specific impacts on older women, who often live in isolation and may experience distinct barriers.
* Third, government responses to heatwaves do not always account for older persons’ needs. There are gaps in how government adaptation plans address the role of isolation and the different living situations of older persons, including those affected by energy poverty and those living in institutions.

The gap in data and in the monitoring of climate impacts on older persons is likely one of the main reasons why climate laws and policies do not address older persons’ needs well. Many older persons around the world are raising their voices to change this, drawing attention both to their needs and their efforts to protect the planet.

40. Ms. Rall stressed that governments have a human rights obligation to protect older persons and other vulnerable groups from adverse climate impacts, including by:

* urgently reducing greenhouse gas emissions,
* removing fossil fuel subsidies, and
* supporting individuals and communities to adapt to climate change.

This adaptation element requires States to consider the impacts on different groups, including older persons, and to design targeted measures to assist them. This can only be done with better data and research.

41. She concluded by saying that the lack of sufficient data and knowledge about the impacts of climate change on older persons speaks to a broader need for a more focused discussion at the Human Rights Council on the human rights dimensions of climate change. The climate crisis is a human rights crisis impacting a broad range of rights of persons in all corners of the earth with severe and disproportionate impacts on a broad range of groups that included older persons, children, women, indigenous peoples, and persons living in poverty. She noted that it is time for a more systematic engagement on climate change at the Council which could be ensured by creating a dedicated special procedures mandate on human rights and climate change.

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| **Mr. Handaine Mohamed - an expert on issues of climate change and indigenous peoples in Africa** |

42. Mr. Mohamed highlighted the fact that older persons constitute more than a quarter of the world’s population – a population pyramid that is forecasted to become a square by 2100, with older persons making up almost half of the world’s population. Changes in the world’s climate – bringing global warming, natural disasters, rising sea levels – are, in common with the population of older persons in the world, on a trajectory of greater and greater growth. This relationship between climate change and older persons has placed a huge responsibility on the international community, particularly on the Human Rights Council, to address the impacts from climate change on older persons’ rights.

43. In this context, he noted that the OHCHR report (A/HRC/47/46) described older persons as a heterogeneous group. Their situation varies between that in many industrialized countries of the North, where a country’s social legislation often guarantees older persons’ rights, and that in many less developed countries of the South, where older persons are often left to themselves and are among the most at-risk members of the population.

44. Mr. Mohamed stressed that climate change directly affects older persons’ rights on several levels and that some older persons may not be fully able to rapidly take on board information about climate change and adapt to its effects. He stressed the need for capacity-building programmes for older persons to help them understand and act on climate change. The international community, States, and civil society have a duty towards older persons to improve their abilities to cope and ensure their right to access information.

45. Regarding the right to a healthy and clean environment, he noted that older persons have the right to live in a suitable environment, given their vulnerable situation. This includes the right to access clean drinking water and clean food, as well as a calm and serene life. Older persons cannot easily cope with natural disasters that occur due to climate change and have the right to be sheltered quickly and be kept out of danger. He noted that, for example, older persons constitute half of those who are affected by cyclones.

46. Mr. Mohamed expressed concern regarding the situation in Africa where climate change disproportionately affects older persons because of, among other things, the lack of infrastructure and of good governance. In the region of the Sahel and the Sahara, which had already been weakened by insecurity, the high rate of mortality of older persons in recent decades could only be explained by climate change which has made the region more arid, with water shortages and low numbers of livestock.

47. He concluded by describing a hierarchy in older persons’ rights through which older persons in the North can access their rights and have minimal exposure to the effects of climate change while those in the countries of the South face difficulties in enjoying their rights in the context of worsening climate change. At the bottom of the ladder, indigenous peoples, who already face the marginalization of their rights, see climate change exacerbating their situation. Older indigenous persons also face the loss of their language and identity due to mobility and climate migration. Islanders see rising sea levels invade indigenous lands with their monuments and sacred sites – a cultural genocide and a loss of universal heritage which may disappear forever.

 B. Interactive discussion

**Summary of the interactive discussion**

48. The speakers emphasized the deep interconnections between climate change and human rights, and the significant impact that climate change is having and will continue to have on a wide range of human rights. The speakers noted that, while climate change is already affecting human rights, the worst is yet to come as the frequency of climate emergencies and the level of human rights risk are both rising. Several speakers also noted that often those individuals, groups, and States who have contributed the least to climate change are facing its worst effects.

49. The discussion brought to light the particular effects that climate change may have on the human rights of persons in situations of vulnerability, including many older persons. Older persons are a heterogeneous group and climate change affects their rights in a wide variety of ways, e.g. they may experience particular effects on their physical and mental wellbeing or they may be less able to adapt to climate change. The speakers emphasized that older persons are too often excluded and subjected to discrimination and ageism. Also, that the situations of vulnerability older persons experience may be magnified by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including based on gender and of presence in rural communities. The speakers underscored that the simultaneous phenomena of climate change and population aging must be addressed coherently.

50. At the same time, the speakers recognized older persons’ valuable contributions to climate action, as well as to those of environmental human rights defenders, including older persons. The speakers noted the importance of traditional and indigenous knowledge about how to preserve the environment and prevent further global warming, as well as the need to mobilize the rich experience and expertise of older persons. They called for older persons to be prioritized in climate change adaptation and mitigation, including disaster risk reduction.

51. Several speakers pointed to the impacts and lessons of COVID-19. The pandemic has been an example of the disproportionate effects that disasters have on older persons and of the impact that ageism has on older persons’ human rights. COVID-19 has also magnified situations of vulnerability and exacerbated inequality around the world. The negative economic and social effects of the pandemic may be diminishing the possibility to meet the Paris Agreement’s goals.

52. The speakers emphasized that, in light of the human rights challenges that climate change presents, including for older persons, there is a great need for solidarity, multilateralism, and international cooperation, and increased ambition to end reliance on fossil fuels and drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Sufficient commitment and sufficient climate finance are both key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement’s goals, to building resilience and sustainable infrastructure, and to accounting for climate change-related loss and damage.

53. The speakers underlined the critical importance of a human rights-based, age-inclusive, and gender-responsive approach to climate action from the grassroots to the international level, and committed to taking such an approach. They specifically called for:

1. recommendations to be implemented regarding human rights and climate change in the actions of the Human Rights Council and at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and
2. the inclusion of human rights in the final version of the Paris Agreement rulebook.

Several speakers pointed to the potential value of creating:

* a new special procedure mandate on climate change and human rights,
* a substantive resolution on older persons at the Human Rights Council, and
* an international instrument dedicated to older persons’ rights.

Other speakers suggested the possible utility of a dialogue on older persons at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Speakers also talked of the need to globally recognise the human right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

54. Several good practices related to including older persons as well as respecting, protecting, and fulfilling their human rights in climate action were highlighted during the discussion. Examples of practices shared included:

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| **Qatar** | Committing to providing $100 million in climate finance to the least developed countries with an emphasis on those most affected or in situations of vulnerability. |
| **Luxembourg** | Adopting a solidarity-based approach to autonomy and participation for older persons which included universal health care and a national heatwave plan. |
| **The Maldives** | Banning single-use plastics. |
| **Mauritius** | Inaugurating a climate change information centre with a particular emphasis on communicating climate change information to those in vulnerable situations. |
| **Morocco** | Creating a climate change cooperation centre that aims to help develop South-South climate cooperation. |
| **Timor-Leste** | Developing an age-inclusive approach to rapidly distribute information in the face of climate-related emergencies. |
| **Mozambique** | Integrating older persons in its early warning system and creating a national policy on social allowances for older persons. |

States and United Nations entities had made efforts to embrace a One Health approach at the international level.

55. The speakers posed a number of specific questions to panellists. The panellists were invited to elaborate on good practices to include older persons in climate action and encouraging intergenerational solidarity, and to share ideas on how the COVID-19 recovery process could be mobilized to ensure inclusive and human rights-based climate action. Panellists were also asked to suggest measures that can be taken to address the disproportionate effects of climate change on older women. A question was also asked whether more could be done to advance human rights in the context of climate change, e.g. by creating a special procedure mandate on human rights and climate change.

 C. Responses and concluding remarks

56. After the interactive discussion, the President of the Human Rights Council gave the panellists the opportunity to make concluding remarks.

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| **Ms. Claudia Mahler - Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons** |

57. In her concluding remarks, Ms. Mahler noted that the discussion, which brought together climate change and older persons’ human rights, is very timely. From her perspective, developing a binding human rights framework with a special focus on older persons will make older persons more visible, contributing to efforts to protect their rights. Concerning good practices, she highlighted the need to specifically consider older persons in national assessments of climate change impacts and to take a human rights-based approach to aging and older persons. To ensure that no one is left behind, she underlined that States should include older persons in Sustainable Development Goal indicators as a first step towards assessing their current situation.

58. Ms. Mahler noted that more disaggregated data is needed to inform policies and develop evidence-based measures. National and international disaster risk reduction strategies that included older persons are one good example of age-inclusive climate measures. She called for systematic attention to be paid to older persons’ human rights in climate change discussions, and for older persons to meaningfully participate in all relevant discussions at the national and international levels. This includes drawing on their experience and knowledge of, and skills in, developing measures to reduce the impact of climate change. Other good examples included the measures that States have adopted to reduce the impact of heatwaves on older persons.

59. Ms. Mahler said that including older persons in risk assessments and ensuring their access to information is key. Some States have, e.g.:

* adapted their information into accessible formats,
* provided advice targeted to older persons on how to deal with climate change, and
* advised older people on how they can participate and be included.

A systematic approach is still lacking to ensure that older persons fully participate – which is key.

60. Ms. Mahler concluded by reiterating that older persons’ human rights and dignity is at stake because they are still invisible. She spoke of the need to strengthen the human rights framework in this regard, noting that a binding convention will be the best instrument to do so.

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| **Mr. Saleemul Huq - Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development** |

61. Mr. Huq shared three concluding thoughts regarding how the climate change world has changed over time.

1. Initially, the first era of climate change was seen as an environmental problem and the international community had focused on mitigation by limiting greenhouse gas emissions.
2. At the beginning of the 21st century, the second era of climate change was linked to development. Climate change impacts particularly affected poor countries and poor people in poor countries, and the international community focused on the need to support their adaptation.
3. We are now about to enter, or have already entered, the third era of climate change, where it has become a globally recognized human rights problem, i.e. a problem created by rich people primarily in rich countries, that is going to disproportionately affect poor people in poor countries – including the elderly as a particularly important subgroup. This is a matter of injustice and it is a human rights violation.

62. He concluded by describing the situation in Bangladesh which has a population of 170 million people, many of whom are very poor – including many elderly – and are very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Bangladesh has been preparing its climate change strategy action plan and now chairs a group of 48 vulnerable countries called the Climate Vulnerable Forum. The countries of the Climate Vulnerable Forum are preparing their climate prosperity plans, the first one of which will be prepared by Bangladesh. The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan will include support for the most vulnerable communities – and amongst them, older persons – to tackle the impacts of climate change.

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| **Ms. Katharina Rall - Senior Environment Researcher, Human Rights Watch** |

63. In her concluding remarks, Ms. Rall stressed the importance of addressing the impacts of climate change on marginalized groups and older persons’ rights. Responding to a question about how to effectively protect older persons’ rights in the face of climate change, she noted the need for better policies that will address how older persons’ rights and climate change intersect. States should integrate human rights into climate change policies, but should also integrate climate change into human rights policies. This requires more coordination and collaboration between the relevant ministries, at the national level, the subnational level, and internationally. More coordination is also needed to integrate the international human rights and climate change communities.

64. Ms. Rall reiterated the importance of governments living up to their human rights obligation to address climate change. One key issue is the obligation to monitor the human rights impacts of climate change on the most marginalized groups, including older persons. This will include closing the gap identified in terms of data disaggregation by age, and other factors that make people more vulnerable. This is an opportunity for governments to do more and to collaborate with research institutions looking at climate change impacts more broadly.

65. She emphasized that empowering older persons, their effective participation, and access to information, are key. Lastly, as pointed out in the OHCHR analytical study, one of the most effective ways to protect older persons’ rights is to scale up mitigation commitments. Staying below 1.5oC is the only way to avoid the worst impacts of climate change on older persons’ human rights. Ms. Rall concluded by reiterating that States could contribute to addressing the impacts of climate change on older persons and to closing the data gap by establishing a new Human Rights Council mandate on climate change and human rights.

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| **Mr. Handaine Mohamed - an expert on issues of climate change and indigenous peoples in Africa** |

66. Mr. Mohamed noted that ‘older persons’ are a group that requires particular attention. He highlighted the importance of promoting and reinforcing the legal framework to protect older persons’ human rights, both through international conventions and at the national level. Mr. Mohamed concluded by stressing the importance of protecting indigenous peoples, given that the loss of indigenous peoples will lead to a loss of traditional knowledge. This knowledge is very important for protecting biological diversity and for combatting climate change.

67. Following the concluding remarks, the President of the Human Rights Council closed the discussion.

 Annex 1: Speaking and non-speaking participants in the plenary session

**Country representatives that made interventions:**

* Azerbaijan (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement),
* the Bahamas (on behalf of a group of countries),
* Cameroon (on behalf of the Group of African States),
* Ecuador (on behalf of a group of countries),
* the European Union (including one statement on behalf of a group of countries),
* Fiji,
* Germany,
* Luxembourg,
* the Maldives,
* the Marshall Islands,
* Mauritius,
* Morocco,
* Mozambique,
* Nepal,
* Pakistan,
* Qatar,
* Slovenia (including one statement on behalf of a group of countries),
* Timor-Leste,
* the United States of America, and
* Viet Nam (one statement on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and one on behalf of the core group on human rights and climate change representing the Philippines and Bangladesh).

**Representatives of national, international, and non-governmental organizations** **that made interventions:**

* The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions,
* The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines,
* The United Nations Environment Programme,
* The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse,
* The Conselho Indigenista Missionário CIMI,
* The International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, and
* The Center for International Environmental Law (on behalf of a group of organizations).

**Statements by the following Member States and national, international, and non-governmental organizations were not delivered owing to a lack of time:**

* the Bahamas,
* Barbados,
* Botswana,
* Cambodia,
* Cameroon,
* Chile,
* China,
* Cuba,
* Ecuador,
* Egypt,
* El Salvador,
* Ethiopia,
* France,
* India,
* Indonesia,
* Iraq,
* Israel,
* Kazakhstan,
* Namibia,
* the Niger,
* the Russian Federation,
* Senegal,
* Tunisia,
* the United Arab Emirates,
* the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and
* Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of).[[1]](#footnote-2)
* the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women),
* the Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale Onlus,
* Jameh Ehyagaran Teb Sonnati Va Salamat Iranian,
* the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence,
* New Humanity,
* the Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés, and
* the International Council of Russian Compatriots.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. Statements received by the secretariat are available on the Human Rights Council extranet. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)